

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Peter F Drucker, internationally famous author and management consultant, has often been quoted as having said management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.

The world waits for no man. Numerous issues requiring decisions have hit the present administration fast and furious and choices made in response have understandably caused many to fast grow furious. Iran, North Korea, the Gulf Oil Spill, immigration, comments at international meetings and the legal approach to admitted terrorists (to name a few), serve to underscore many things, including the distinction between management and leadership.

Some argue that decisions, or hesitancy in choosing a direction by the administration, have mirrored politics as usual instead of reflecting the light of seasoned leadership. So it is with the curriculum of our culture. Physical fitness, arts, civics and citizenship and more poignantly, leadership, have fallen out of the consciousness and classrooms of everyday American life.

The quality of leaders and the lead are directly related. Furthermore, despite the advent of deep, broad and rapid access to crucial information and the wise decisions it can inform, leadership skills have grown limp proportionally to the lackadaisical standards and non challenging experiences we demand of ourselves

We have plenty of managers but effective leaders are far too rare. The quality of the elected is related to the qualities in the electorate thus government reflects at least as much of our ability to understand what leadership entails as it does the positions candidates take on any given issue.

So what is it?

Ralph Waldo Emerson said leadership is "... leaving a trail where there has previously been no path." True, originality and inventiveness are essential, but we must beware the zealot or "One Note Willie" leading us willy-nilly in the wrong direction that ignores the lessons of history, hell bent on doing it their way or no way at all.

Leading up to D Day, Dwight D Eisenhower, in cobbling together massive egos to save the free world, said leadership "is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it." Perhaps, but at face value that runs the risk of a leader being the best manipulator of men or politician easily willing to make deals which might compromise cause and virtue in the process.

During the Irish rebellion, the Irish leader Benjamin Disraeli offered a populist view saying, "There go the people. I must follow them for I am their leader." Jefferson warned us, however, to beware the tyranny (and implied lack of wisdom) of the masses.

Leadership is more. As lonely as it often is, leadership has a crucial ingredient of attracting greatness. The infamous German philosopher, Goethe said “a great person attracts great people and knows how to hold them together.” General MacArthur agreed; great leaders build willing teams.

There is more still. Great leaders put service before self. As brilliant playwright Henry Miller said, “The real leader has no need to lead and is content to point the way.” However leaders are not word merchants, selling oratory without substance and staying power under fire. Their words must inspire others to do more, learn more and be more. If they can keep the craft of creativity steady and true, all will be surprised, as said Patton, “by the ingenuity and industry of those they lead”

Seas legs are found in stormy seas. A man’s leadership is worth its salt when, as Dr. King lived and breathed, “... he stands at times of challenge and controversy”

We just completed one visit to the polls. As we prepare for a possible history making vote in November, consider the concept of leadership. To Lincoln’s admonition that “no man is good enough to govern another man without that others consent” add this; can and will they lead you?

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