



OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2005 - LEADERSHIP LETTER #5

***The Leadership Lessons of George Washington:
Part 1 – On Learning***

At a time when we have troubles at home in the USA and abroad, and need all the leadership insights and wisdom we can muster, I thought you might enjoy these brief lines about our first great leader. The books mentioned are far, far finer than the best fiction ... for entertainment and learning as well.

Regards,

Mel

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THE LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

ON “LEARNING” – Part One

Last weekend Carol and I were enjoying several Ohio River parks, including one dedicated to Cincinnatus ... the respected Roman farmer-general, who went back to his farm quickly when military duties were done.

Many American Revolutionary War officers saw themselves also as farmers first, officers second, and so began the Society of Cincinnatus.

Some were given land in payment of their wartime service in the southwest corner of Ohio which later became known as Cincinnati (being the plural of Cincinnatus).

The best known of them was of course, George Washington, the “father of his country.” George did many leadership things well. He learned practical leadership in the French and Indian Wars, building Ft. Necessity to protect his road-building army in Pennsylvania. Later, he helped save British General Braddock’s men when they were defeated. Braddock didn’t make it.

This remarkably wise, yet humble man, is more of a leadership treasure than most of us realize. Enjoyable current books will do much to provide true-life action and adventure drama plus leadership insights.

- *1776* by Pulitzer Prize winner David McCullough, Simon & Schuster, 2005
- *The Glorious Cause* by Bestselling author Jeff Shaara, Ballantine Books, 2002

The first (*1776*) tells us how Washington began that most difficult year of the six years of war with a victory. Then went on to defeats and brilliant retreats, finally winning again as 1776 drew to a close.

To watch him learn from defeats and setbacks is awesome. It was also worrisome to General Cornwallis, who could see it as well. At that time, Washington’s greatest enemies included awful winter weather and a fractious, stingy, often uncommitted “government.”

Most Americans can recall the morale-building Christmas defeat of the Hessian mercenaries at Trenton. What many of us never knew was that it was desperation-driven: his army had no shoes, blankets, gunpowder, or food. The Hessians did. Rather, they did until their defeat and capture.

Nor do we realize that General Cornwallis then raced his army toward Trenton from Princeton, to quickly strike the Americans across Assinpunk Creek. In the morning, Cornwallis found only campfires, as Washington had night-marched to Princeton to defeat Cornwallis’ relief column and base guard there!

Fred Smith, CEO of FedEx, was recently quoted in a business magazine on his thoughts about books for leaders. His view: forget about the guru and famous CEO books; **read history**. I can only agree. And especially American history, since our culture and values are unique.

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