

Some hard-nosed business advice for President Bush

"Okay, we've got ourselves into more than we bargained for. It's draining our resources and keeping us from realizing our potential in other areas. So, what do we do now?"
Could these be President Bush's New Year's ponderings? Probably not.



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But, according to the December 12 issue Fortune magazine, good business leaders ask this kind of question when they find themselves in a business "hole."

Andy Grove was the legendary leader of Intel, the successful computer chip maker. But back in the mid 1980s Intel was about to be on the ropes. The computer memory chip, its "core business," had become a commodity. Intel had drawn a worldwide group of excellent competitors. From annual profits of \$198 million in 1984, Intel's profits slipped to \$2 million in 1985.

At Intel, Grove was then second in command to Gordon Moore. (Moore is known as the creator of Moore's Law, which says that the number of transistors that can be put on a single computer chip doubles every two years or 18 months.)

Richard Tedlow, author of an upcoming book "The Life and Times of Andy Grove," writes in Fortune, "By all odds, Intel should have failed. It should have been destroyed by the same brutal international competition that has killed apparel companies, tire companies, and television companies...."

According to Tedlow, Grove asked Moore, "If we got kicked out and the board brought in a new CEO, what do you think he would do?"

Moore said, "He would get us out of memories."

Moore and Grove had a strong emotional attachment to these "memories" that had made the company great. But Moore was suggesting that under fresh leadership Intel would abandon the memory chip product line.

Grove remembers, "I stared at him, numb, then said, 'Why shouldn't you and I walk out the door, come back, and do it ourselves?'"

They did. The adjustments were painful, but Intel's shifted from memory chips to the kind of "brainpower" chips that are at the heart of most computers. The "Intel Inside" franchise would not have happened if Moore and Grove had not "walked out the door" and come back with a willingness to abandon the product line that was the core of their earlier business success.

Fortune magazine quotes famed business "guru" Peter Drucker on this point. "The problem is to get rid of yesterday's successes that have outlived their potential."

What if President Bush did "walk out the door" and come back and look at our situation in Iraq as if he were "the new CEO?" What could he do? What kind decision would he make if he had fresh thinkers like Moore and Grove by his side?

He might get some help from another legend in the high tech world, UNC-Chapel Hill professor Fred Brooks. (His "Brooks Law" states, "Adding people to a late software project makes it later.")

In Fortune, Brooks outlines the options that face a company when it cannot meet a promised release date for an important software product.

According to Brooks, the company must stop thinking it can magically meet the earlier schedule by pouring more people and resources into the project. It should grit its teeth and choose among three unpleasant options: (1) letting the deadline slip-adjusting it conservatively, since each backward adjustment results in the loss of more credibility, or (2) "lightening the ship" by scaling down realistically and modifying the objectives to fit what can be accomplished in the allotted time, or (3) phasing the release of the product by completing and releasing a key component on time, and then developing and releasing "improvements" over a longer period of time.

We cannot know exactly what would happen if our president were able to "walk out the door" in this New Year's season, and come back in surrounded by people like Andy Grove, Gordon Moore, Peter Drucker, and Fred Brooks. But I bet they would push him to take a fresh, objective look at his policies in Iraq and choose from the kind of painful options that Fred Brooks gives for projects that are not going according to the original hopes and plans.

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What if President Bush did "walk out the door" and come back and look at our situation in Iraq as if he were "the new CEO?"

Making room for children of America's inn

Without helping vulnerable children, the nation will suffer

A friend who shared this story described it as "the best sermon" my dear friend and mentor Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. "never preached." It was Christmas Eve and the pews at New York City's Riverside Church were packed. The Christmas pageant was underway and had come to the point at which the innkeeper was to turn away Mary and Joseph with the resounding line, "There's no room at the inn!"

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Never mind that no figure of the innkeeper actually appears in scripture. We've all imagined him delivering the message of no room, of inhospitality to the baby Jesus and his parents. It seemed the perfect part for Tim, an earnest youth of the congregation who has Down Syndrome. Only one line to remember: "There's no room at the inn!" He had practiced it again and again with his parents and with the pageant director. He seemed to have mastered it.

So there he stood at the altar of the sanctuary, bathrobe costume firmly belted over his broad stomach, as Mary and Joseph made their way down the center aisle. They approached him, said their lines as rehearsed, and waited for his reply. Tim's parents, the pageant director, and the whole congregation almost leaned forward as if willing him to remember his line.

"There's no room at the inn!" Tim boomed out, just as rehearsed. But then, as Mary and Joseph turned on cue to travel further, Tim suddenly yelled "Wait!" They turned back, startled, and looked at him in surprise.

"You can stay at my house!" he called.

Well, Tim had effectively preached the sermon at Riverside Church that Christmas Eve. Bill Coffin strode to the pulpit, said "Amen," and sat down. It was the best sermon he never preached.

For Christians, another Christmas season has come to a close. People of all faiths are reflecting on things done and left undone during the past year and making resolutions for change in the new one. When, oh when will we individually and collectively as congregations, as communities, and as a nation resolve to stop saying to our children, "There's no room at the inn?" When will we, like Tim, start saying, "You can stay at my house?" When will we say to the poor, hungry, and homeless children, "Wait! We'll make a place for you at America's table of plenty?"

How long until we say to children whose parents are working hard every day trying to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads or whose families were poor before a terrible hurricane struck, and even poorer after they lost everything in the storm - "We will help you escape poverty?" "We'll catch you in our safety net until your family is able to provide for you again?" And when will we ensure that no child is without health coverage?

