Twitter Thread by Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes



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■In coming days & weeks, a bunch of awesome younger folks will be taking on roles in the Biden Administration, some for their first experience in government. Herewith some free advice, worth what you paid for it. I encourage others to add their best advice below this thread! 1/

1) You may be appointed by the president—but you are taking an oath to the constitution, and you work for the people of these United States. You owe them integrity, honesty, & transparency, as well as your best work. 2/

Take your ethics undertakings seriously. Learn the rules and follow them. Don't ever think they don't apply to you. And don't do or write anything you would be ashamed to see in the newspaper the next day. 3/

2) Government is a team sport. Your job is to help your team succeed. That means help your boss, help your peers, and help your employees. If they rise, you rise. If they fail, you have failed. So start by figuring out who they are, what they need, and what you can offer. 4/

3) Every workplace has unwritten rules, too: what I call "invisible furniture." You will be bumping into a lot of it in your first months on the job. Make a point of learning it, & remember that it's never dumb to admit what you don't know—it's the quickest way to learn. 5/

4) Your colleagues in the career service are your partners, and you cannot succeed without them. They know how to get things done in the byzantine system of the USG, & beneath their caution they can offer incredible creativity in solving problems, if you empower them to do so. 6/

Career folks are used to working with appointees, across admins. If they seem a little world-weary in the face of your enthusiasm—they are. Connect them to your mission & help them see how their work matters to policy & real-world outcomes. That's why they joined government. 7/

After last 4 years, some career folks may have PTSD, but don't expect them to greet you with cheers & share horror stories. They are pros. Be thoughtful as you assess policies you inherit — that was their work, too, because they were there, trying to do their best. 8/

5) Read this book: More Than Ready, by @cecmunoz. It’s a master class in learning principled, inclusive leadership in government—including some bracing models of what not to do. She names names. Pay attention. 9/

6) You must be accountable. Congressman oversight and media scrutiny keep government honest & on track. Respect their roles even if you think they are being unfair. And never, ever lie to them. 10/

7) Take @EliotACohen’s essential advice & have your letter of resignation drafted & in your desk drawer. If you think you’ve lost your sense of purpose, your integrity, or your awe for the responsibility you hold, turn that letter in.
Good luck, and thank you.
/fin

*congressional oversight, darn it.

Grateful to everyone adding their own advice and tips. More from a classic piece by my excellent Obama Administration colleagues @HadyAmr and @scottlasensky : https://t.co/cATоGWHdWV

One additional note based on feedback I'm getting from career folks:
They are exhausted! They've been running a pandemic/Trump Admin marathon. Remember that your energy level does not by itself restore theirs.