

Date: 10/18/01 8:07:50 AM Central Daylight Time  
From: JamesOberg@aol.com  
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Goldin always made it clear he was the White House's man at NASA, not NASA's ambassador to the White House. Whoever was President -- and that made it mostly Clinton -- Goldin always acted like NASA had to operate mainly to the President's benefit, whether it be foreign policy initiatives, 're-inventing government' initiatives, diversity and other demographic games, aerospace contracts for important electoral states, and kowtowing to political 'stars' (such as the Triana fiasco with Gore). Goldin didn't do anything that other federal bureaucracy managers hadn't done, he was just more relentless. It was said by more than one cynical observer that White House flatulence required frequent hair combing by Goldin.

A second observation is the degree that Goldin imposed his vision of reality on the people around him. When a leader has the resources and attracts allies, this quality can allow the leader to accomplish marvelous things. Goldin seemed to have this same single-minded idea that the world was the way he wanted it to be and he wouldn't tolerate any contrary information. He and his lieutenants were confident that they were the smartest people in the known universe and outsiders had nothing to teach them about anything.

If things didn't occur the way he had planned, he made it clear he would kill the messengers who tried to tell him. This descent into self-delusion was I think the primary cause of NASA being 'caught by surprise' again and again during the Russian partnership. To quote one of his lieutenants (Brinkley) from 1997, "The Russians have just GOT to stop surprising us", when in fact the fault for being surprised lay with Goldin, not the very predictable Russians.

The same process was seen on the 1999 Mars fiascos -- after the first probe crashed, a team analyzed the second probe, found shocking inadequacies, and concluded there was less than a 5% chance it would succeed. The team was told that such a figure was 'unacceptable' to Goldin, and it was arbitrarily raised to '50%' as the lowest possible number he might accept without erupting in fury and throwing the viewgraph projector at the screen, a practice he was known for.

Within the reach of his budget fist, he got people to publicly adore him and award him all of the space community's prizes for excellence. Elsewhere in the aerospace industry, I perceived that he -- and NASA -- was held only in contempt.

This doesn't mean that his replacement will be an improvement. But confronting reality, and giving reality precedence over self-serving make-believe, is a crucial first step.

Date: 10/18/01 8:36:43 AM Central Daylight Time  
From: wayneday@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu (Dwayne Allen Day)

On Thu, 18 Oct 2001 JamesOberg@aol.com wrote:

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- > ambassador to the White House. Whoever was President -- and that made it
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I think this is mostly correct. I also think that he took this too far--it does not seem like there were any cases where he was willing to tell the White House that something was simply unwise or not doable.

However, often this criticism comes from a totally unrealistic premise--that the NASA administrator is supposed to be a space advocate and push neat stuff, like Mars missions. Anybody who forgets for even a second that the NASA administrator works for the president \_and should take his orders\_ is deluding himself. A NASA administrator who bucks the White House should not be in that job.

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Add to this his abrasive and often vicious personal style. I have heard stories of him being nasty to low-level employees \_for absolutely no reason at all.\_ One colleague of mine was called a "contractor scumbucket" by Goldin after he said hello to him in the elevator. (I am not making that up, and I do trust the source, who otherwise had no interaction with the administrator or his policies.)

But I think that something you have to keep in mind is Goldin's ability to be poetic and a great salesman. When he was at his best, he could talk about space exploration in beautiful and inspiring ways. He was not the typical bureaucrat.