

Ten



Keys to *Extraordinary* Leadership

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Servant Leadership

Intro

Is there any more important or sought after trait in business or life than leadership? Over the past decades, an entire industry has built up in this realm and there is no secret as to why. Ancient writings clearly show that without leadership, the entire fabric of society falls apart. This negative fact is equally true for businesses, families, educational institutions and service organizations. Bottom line is that leadership is core to success in life.

In my book, *Success for Life: Answers to the 77 Hardest Questions College Students Ask*, I surveyed hundreds of college students across the country for their toughest issues. A large portion of their questions came back to the issue of leadership, either failure in the classroom by a professor, bad models of leadership that have impacted their lives, or simply the quest for a good life model, a leader, to follow.

As a historian, I have found great wisdom in the lives of those who have preceded us in this journey of life. Whether looking at the “great ones” from history or merely studying the examples of more “normal” people, much can be gleaned about successful approaches to life. In particular, one can learn much about how to be or become a leader through the examples of the world’s previous leaders. Of course, you can do the same thing with current leaders, but you gain a better perspective the further back you look. Once you get to a figure that lived 50 or more years ago, historians have generally presented a more neutral and comprehensive look at their successes and failures.

Opening Story

Once there were two young “start up” organizations that were seeking to challenge all of the previously held assumptions in their fields. These two organizations were truly creative, perhaps even revolutionary. These groups had an idea that they could make a significant change in their respective industries. What they wanted to do was literally turn their world, their field, upside down, and perhaps, if done well, what they produced could impact the average person.

Not surprisingly, both of these organizations were led by dynamic leaders who were revolutionary in their own ways. These leaders were innovative, skilled, visionary; and they believed they could provide a necessary impact to the organization. They had visions and ideas of how things could be done, as opposed to how things had been done at that point.

So, the business plans were put into motion and sure enough, within five years, both organizations had hit the industry benchmarks for success. They were achieving their dreams, mostly due to the impact of their founding leaders. By seven years, they were on top of their fields, having succeeded in ways that were bold and audacious. The organizations were seen as leaders in their respective fields, moving with a somewhat revolutionary flair that, quite honestly, set things apart.

The organizations were doing so well, that the leaders decided it was time to move on. One wanted to retire; the other leader was a

little more of a dreamer, younger, and wished to try other things. Both were happy and enjoyed a fairly successful next step.

For the organizations, however, things went less well. In less than a decade, both organizations were in chaos, and enemies were closing in on all sides. The press that focused on their industries was writing that the organizations were doomed or were a "flash in the pan." Economically, investors and those who really matter to the story were pulling out. Things looked bleak. What was thought of as innovative and revolutionary was now derided as utopic or naïve. There were calls for overhauling or closing the organizations. Both were obviously on the brink of disaster. In hindsight, while there were some organizational, structural flaws, the real issue was the absence of solid leadership to guide the organization.

So, both organizations, after a somewhat panicked self-assessment, did what you would hope a smart organization would do-- decided to turn back to their original leaders. They agreed to make whatever changes necessary to bring back the founder.

This news was, perhaps surprisingly, not received with a warm response from within or without the organization. If you read the press publications of that time, the writing was negative. It was very dire, and external observers held no hope for either organization.

Even after both leaders returned, the press and critics were not impressed. They did not see the returning leaders as saviors, but as yesterday's news. Many wrote the return of the leader was a bad idea, doom and gloom. Criticism was made of age, of not being in touch with the changes that the years had brought, and of having lost the innovative spark. In one sense, the sharks had smelled

blood and were circling to destroy these young “start-ups.” Remember, both groups had been around for less than 20 years.

The result? Well, within 4 years of having returned, both organizations had made a rapid, radical, startling turn around, shocking all the observers and prognosticators as to what kind of companies these organizations could be. The key, the secret, was obviously the leader at the top. Driving, visionary, modeling the great skills of leadership that we all want to embody.

Who are these two leaders? You might have heard of them: Steve Jobs of Apple Computer and George Washington of the United States of America

Why Leadership Matters

With that story in mind, let’s lay out some simple facts about leadership. Make no mistake; leadership is in critical supply today. Yet, the larger truth is that **leadership is ALWAYS in critical supply**. That means a lot to the potential leader. A person who has or who builds their leadership skills will always be needed. Things that are rare become valuable. As you work forward in your life, people, businesses and perhaps society will need you.

