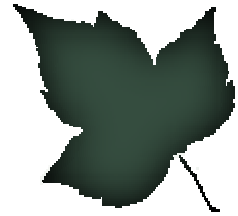


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The Leadership Lessons of George Washington
Part 2 -- On Leading

Hello Everyone!

Leadership Letter No. 5 back in 2005 addressed **Leadership Lessons of George Washington: On Learning** (you can still find this letter on our website at www.henseyassociates.com - click on 'Our Past Leadership Letters' tab and scroll down the page). I'm grateful to client Mark Frey, VP of Hixson Architects & Engineers, for asking me when Part II might appear. So, thanks Mark, and here it is at last, appropriate to February!

Since 2005, I've found two more enjoyable books about George Washington:

- **George Washington, Frontiersman**, by Zane Grey (his last book), Forge Books, 2001
- **George Washington's Secret Navy**, by James Nelson, International Marine/Ragged Mountain Press, 2009

What enjoyable reads these were! They go so well with the two great books I mentioned in the 2005 letter ...

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

Many know of Washington's frontier days as a courier, surveyor, Virginia military officer and developer of Mt. Vernon.

Fewer know of his desperate strategy to develop a continental "navy" of armed merchant vessels beginning with his siege of the Brits in Boston Harbor. Though very frustrating to actually implement, it was finally very successful!

I hope you enjoy this letter (see attached).

All the best,

Mel

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THE LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

ON “LEADING” – Part Two

In this leadership letter, we’ll begin with the closing thought from Part One:

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.

George Washington did many leadership things well. He learned practical military leadership in the French and Indian Wars, building Ft. Necessity to protect his road-building army in Western Pennsylvania. He later helped rescue British General Braddock’s troops in the same area when they were defeated.

ON STRATEGY:

During 1776, George learned about strategy and tactics, on the run so to speak. As it turns out, Washington’s army was almost always out-manned, suffering from want of basic necessities, such as blankets, gunpowder, horses and food. And so, his **master** strategy was to strike suddenly and go away to fight again another day.

As George learned about strategy the hard way, he made several near-fatal blunders. The first was the site he chose for Ft. Necessity in Western Pennsylvania ... his road-building enterprise for Virginia: it was low, swampy, easy to fire into. The second was allowing his army to be trapped against a channel in New York, until Colonel Glover’s boats took them away under cover of night.

He well understood the notion of competitive edge or strategic advantage. For example, when his army had the Brits surrounded in Boston Harbor, he had the numerical advantage but **no** gunpowder! So, he sent a daring merchant captain to a British island to find powder and bring it back. He did!

Another example during that period and beyond: Frustrated by the land stalemate at Boston Harbor, he began to develop captains, crews, gear and vessels for a “secret navy” of armed merchant ships to harry the British merchant and naval vessels. Like Lincoln, he persisted until he got the right captains.

ON LEADING:

Most of what’s been written about Washington, beginning as a frontiersman and surveyor, show his courage. He led from in front, not behind. However, he was not foolish as was Braddock fighting the Indians, and lived to rescue Braddock’s men.

In one frontal confrontation with the British, where his troops were reluctant to face and fire on the Brits, he rode his horse back and forth **between** the lines of fire, encouraging/demanding they stand and fight. They did.

In many battles, beginning with Braddock's defeat in Pennsylvania, Washington had bullet holes in his coat. He was totally committed to the cause and to leading his often ill-equipped soldiers.

ON DELEGATION:

Washington surrounded himself with excellent leaders. His personal secretary constantly carried a heavy load of critical correspondence with Congress and other key people. Henry Knox, his artillery chief, "found" cannons at defeated Ft. Ticonderoga, NY, and brought them hundreds of miles to Boston. Colonel Glover, the Marble Head fisherman, whose men, skills and "boat-finding" ability saved the army at least twice, once escaping a trap in New York and again crossing the Delaware at Trenton.

We all know the great Lafayette, who began as Washington's aid-de-camp and became a skilled general. Finally, even Benedict Arnold was a skilled and courageous general for Washington until his love for an English lady made him disloyal.

And there were **many** others! In Air Force parlance, Washington relied upon many talented and dedicated "wing-men" or deputies ... something **every** leader needs, now more than ever!

ON CARING:

It's interesting to compare Washington with the Hessian Colonel he defeated at Trenton, or with the Brits as he struggled through winter at Valley Forge, or with Cornwallis whom he defeated at Yorktown.

The Hessian Colonel had a "dresser," servants, and a fine residence at Trenton, while Washington traveled on foot at the head of one of two surprise attack columns. The weather was terrible and getting worse. Most wanted to turn back, and would have without his example.

At Valley Forge, Washington shared the pain with his few troops, many of whom were sick and without shoes in the snow. Martha accompanied George in every winter bivouac and cooked for the officers. Too often, stone soup was the day's menu. George spent his time cheering the troops and asking Congress and friends for money and supplies, giving much of his own resources as well.

BACK TO STRATEGY:

At Yorktown, arguably the **first** time Washington had any advantage, he showed his mettle in many ways. He used the French Navy to keep Brit rescue ships away. He used French and Continental cannon to level the British defenses.

He accepted Cornwallis' surrender, even though Cornwallis lacked the nerve to surrender in person. He took British prisoners humanely, **many** of whom became Americans over the years. He was as humble in victory as in defeat. So, we understand why, for years afterward, British vessels fired a cannon salute to Washington when passing by on the water side of Mt. Vernon.

ON CREATIVITY:

Some years ago, it was my privilege to visit Mt. Vernon and tour it in depth. Washington's creativity in almost everything was apparent there ... architecture, gardening, orchards, food preservation, lighting in his home, front and back porches, and entertaining guests, visitors, and notables.

Jefferson gets much credit for creativity ... and deserves it. Yet he was almost always deep in debt for his extravagance at Monticello. Washington was frugal except when giving his army what they needed.

Both were slave holders. George inherited his with his marriage to Martha and took good care of them at Mt. Vernon. He stipulated that they be freed upon Martha's death, with provision for their care thereafter.

ON GRACE:

Before he was 20, George wrote rules of conduct for himself, based on his learnings from school and religion. One of the most important was holding his temper in check. Another was treating others with respect. And there must have been one on humility (as *Good to Great* would suggest for leaders of today).

A famous painting depicts Washington kneeling in prayer by a woods in the snow, holding the reins of his horse. I'm sure that either George or our people were blessed by grace. Or both. He left us in good shape, with cautions about avoiding foreign entanglements. Perhaps we should listen.



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