On being President of MIT, or

By Paul Schindler

(After this article is the second in a series of two which attempt to present a portrait of the President of MIT, Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner.)

“"It takes an awful lot of paper to run this place.” —JWB

The first week that Wiesner gets in the morning is the paper work generated in the last two hours of office work this day before he left for his vacation the week before. There are three major categories of file boxes in the office on the presidental desk, and time and again during the day: outside correspondence, MIT correspondence, and “Dr. Wiesner’s signature.”

Outside correspondence includes drafts of letters to and letters from people outside of the MIT community. These include MIT alumni, senators and congressmen, members of the business community, and potential contributors. This folder will also input any outside reports or analyses that arrive in the office which concern MIT, its function, or Dr. Wiesner’s personal interests. MIT correspondence consists of letters and memos, as well as reports and information sheets, from people inside the community. Either of these files are also likely to hold an occasional newspaper clipping or reference, or a Xerox of a magazine article. All the secretaries in the president-chancellor office suite are asked to read Tech Today and all three student papers; several read Technology Review and TEN as well.

“Dr. Wiesner’s signature” file probably gets the most careful scrutiny. It includes formal visitors (any non-MIT travel is paid for by the non-MIT source involved), checks, letters and memos, meetings, all of which a secretary is hand-typed, often with slight variations in the text that were to be watched. In addition, Dr. Wiesner is careful not to sign “Jerome B. Wiesner” to letters addressed to long-time close friends — these he signs “Jerry Wiesner.”

Every piece of paper that comes to his office addresses long-time close friends — these he signs “Jerry Wiesner.”

A small percentage of the letters, and almost any material over three pages long goes onto a pile on his right. Once or twice a day, he gathers all of these materials up and places them in his briefcase. The right hand pile is the source of his reading material in the early morning (and occasional late night) hours he spends in his den at home. Some of the “take-home work” comes back from home to the desk behind his chair, which serves as a kind of “paper buffer zone” with each drawer containing papers he may want quick access to.

Wiesner has several alternative methods of getting paper communications out of his office. He can write letters in long-hand with his magic marker, if they require careful sculpting; type memos, as well as reports and information. (It is not written or outlined, but sounds as if it could be.) It could be)

People who have heard Wiesner speak in public are occasionally surprised by him on the phone, but the same procedure makes him a difficult person to interview on the telephone. He will make occasional notes and usually concludes the call with a few pleasant pleasantries, or plans to meet for some future point. Output phone calls are usually initiated by Wiesner, often one of his secretaries, and consist of a brief “Hello, how are you?” followed by an organized presentation of the necessary information. (It is not written or outlined, but sounds as if it could be.)

People who have heard Wiesner speak in public are occasionally surprised by him on the phone, but the same procedure makes him a difficult person to interview on the telephone. He will make occasional notes and usually concludes the call with a few pleasant pleasantries, or plans to meet for some future point. Output phone calls are usually initiated by Wiesner, often one of his secretaries, and consist of a brief “Hello, how are you?” followed by an organized presentation of the necessary information. (It is not written or outlined, but sounds as if it could be.)

It's also of note that most of the time he is talking with people, “Will John be counter-productive in this?” or “Can we get Harry on over side,” or “Why don’t we meet with Dick, as soon as Harry gets back in town and Dan is free.” In any one conversation on any one topic, as many as 15 other people may be involved in some stage of consultation before the final decision is reached.

Not all the people who come into his office ordately sit down and quietly talk of their business however. On this day Herbert Holloman, special assistant to the President, came in with news concerning possible future income for MIT. The secretaries wavered in him, and he stood about 10 feet from the desk and quickly filled Wiesner in. Then, just as quickly, he was gone. When asked, “Do you get good recovery of loose?” Wiesner replied “Not often enough.”

A phone opportunity with JWB

Another aspect of the Wiesner day is the presentation ceremony. This is something that usually happens in his office, and involves someone handing him something while he smiles, and a man from Tech Today moves quickly about the room, and ant the presentation ceremony ends with everyone a long description of a "presidential photo opportunity" as the man from Tech Today generalizes everyone into place, and has the book, or check, handed from one hand to another, and so that every angle can be gotten. At one point, as an author started to walk away, he was handed back in as though by a gentle sheep dog, and photographed quickly.