One reason leadership is in critical supply is the old adage that “leaders are born.” Thus, there are not as many skilled leaders as we might hope. History shows us “you either have it, or you don’t.” Yet, there is a second lesson from history: **leadership can be taught and developed**. That is good news for the majority of us who wish to be leaders. You can determine right now that you want to build this skill set.

However, do not grow complacent. Whether you are a “natural born leader” or you are someone who has already invested considerable time in growing your leadership skills, you must **become a scholar of leadership**. Sometimes the worst leaders are those who assume they already know everything. We know from history and common sense that no one can know everything about a topic. That means, no matter how good you are at something, there is room for improvement. We have all heard the legendary stories of the great heroes of sport. When I was in college, Larry Bird and Magic Johnson were the kings of the basketball court. I can remember reading in *Sports Illustrated* about how these men would come hours before a game to work on their shooting touch. No wise person coasts on their skills, and the best leaders invest deeply in leadership.

One way to invest in leadership is to pick a leader that fascinates you and go read a biography on that person. Often, if you become a scholar simply of that great leader, you’ll find others who agree with you who have written even more on that leader.

Some examples of books on leaders from history include: *We Shall Not Fail* (Winston Churchill); *Napoleon’s Glimpse* (Napoleon Bonaparte); *Elizabeth I CEO* (Queen Elizabeth I); *The Disney Way* (Walt Disney); *Built from Scratch* (Bernie Marcus, founder of Home Depot); *George Washington on Leadership* (President George Washington); *Lead like Jesus* (Jesus Christ); *Wooden on Leadership* (John Wooden, UCLA legendary coach); and *Lincoln on Leadership* (President Abraham Lincoln).

Examples from History

There are many traits that make up a great leader. John Maxwell, a noted expert in the field of leadership, described 21 traits. Other

experts in the leadership arena have found other collections of skills to possess. History provides models for many of these skills. Alice Paul, for instance, demonstrated the necessity of being willing to lead by example. In her successful efforts to get the 21st Amendment passed for women to vote, she did not merely urge her followers to protest, but she herself went to prison. Pope John Paul showed the necessity of using your power of influence in so many arenas of the world while he was still alive. Dwight Eisenhower, while General of the Allied Forces during World War II, demonstrated the skill of empowering others to lead. Joan of Arc's life is a model of holding faith and determination in the vision in the face of great opposition.

On and on we could go looking into the expertise of history. Mother Teresa showed us that we must be a determined leader even if no one is watching (and even if you think you and your work is invisible, trust me, people are watching). Napoleon's rapid success gives us example about visionary leadership. He is viewed as possessing a vivid sense of the ability to read the landscape, both literally in battle and metaphorically such as in politics. His subsequent failure in Russia in 1812, though, shows a failure of leadership, particularly the Maxwell leadership "Law of Timing." Winston Churchill demonstrates the leadership quality of courage and determination.

However, if there is one skill, one leadership trait that outshines the rest, it is the notion that the leader is called to serve. If you read through the multiple leadership books available, this one idea comes through again and again. You might see it called by different titles or terms, but the idea remains the same. A leader, in the core of the calling, is there to serve those she leads. There is no other purpose.

For the human, relationships with others is unavoidable, critical and, currently, underdeveloped in our society. The leader is not immune to this need; the leader is there for the people. In fact, one could argue that if there were no people, whether we are talking about club members, employees, customers, or the electorate, there would be no need for a leader.

George Washington as Servant

For many, George Washington remains an unreachable person. Unlike the supposed warmth of Abraham Lincoln or the charisma of John F. Kennedy, Washington seems to us as frigid as the face on the dollar bill. He was, however, a real human and was known by many as a genial man who seemed to get along fairly well with most. By the time of his Presidency, however, there was a sense of him becoming “the Father of the country,” someone who was perhaps as aloof as the marble in his statues.

His soldiers from the Revolutionary War would not agree with our assessment. To them, he embodied the actions of the servant leader. Throughout the war, and then subsequently as our first President, Washington would make sure to serve those around him. It is perhaps the fact that he always seemed to be looking for a way out of the limelight that catches our attention. In a day and age where everyone is looking for the quickest way to get their 15 minutes of fame via TV, especially politicians, the fact that Washington seemed quite happy to have no overt, public job is a refreshing change.

