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# WHAT MALCOLM MUST DO NOW

 Prime Minister Malcolm  
 Turnbull in Sydney yesterday.

**T**his week, as the football teams prepare for the grand finals, the coaches will remind them to stick to the game plan. They have been practising it all year.

It has got them this far and, hopefully, will carry them over the line. In politics, the government has recently changed its captain. Malcolm Turnbull will be looking at his game plan for the next election. What should it look like?

## BE OPEN AND CONSULT

There is no doubt Turnbull is highly intelligent. Sometimes intelligent people don't have the patience to seek out and listen to the opinions of others. That's the way Malcolm was when he arrived in Canberra (we were in Cabinet together in 2007).

He refused to take advice on the emissions trading scheme, which was a big part of why he lost the Liberal leadership. It was a brutal experience but he learned from it. He learned to consult.

When he reached out and started listening to his backbench colleagues he came back into contention as Liberal leader. He can't afford to stop doing that. He must not let his staff cut him off from those colleagues and the people who challenge his views now he is PM.

## RUN A CABINET GOVERNMENT

The Cabinet represents the top policy and political talent of a government.

It has people from all states and both Houses. When it functions properly it has robust and critical debate. Every major strategy should be run through it. If a proposal can't get the support of a Cabinet it shouldn't see the light of day.

If it does see the light of day, it will need the collective clout of Cabinet to win the support of the public. Turnbull pledged himself to this principle as part of his campaign for leadership.

## LET MINISTERS BE MINISTERS

The best Cabinet I ever served in was the first after we were elected to government from opposition. In the dark years of opposition, ministers had to think about policies and how to implement them.

In government, subject to Cabinet, they made decisions. As time wore on the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) began to intrude more and more in an attempt to centralise

power. Some ministers thought that taking instructions from the PMO was the way to get advancement. The centralisation at the end of the Howard years was taken to new heights under Rudd and continued under Abbott. We do not have a presidential system or presidential office.

Any staff member doing media profiles and appearing on "power indexes" is failing in their job. They are not players in their own right. They are there to assist the real decision-makers — the elected representatives.

## IT'S THE ECONOMY

Syria is a big issue, as is gay marriage, emission targets and all the rest. But they pale into insignificance if you can't find a job, can't pay the mortgage, can't get a good education for the kids, or can't get an overcrowded train to commute for hours at the start and finish of every day.

Most people want a government they can trust to manage the economy. That is the area of politics that really affects them.

Voters don't swing over foreign policy or defence posture.

It doesn't mean those things are unimportant. It just means that they won't decide who governs the country. Credibility on the economy isn't everything but, in electoral terms, it is just about everything.

## IGNORE HIGH TAX CHEER SQUAD

The Rudd government massively increased government spending as a response to financial crisis. It was supposed to be temporary. Eight years later it is still going. Now there is a cheer squad for higher taxes amongst people who want to keep that spending going and possibly have even more.

The leadership of this cheer squad resides mainly in big government "think tanks" like the Grattan and Australia Institutes, and congregates with other professional conference-goers to generate publicity. They represent no one but themselves.

Real voters who have to pay taxes are not taken in by it, which is why these people never actually test their theories by running for election. Scott Morrison is absolutely right when he says the budget problem is a spending problem. Don't be sucked into increasing taxes.

## GO FOR GROWTH

Our economy is stuck around a 2 per cent

growth rate when we need it to be above 3 per cent to reduce unemployment, balance the budget and improve living standards. We need to put a rocket under it.

That's why increasing taxes would be such a backward step. We should be thinking of ways to reduce the income tax burden, which has crept up under "bracket creep" and the Abbott government's "deficit levy".

Every government decision should be tested against its growth implications — will it boost jobs or harm them? The United States is transforming itself with cheaper energy. From being an energy importer it is becoming an energy exporter as a result of new fracking techniques to collect gas. This is leading a manufacturing revival.

Yet in Australia we ban such things or make it impossible through burdensome environmental processes.

Let's open the country for business and boost economic growth. These are not just slogans — they must be actions too.

## PACE YOURSELF

It is 12 months until the next election. Our problems weren't created in one year and they won't be solved in one. No one is expecting the mother of all policy prescriptions between now and the next election. What they are expecting to see is concrete achievable measures that will show progress now and blossom later into fully effective measures for the medium and longer term.