(Wieamer has all sorts of calls, but they fall into two broad categories: “input” calls and “output” calls. Input calls are usually (although not always) initiated by the other party, and consist of Wiesner saying hello and then being quiet for a long time. He will make occasional notes and usually concludes the call with a few pleasant pleasantries, or plans to meet for some future point. Output phone calls are usually initiated by Wiesner, often one of his secretaries, and consist of a brief “Hello, how are you?” followed by an organized presentation of the necessary information. (It is not written or outlined, but sounds as if it could be.)

It's also of note that most of the time he is talking with people, “Will John be counter-productive in this?” or “Can we get Harry on over side,” or “Why don’t we meet with Dick, as soon as Harry gets back in town and Dan is free.” In any one conversation on any one topic, as many as 15 other people may be involved in some stage of consultation before the final decision is reached.

Not all the people who come into his office ordately sit down and quietly talk of their business however. On this day Herbert Holloman, special assistant to the President, came in with news concerning possible future income for MIT. The secretaries wavered in him, and he stood about 10 feet from the desk and quickly filled Wiesner in. Then, just as quickly, he was gone. When asked, “Do you get good recovery of loose?” Wiesner replied “Not often enough.”

People who have heard Wiesner speak in public are occasionally surprised by him on the phone, but the same procedure makes him a difficult person to interview on the telephone. He will make occasional notes and usually concludes the call with a few pleasant pleasantries, or plans to meet for some future point. Output phone calls are usually initiated by Wiesner, often one of his secretaries, and consist of a brief “Hello, how are you?” followed by an organized presentation of the necessary information. (It is not written or outlined, but sounds as if it could be.)

It's also of note that most of the time he is talking with people, “Will John be counter-productive in this?” or “Can we get Harry on over side,” or “Why don’t we meet with Dick, as soon as Harry gets back in town and Dan is free.” In any one conversation on any one topic, as many as 15 other people may be involved in some stage of consultation before the final decision is reached.

Not all the people who come into his office ordately sit down and quietly talk of their business however. On this day Herbert Holloman, special assistant to the President, came in with news concerning possible future income for MIT. The secretaries wavered in him, and he stood about 10 feet from the desk and quickly filled Wiesner in. Then, just as quickly, he was gone. When asked, “Do you get good recovery of loose?” Wiesner replied “Not often enough.”

A phone opportunity with JWB

Another aspect of the Wiesner day is the presentation ceremony. This is something that usually happens in his office, and involves someone handing him something while he smiles, and a man from Tech Today moves quickly about the room, and afterwards, he will sign a certificate of a "presidential photo opportunity" as the man from Tech Today generalizes everyone into place, and has the book, or check, handed from one hand to another, and so that every angle can be gotten. At one point, as an author started to walk away, he was handed back in as though by a gentle sheep dog, and photographed quickly.

Today, Wiesner told one: “When I met the first presidential science advisor, who served Truman, I asked him what he did. He told me, ‘I see the president every day.’ I thought that was impressive until I pointed out his window. ‘That’s the White House Rose Garden. He walks through there every day, and I see him...’

It is interesting to watch as the several people from such a presentation sit down and talk, for a moment. Everyone crosses his legs, and speaks rather quietly. The only person in the room not wearing a colored shirt (yellow or gray) is Wiesner. Gestures are kept minimal, and appear a bit awkward, since these people don’t really know one another. One of the skills of an executive is to reduce this kind of feeling in others, and at the end of a half hour, Wiesner has made this group or that feel as though he knows them.

The Office of the President

Jerome Wiesner’s office, to the left behind the big glass door, is a wood-paneled wonderland, bathed in the harsh blue light of a ceiling full of fluorescent fixtures. It has been substantially re-decorated since the days last year when it was occupied by President Stassen. Behind the door, before entering the office, a large sweater which adorned the office then decorated since the days last year when it was occupied by President Stassen. Behind the door, before entering the office, a large sweater which adorned the office then

OFFICE SPACE AVAILABLE
S 25 per month

CENTRAL SQ.
Cambridge Mass.

Call 868-2540

OFFICE SPACE AVAILABLE.
S 25 per month.

CENTRAL SQ.
Cambridge Mass.

Call 868-2540

Wiesner and a group of visitors to the office pose during a photo opportunity.

Wiesner

By Paul Schindler