



“Put Some Better People on Your Team”

Date: 1964-11-16

Conversation: WH6411-21-6359-6360-6361

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: George E. Reedy

Start Time: 11:20

Duration: 04:41

Place: Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: Almost two weeks after his landslide 1964 election, President Johnson complained to White House press secretary George E. Reedy that recent press coverage had cast his victory not as a success in his own right but as a political reaction against his opponent. The President encouraged Reedy to shake up the White House communications staff and to hire someone who could advocate for Johnson and his administration more effectively.

President Johnson: We've got to get a sizable person that can operate with you on the same basis that, in theory, a [Andrew "Andy"] Hatcher and [Pierre E. G.] Salinger worked. But we can—you can have seniority, and you can have title, and you can have the position. But he has got to also have some strength and some ability to supplement what you have, because . . . we've got to have that.

End of excerpt 1.

President Johnson: And that's what we got to do here in this press office. And we've got to kind of divide the weak, where we don't have these breakdowns, and where we don't leave the impressions that we slept in our clothes the night before, or we can't catch up with a train, we're having trouble moving and playing, and so forth. And we've really—if I've got to give you more information, spend more time with you, I'm prepared to do it, because I really want to work. But I want a real organizational chart, and clean out dead wood, and not have people just because they happen to be on the payroll, and not have anybody we don't need, and—but have some real, strong people that are imaginative enough to deal with a [Charles] de Gaulle press-wise, and to deal with a [Ludwig] Erhard press-wise, and the Russians press-wise. My own image, and my own Congress, and have somebody that they really feel not only knows what's going on but *is* in the inner circle, and *is* looked up to, and respected, and trusted, and admired.

Now, I have all those feelings towards you. But we've got to put them together better, and you've got to put some better people on your team. If you don't, I got to form a new team.

End of excerpt 2.

George E. Reedy: Somebody is overlooking a very obvious fact here, which is that, regardless of all the crap they toss around—

President Johnson: Well, I'll tell you what's happened there.

Reedy: —you won.

President Johnson: I'll tell you what's happened there. Their theory of that, which they've pretty well sold America on—because we were in a vacuum, and we did nothing about it—was that it was not Johnson's popularity or any efficiency on his part, because neither really exists—it was the hate and fear of [Barry M.] Goldwater [Sr.] [R–Arizona]. Now, the liberal Republicans have sold that, and the Kennedy people have sold that, and the country has bought that. And I do not think that that is the basic reason. I think it has something to do with the Republicans. But I think the basic reason that we did is the first 90 days, that we convinced them that we would try to be president of all the people, and a good many businesspeople went along on that theory, and they thought we were responsible, and so forth.

Reedy: [*speaking under President Johnson*] I think that's right.

President Johnson: I think that's been your image that you've given of me from the time I was Senate [Majority] Leader. Now, I think, though, that they have moved in, and they have sold that picture. And that we've got to be watched, and we're corrupt, and we have weaknesses, and we're too close to our friends. And the Walter [W.] Jenkins thing [arrest on a morals charge] has hurt us substantially. They don't care what you say, it's hurt us with the staff, and every one of them are taking vacations, and every one of them are getting independent as hell. We've got to stay away from these cocktail parties that destroyed him. He'd never have been hurt if he hadn't have gone there and gotten too many drinks that night. Just got to stay away from the lobbyists and the folks that shove us. And we just got to give up our social life pretty well, outside of a[n] intimate thing every day or two with some different correspondents.

But they're laying for us, and they're following us, and they're tapping our phones, and they're tapping [Robert S. "Bob"] McNamara's. He's caught two taps in the last month. And they're watching every move that we make. So we've got to shore up, and we've got to take the initiative in these things. And I couldn't get it done any other way, so I called [Edwin L.] Eddie Weisl [Sr.]. I got him to have stories written, saying that Johnson was popular, and he did carry on an effective campaign, he did have a good organization, he did have a record of accomplishment in the Congress, he did give confidence, and it wasn't just anti-Goldwater, it was some Johnson. And he got it in all the Neustadt [*sic*] [S. I. Newhouse] papers, and then I got him to put it in the Hearst [Corporation] papers, and he got it in the Hearst papers, and he planted it in some special things. And *Life* says they're going to do something on it.

And that's what we've got to have one man doing here all the time, though, backgrounding, and giving material of that kind, interpreting there, and suggesting things.

End of excerpt 3.

CITATION: Conversation WH6411-21-6359-6360-6361, 16 November 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

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