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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 28, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. DAVID R. DERGE  
FROM: L. HIGBY

In addition to the question you have already prepared, here are some additional areas that we would like to have probed with regard to image.

With regard to our upcoming poll, I am indicating below a number of items that will be stated as facts that should be tested. Not all of them are arranged in a strict item by item basis because, in several instances, it may take perhaps two or three questions to test any individual item. What I have tried to do below is give you a few of the areas that should be probed and tested.

1. Basically, we have done a good job in getting across to the public the idea that the President and the Administration is efficient at process. This is indicated by the way our National Security Council and Domestic Council is organized and functions. But, along with this we have presented the picture that the President is an efficient, cold, machine - both in operating the government and with regard to political activities. We have failed to convey any sense of human, warm, or personal character associated with the President.
2. There is a mystique which goes far beyond that which has to do with basic elements of character of the President and we have been utterly deficient in creating or conveying this idea of mystique.
3. What the average person wants in his President differs, but it is a combination of some of the following factors if we are to judge reactions to previous Presidents.
  - a) Johnson was thought of as a man of many faults but one personal characteristic that did get through time after time again was that he was the "hardest working" President that we've ever had in the White House.

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- b) Harry Truman is thought of as having courage, guts, an outspoken "devil-may-care" attitude.
- c) Though Kennedy's record in foreign policy was an utter disaster, his charm saved the day for him.
- d) Eisenhower, of course, was a bigger figure than life when he went into the Presidency but he justifiably, in the Presidency, was known as a "warm, kindly, fair man".

With regard to those characteristics listed above, what is the image of Richard Nixon which comes across. If we are to study your last in-depth poll and the recent Gallup Poll, we basically see three main points:

*More  
more*

- a) He is doing the best he can in a hard job.
- b) He is at least trying to get us out of the war.
- c) He is a cautious, careful man.

4. Because of the reasoning listed above, the President's support in the country is quite thin and shallow. For example, the hard-hats were a little embarrassed when they were asked about their support of Richard Nixon because they really didn't quite know why they support him. Basically they were marching for him because they were against his opponents rather than because they were for him.

I am now going to list some of the items that we have failed to get across.

5. It is not really what Presidents' do, but the aura of their office, the mystique that is built up around them that develops the sixth sense among voters which generates support when the times are tough, or in times of crisis, as well as in other times. And, this is very important support that is simply not based on the fact that we "ought to support the President".

*Wants  
Frank family*

6. There are innumerable examples of warm items that have gone way beyond any previous President in this century to be nice to Cabinet, Staff, the Congress, etc., particularly around Christmas time in terms of the activities that show personal concern not only for the members, but for their families as well. An excellent example here would be the Church Services. In addition, the way the White House staff has been treated. In fact, here, no President has ever done more. This President has never bawled out a subordinate but most of these small acts of kindness mean an awful lot to people,

but they fail to realize that this President performs them.

*First Family  
John*

The same would be true for the First Family and the work they have done for parties for the under-privileged, teaching, etc. In particular, the graciousness of Mrs. Nixon and the unbelievable number of people that she sees every day has failed to be adequately mentioned.

8. This is a happy White House and it is one that should be thought of as being everyone's house. It is a place of constant excitement, entertainment and special activities.
9. The President always takes the heat and never shifts the blame. There is incident after incident wherethis has been the case. Son Tay, of course, is the most striking.
10. A related point would be after the "benign neglect" story was out, there was no criticism of Moynihan.
11. The problem is the staff is obsessed with process effeciency etc., which while it builds them up to some extent, has very little effect in building up the President.
12. We have failed to get across the following points about the President in those areas of decency and virtue which the great majority of Americans like.
  - a) hard work, warmth, kindness, consideration of others, willingness to take the heat and not pass the buck, just plain guts and courage. And, above all, a man who always does what he thinks is right regardless of the consequences.
  - b)The President works hard at his job. While the criticism on the fact that he goes to San Clemente, Florida and Camp David is really limited, there is a positive feeling that these visits are vacations and relief from the job. People don't understand that the President works late at night, gets up early in the morning, doesn't have lunch, writes his own speeches when he can.

- c) People also do not link the simply word - courage - with the President. For example, the November 8 speech, the Cambodian speech, or the actions we have taken with regard to Jordan. Most of these go far beyond anything Johnson or Kennedy can point to - except possibly the missile crisis. The courage part, the personal dimension, the mystique, is utterly submerged by the blizzard of words on process.
  - d) This President does what he believes is right regardless of consequences. For example, the way he over-ruled the Cabinet on Family Assistance, decisions with regard to the Postal strike. Related to courage is the idea of boldness - that also is reflected in many of these decisions. We have several examples of stepping up to a hard one and hitting it - not ducking the big issues - but we've failed really to get this across.
13. The President would rather be a one-term President doing what is right than a two-term President doing what is wrong. While these things may have come out occasionally in a column or article, the lasting impression on public consciousness of these points simply has not been made.
14. In addition to this, we gained the liability of being known as a "PR obsessed Administration". When newspaper people write about process, they do so because they know it is dull and does us no good from the standpoint of developing public support. Now it is not dull for the intellectuals who read an editorial page but it is totally dull for the average person. He isn't interested in how something is done, he just wants it done.
15. People like to think that their President doesn't give a damn about politics - that he is only interested in the country and will risk his political future in doing what he thinks is right.
16. For example, the head of state mystique - while something hard to define - we have certainly failed to project. We don't want to get away from the fact that the President is reserved, dignified, etc. There are innumerable incidents of warmth that have not come through. A couple of examples:

- a) the restoration of dignity in the White House and the conduct of the Presidency in every respect. Related to this would be the restoration of prestige for the United States abroad. The dignity theme, incidentally, can be related to the White House worship services. The prestige theme would be related to the fact that the President is now the major world leader - the way he's been treated abroad, etc.

- 17. Related to this would be the spontaneity of the President - that he does not do things simply for publicity, but because he feels something and does them on the spur of the moment. For example, his call to Trudeau when he was having problems in Canada; his call to Pompidou; and his trip to New York for Pompidou were done on the spur of the moment without clearing with the State Department or his staff.
- 18. He has made many decisions over the objections of most of the people on his own staff and these decisions have turned out to be right. He looks not only to the winners - something that all Presidents do - but also cares about those who did not happen to win first prize.

During the next poll we want to ask a question regarding U.S. position vs. the Soviet Union.

It has been suggested that the way to put this would be to make this statement: "The U.S. has been the strongest nation in the world for a long time. It now appears that the Soviet Union will pass the United States in overall strength by 1975. Do you favor defense policies which will keep the U.S. number one, or are you willing to accept Soviet superiority in the future?"