Still, he was not afraid to lead when the time came, when the country was in need of leadership. Nowhere was this more important than his willingness to lead the army of the young revolution. In case you don't remember, the decision to have an

official army to deal with the conflict near Boston came in June of 1775, a full year before a declaration was written about our independence from England. Washington clearly was eager to take the role of leader since he came to the Second Continental Congress wearing his own uniform.

The others were excited to send him; many were in some awe of him knowing that among them, he was the lone person with any significant military experience. Standing at around 6' 2" Washington towered over his colleagues when the average height was about 5'8". He was aware that he stood out and was prepared to use that to lead the country to a new political reality. This sense of awareness, of preparing, had been with the man most of his life.

One key example of how his self-awareness came at an early age when he determined to create a list of manners. Sometime during his teenage years (around the mid-1740s) he wrote out 110 rules for living into a small notebook. French Jesuits first wrote these rules in 1595 with a special focus on training young boys the correct way for living life. Through these "rules," Washington became a man who was driven by honor and duty.

He would need every skill he possessed if he were to make it through the crisis of the Revolutionary War. Regardless of what you may have heard, we did not win the Revolutionary War as much as England quit fighting after 1781. Our performance in the field was less than impressive and Washington himself is considered an average General at best. Yet, he also was the glue that would hold the revolution together, if it could be so held, during the war years.

Nowhere was this fact more evident than in the winter of 1777-78. The early years of the war as a whole were not good militarily for

us, and except for the British's own sense of confusion as to what they were trying to accomplish and rivalry within their leadership, the revolution would have been crushed by 1777 or 1778. 1776 in particular was bad, and only Washington's famous "crossing the Delaware" salvaged the year.

The following year was little better, particularly for Washington. Certainly the American victory at Saratoga in the fall of the year was significant, yet it brought little joy to Washington. The victory in New York was made possible mostly because the third leg of a British trap, the New York City forces led by General William Howe, had captured Philadelphia rather than head north towards Albany. Bad news for fellow British commander, General John Burgoyne; worse news for Washington whose forces were unable to stop Howe's troops from taking the City of Brotherly Love.

With that defeat, Washington faced the arduous task of trying to hold his defeated and mentally exhausted army together. Philadelphia was not only the largest city in America, economically it held the key to the large "middle colonies" region. Were Washington to evacuate the area completely, it would allow the British to take control over the entire region, long seen as the "breadbasket of the colonies." Plus, Philadelphia had served as the temporary capital of the newly formed Congress of the Articles of Confederation, and the revolutionary leaders of this group wanted the army near by to hold the British in place.

The problem for Washington was not only the British, but also the Congress. While we don't have time for an in-depth explanation, suffice it to say the Articles of Confederation was never a strong document. Worse, the leaders of the Congress, indeed of the Second Continental Congress (the group who enacted the Declaration of Independence) had no real governing experience.

With a government founded on a less-than-steady foundation, led by mostly inexperienced men, Washington was soon confronting an insidious plot from the corridors of the young Congress by those who saw him as a hopeless, out-classed leader.

Washington's task at holding his army together, confronting the British, AND maintaining control as the commanding General, confronting opposition from within Congress, stands among history's most difficult leadership quandaries. How did he succeed?

We know he did not fail, which gives testimony to his impressive leadership skills. It obviously took a multitude of skills to pull off this difficult task, however the core of the matter, especially in regards to the army, was Washington's personal service to them. Throughout the experience at Valley Forge and elsewhere, the men grew to love their commander as they saw his actions serving them.

Building a sense of loyalty to you as the leader is an important feature of successful leaders, yet it is no easy task. When people can tell that you are there for them, rather than using your leadership position to further your own aims, they will be more likely to step up to whatever task or challenge. For the broken men of the Continental Army in 1777, they would need this link to the great man if there were hold on.

For starters, everything you've heard about how rough the experience was is true. It was bitterly cold. The men literally had no food or, in many cases, no water. At one point during the early winter, Washington wanted to strike at a British raiding party and was told that there was no food for the men, no food at all! And the story of men walking through the snow with no shoes, leaving

bloody footprints? That story is true. Estimates indicate that perhaps half of the army had no shoes for their feet at the start of winter. Can you imagine the suffering, walking just through the woods, let alone through snowy trails or into battle?

Sadly, the issue with supplies did not need to happen. Here is where we can begin to see how politics was just as evident in the early days as today. For opponents of Washington, withholding needed items from the army would make things worse, thus making the General look inept. Their plan almost worked.

