

Appoint a U.S.-CLO, Mr. President!

Hail to the learning leader • BY ELLIOTT MASIE



Elliott Masie is the chair and CLO of The MASIE Center's Learning Consortium and the host of Learning Systems '08. He can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

Dear President-elect Obama,

As you find talent for your new administration, let us make a suggestion for one more position: chief learning officer of the United States (U.S.-CLO). Just as we have a surgeon general and a poet laureate, it is time for the country — and you as our chief executive — to have a chief learning officer.

The U.S.-CLO would serve three key functions:

- **Advocate for a learning administration:** The challenges that you and the country face are enormous and unpredictable. In areas ranging from energy to the economy to foreign policy to technology and intelligence, your team will need to be incredible learners. And you will need to create and sustain a learning organization at every level of government. The U.S.-CLO will help build a culture of collaboration, curiosity and commitment to learning.

There will be talent issues your administration will have to confront, including a retirement bubble in government service and the rapid adjustment of the U.S. workforce to changing job requirements here and abroad. The U.S.-CLO will be your point person to explore how to attract and retain the best minds for government service and leverage knowledge in the field to attack our most pressing problems.

- **Advocate for learning in U.S. society:** The U.S.-CLO will be a highly visible advocate for the role and necessity of learning in our society. While you already have a secretary of education addressing the K-12 and higher education arenas, the U.S.-CLO will be your ambassador to the world of lifelong learning.

He or she will work with Congress to make research on learning a key priority at the National Science Foundation and will negotiate with regulatory agencies to bring more innovation into accreditation and more sanity into compliance rules, which often result in demotivating learning requirements.

ing learning requirements.

The U.S.-CLO will coach you to become the chief learner of the U.S. Just as Oprah has enormously impacted the number of people reading books in

our society, you can have a similar effect. Host great authors for an "Authors at The White House" set of speeches, just like Google does, with talks and interviews streamed for the world to watch. To set an example, you could even enroll in an online course to teach yourself about a topic.

- **Your coach and talent adviser:** When Jack Welch reached out to Steve Kerr to be his first CLO, he installed a business professor at his right hand — someone who would give him unfettered advice and continual coaching. The U.S.-CLO should be your coach and talent adviser.

Throughout your presidency, you'll get a ton of good and bad political, economic and foreign policy advice, but few people will give you the unfettered coaching a CLO can provide. Let the U.S.-CLO attend a wide range of meetings. At the end of a Cabinet session, walk back to the Oval Office and talk with your CLO about what you learned from and about the talent around the table: Which secretaries are thriving? What would be "stretch" experiences for others?

Make a list of 10 personal habits or approaches that might subvert your effectiveness in office. Have the U.S.-CLO ask you every week about your personal and political progress — even run a confidential 360-degree feedback process to let you know what it is like to work for you.

Please, don't make the U.S.-CLO role a high-paying job (see if you could get institutions to lend you a great CLO for \$1 per year). Don't put him or her in charge of training in the federal government, and don't appoint someone who wants your job someday. In fact, make the U.S.-CLO sign a contract saying that all proceeds from any book he or she writes must be donated to charity. In other words, pick from hundreds of great learning leaders and find someone who will push you, support you and make learning a priority in your administration. Finally, vary the people who fill the U.S.-CLO role every year or two to get fresh perspectives.

You have a unique opportunity to make learning a central aspect of your administration. We all need and deserve a learning leader.

Respectfully yours,
Elliott Masie **CLO**

DID YOU KNOW?

The Department of Education was created in 1979, when President Jimmy Carter signed a bill that authorized creation of the organization.

Source: Wikipedia