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also delivered a Christmas Eve sermon. In "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," given at Ebenezer Baptist Church on his last Christmas Eve, Dr. King reminded us one of the things "we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth and good will toward men is the non-violent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life. Every man is somebody because he is a child of God - made in His image, and therefore must be respected as such."

He also reflected on the "I Have A Dream" speech he had given at the March on Washington four years earlier, and how he had already begun seeing his dream turning into a nightmare as he watched current events unfolding. However, Dr. King refused to give up his conviction that our nation could change: "I still have a dream today that one day justice will roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. I still have a dream today that in all of our state houses and city halls men will be elected to go there who will do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with their God - With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when there will be peace on earth and good will toward men."

Is the day of good will toward all still coming? As Christians celebrate the miracle of the incarnation - the belief that God actually came to live among us as a child - I also hope we can honor Him by raising a mighty voice for justice and protection for all the children who are sacred and made in God's image but left behind in poverty and hopelessness.

As we end the holy season of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa, look ahead to Eid al-Adha, and enter the time of year of new beginnings, let us repent and reaffirm our commitment to building a nation where all children find room in our inn.

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

Impeachment talk makes the rounds in D.C.

By Ken Guggenheim
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - It's an explosive word that faded from the American political lexicon after Bill Clinton's presidency. But, cautiously, a few Democrats are whispering it again.

Impeachment.

Could President George W. Bush be impeached - tried by Congress and possibly removed from office - for letting an intelligence agency spy in the United States without getting court approval?

That appears highly unlikely. It's debatable whether Bush broke any laws. Any decision to impeach would have to be made by Congress, which is controlled by Bush's Republican Party. And if Democrats pressed the matter, they would be taking a huge political gamble that could backfire.

That hasn't stopped a handful of Democrats from raising the matter. Sen. Barbara Boxer of California released a letter asking four presidential scholars for their opinion on whether Bush had committed an impeachable offense. Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, introduced legislation calling on Congress to determine whether there are grounds for impeachment. Some Americans have written to their local newspapers, demanding impeachment.

Most Democrats, though, have been silent.

Under the U.S. Constitution and American political tradition, impeachments are not taken lightly. Presidents cannot be removed because they do not have the support of Congress. They cannot be removed for incompetence. They can be removed only if they have been convicted of "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

The White House insists that Bush had the legal authority to allow the National Security Agency to intercept communications within the United States. Many Democrats - and some Republicans - disagree. But even if Bush lacked the authority, it's not clear he committed a crime.

"This was an error of political judgment," wrote Charles Krauthammer, a conservative columnist. "And only the most brazen and reckless partisan could pretend it is anything approaching a high crime and misdemeanor."

The American Civil Liberties Union, a New York-based rights group critical of the Bush administration, has called for the appointment of an independent special counsel to investigate whether Bush violated wiretapping laws. It took out full-page newspaper ads comparing Bush to former President Richard M. Nixon, who resigned in 1974 to avoid impeachment after being accused of covering up crimes in the Watergate scandal.

But a special prosecutor cannot initiate impeachment proceedings. That power rests with the House of Representatives, where Republicans have a 231-202 advantage over Democrats.

Democrats could conceivably win control of the House in November elections and then vote to impeach Bush - that is, to put him on trial. But the trial would be held in the Senate, where Republicans have a 55-44 advantage, with one Democratic-leaning independent. Even if Democrats win control of that chamber, they wouldn't have the two-thirds vote needed to convict and remove the president from office.

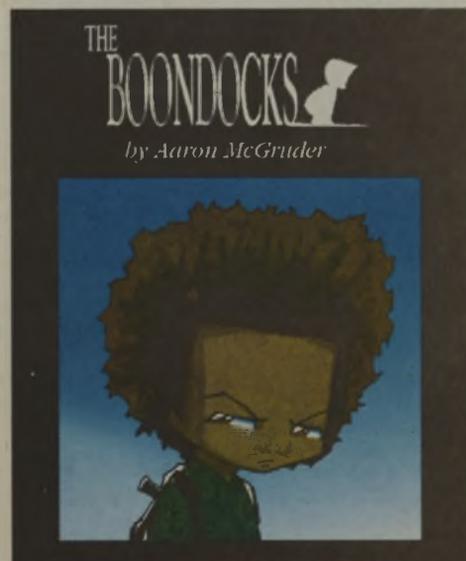
The numbers are only part of the problem for Democrats. Impeachment carries huge political risks.

Bush clearly won the 2004 election. His popularity has fallen, but Democratic lawmakers aren't especially popular either. Many voters would view impeachment as political vindictiveness by the losing party - and they could punish Democrats at the polls. The Republicans' weak performance in the 1998 congressional election was seen as a backlash to their efforts to impeach Democratic President Bill Clinton.

Clinton's impeachment stemmed from charges he lied under oath about a sexual affair. The House voted to impeach, but Republicans lacked the votes to convict him in the Senate. After a monthlong trial, not even a simple majority could be mustered to remove the president.

Some observers say Bush's failings as president are of far greater consequence than anything Clinton had done. But Clinton's misconduct was self-serving. So was Nixon's. Bush's actions, right or wrong, appear to be based on national security concerns. He says he was trying to prevent terrorist attacks. That could make it harder for Democrats to persuade the public that impeachment is necessary.

KEN GUGGENHEIM is the Associated Press' World Service's Washington editor.



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