The bitter weather and miserable conditions played another role that almost contributed to ruining the army. At this juncture, no plan was yet in place to have soldiers join the army for the duration of the conflict. Remember, the 13 colonies still basically saw themselves as independent entities and most men, if they fought at all, would fight for their state militias on their own soil. When the army arrived in Valley Forge, they were an estimated 12,000 troops. At the height of the suffering, over 4000 were declared unfit for battle and another 2000-3000 died during the winter.

Thus, Washington had his hands full in keeping the army together as well as working against enemies in Congress who were determined to use politics to get rid of the man. His very first move in Valley Forge set the tone. As the freezing and miserable men began the arduous task of setting up the semblance of a camp, Washington pitched his own tent with the men.

While that may seem like a small thing to us, to the men it was huge. Washington was determined to show his men that he was there for them. He would camp where they camped, in the same conditions. The other officers felt no eagerness to share the misery and fanned out over the area looking for houses and rooms to

commandeer. Through the coming days, Washington would lead the charge in helping get the camp prepared as well as working the political channels to find necessary supplies.

His leadership and example worked. The next three months were horrible, yet by March, things began to turn around. Washington finally won the war in Congress, made needed changes that finally brought consistent supplies to the men. New reinforcements arrived as well as new leadership that brought about a new level of training and military precision. By the time of May, the army had emerged stronger than ever. The success in the coming months and years is correctly attributed to making it through the rigors of Valley Forge. And that success is rightly laid at the feet of the leader. Another way to say it is that had Congress won and removed Washington from command, the army would not have survived Valley Forge and we would have ultimately lost to the British.

Level 5 leadership

During the crisis of leadership and attacks from Congress by those looking to replace him, Washington's chief strength was his character and his own cost of the war, that he was putting his own life in danger, paying the price for the men, serving the men and the country.

In 1996, Jim Collins, Professor of Business at Stanford, set out to determine what enables companies to move from being merely good companies to becoming great companies. His research, published in 2001 as *Good to Great*, provides insightful information about leadership and success. In this research, Collins studied 28 different companies in multiple fields. What he discovered is a powerful model for anyone to follow.

For our purposes, the book raises a key point about what Collins found in successful leadership of these great companies. Note, to be included as a great company in the research, it had to outperform the general stock market by 3 times. The companies he found actually beat the market by 6.9 times, an amazing feat from companies that previously had been very average.

Collins found that these companies did not have “larger than life, celebrity leaders.” Somewhat shockingly, Collins found instead, that the leaders were the epitome of servant leadership. Collins calls this leadership skill “Level 5 leadership”. These leaders are “a study in duality: modest and willful, humble and fearless.”

Collins goes on to describe this leadership thus: “Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. . .they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”

It is oxymoronic on its face, but the evidence is clear; the best leaders are not those that trumpet their own skills or demand the spotlight, but rather are modest and focused on serving others first. George Washington’s career is the embodiment of this skill.

Elizabeth I: Servant for Others

Some think that observing male leadership is the only path. Not true, as hopefully more are learning. In fact, I would propose as a historian that England’s Queen Elizabeth I is clearly among the Top 10 (maybe Top 5) of European leaders. Others are now coming to see what England discovered in the 1500s; women can be wonderful leaders.

The magazine *Fast Company* ran an article in 2005 on the Top 25 business leaders. In the article on these excellent leaders was a short list that any woman should learn as important steps in her leadership. The authors quoted several of the female executives and came up with Four Leadership Mantras for women:

- The "woman factor" is an asset, not a liability.
- Surround yourself with strong, creative people.
- Pay for quality -- in employees, financial advice, & infrastructure.
- Don't be timid.

Elizabeth I would have strongly approved of that short list. With death of half-sister Mary in 1558, Elizabeth took over a divided, socially torn country that had spent the last 20 years in the throes of major turmoil over religion. The nation was broke, splintered and seen as an easy prize by the world's major nations. When she died in 1603, England had become one of the most powerful nations in the world, having successfully turned back the world's leading superpower, Spain, in 1588.

How she did this is a model of excellent leadership. We could spend pages JUST on her and still not learn all of her lessons. Note she became the leader of a nation in a time when NO ONE wanted a woman to lead. Yet, lead she did, brilliantly. She did this just as Washington did--by showing her desire to serve others and being willing to work with others.

Elizabeth I discovered the knack for working with people, bending them to her will, yet never trampling feelings. Octavian of Rome, before becoming the titled Augustus, did the same thing, and like Elizabeth, his ability to work with others was the key to his successful control over the Roman Empire.

Here's how she did it: She openly sought the wisdom of others, willing to keep the counselors of her sister (who had hated her) as well as bring in new people. Those on the outside of the inner circle, she consistently cultivated and made them feel included. She made her expectations very clear and set high goals. She demanded loyalty, rewarded it and punished swiftly those who were not loyal. She required excellence of those around her and modeled that same desire for herself. She knew she was the boss and ultimately would make the call, based on the advice of others. She was prepared to back her people 100% in the face of opposition. She never played favorites.

In her first meeting with her all-male counselors, she said, "I give you this charge, that you shall be my Privy Council and content yourself to take pains for me and my realm. Thus judgment I have of you that you will not be corrupted with any manner of gift and that you will be faithful to the State, and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best; and if you know anything necessary to be declared to me of secrecy, you shall show it to myself only and assure yourself I will not fail to keep taciturnity therein."

Ultimately she would become among the first European leaders to see themselves as leader of a nation, rather than a member of a family attempting to control their lands. In the end, she would never marry, stating rather famously that she was "married to England." So, she even set aside the potential of having children, something many women look forward to eagerly (and there is no evidence that Elizabeth felt any less). With this leadership skill of service and sacrifice, the people of England became prosperous and loved her dearly.

Washington unmasks The Newburgh Conspiracy

Sometimes, however, your followers do not love you and yet your service to them is critical. We come back to Washington for one last example. The last major battle of the Revolution occurred in 1781 at Yorktown, but the actual peace treaty was not finalized till 1783. In that time, British troops were still at various places in the country and Washington had to hold the army together (though many in Congress hated him for it). The army remained under-supported, and had not even been paid regularly.

By March 1783, a rebellion was brewing within the army leadership itself. There had been discussion of marching in person to the Congress, then meeting back in Philadelphia. If things did not go their way, well then perhaps force would be useful, so thought these unpaid officers.

Washington received word of this impending disaster when he heard the officers were planning a meeting in private. He countermanded the meeting, but then called for a public meeting a week later. The impression was that the upset officers could hold their meeting as long as it was open, and Washington would not interfere.

When the meeting began, headed by one of the chief schemers and rival to Washington, General Horatio Gates, Washington surprised all the men by abruptly entering the room. The shocked Gates obviously gave up the podium to the General who began a prepared speech. In the speech, he reminded the men, "I was among the first who embarked in the Cause of our common country. As I have never left your side one moment . . . as I have been a constant companion and witness of your distress . . . it can

scarcely be supposed at this late stage of the War that I am indifferent to [your] interests.”

He was appealing to the evidence from Valley Forge and elsewhere, that he had served them to the point of great personal suffering. According to contemporary sources, his speech did not have the expected result . . .yet. Looking around at these men who were still angry at their treatment by Congress, Washington then pulled off a great act of planned theater.

He opened a letter from the mother of a soldier, intending to read it to the men, but then stopped. Instead, he reached into his jacket and pulled out a pair of glasses. Many in the room gasped, as they had never seen the man with spectacles. Remember, this was a time when to wear glasses was often seen as a sign of weakness. Washington then looked up at his officers and said, “You will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray, but nearly blind in the service of my country.” Several of the officers began to weep and all thoughts of abandoning this man to march on the Congress in a coup vanished.

Note, though, that none of that would have worked had it been ONLY theater. Yes, the act was dramatic, but it was based on a lifetime of service at great personal cost. The men remembered that their leader had not sat around, ordering to do things while he merely watched, but that the great man had actively participated with them. He had suffered more than they had, had taken greater risks than they, and he had never left them.

Final Thoughts

Do you wish to be a good leader? Then serve your people. Be a level five leader, as Collins described. Don't be power hungry. Later in 1783, Washington dramatically resigned from office, when most people assumed he would leverage his power and authority to take over the young country. Instead, he retired. The Founders of our country embraced this concept of leadership. They thought that a real leader never seeks power for their own sake; the fact that someone WANTED the power of leadership was a bad sign.

The people you lead will be more likely to accomplish what you desire based on what they SEE you doing! You can't lead where you refuse to go, either by fear or some sense that as the leader, actions are no longer for you. Instead, get busy getting into the down and dirty of serving others. It is the only path to becoming a leader worth following.

Want more. . .you can [purchase the full book](#) for only \$14.97. This is no ordinary "leadership book" as the topics range from diversity to etiquette. Get your copy today!!