

Learning From The Presidents II

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In a previous article, we began a two-part treatment of “Learning from the presidents” — three in particular, Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt. We considered two valuable lessons:

1. Learning from, and taking responsibility for, our mistakes and
2. The value of nurturing relationships and taking time for recreation. Those that research such topics are finding out that all work and no play makes Jack not only a dull boy but, in some cases, a dead boy.

Now let’s see what else we can learn from our trio of ex-presidents. I would like to focus on one significant aspect of Kennedy’s leadership and one from Roosevelt’s.

Recently, in reading *The Second Coming of the Church* by George Barna, I found a definition of leadership that I really like (page 106). “A leader is someone who effectively motivates, mobilizes resources and directs people toward the fulfillment of a jointly-embraced vision.” No one-man show but getting others on board and involved. Kennedy knew how to do that, and do it well.

John F. Kennedy

According to Pulitzer Prize winner Doris Kearns, who is an expert on presidential leadership, “Kennedy made millions of people feel they were part of the New Frontier. He was able to give the public a sense of connection to the presidency. He had the ability to mobilize people to feel included and to care about the tasks ahead.” No doubt about it, Kennedy was able to identify, recruit and effectively manage the best and brightest people — including people unlike himself and thereby catalyze an entire nation with a fresh vision for the future.

All my study and research on leadership over the last 20-plus years has taught me that one of the key elements in effective leadership (especially as we approach the next millennium) is understanding the need for, and demonstrating the ability to work with and involve others, in a shared vision. To be able to form a team of different and gifted people who complement the leader and the team members.”Little” people do it by themselves. “Big” people get others to work with them. It would appear that LBJ, on the other hand, was unable to mobilize the public at large...unable to generate trust as Kennedy did. Without trust there is no relationship.

Reggie McNeal in his excellent book, *Revolution in Leadership*, notes that, “The old pattern of individuals working alone in their own isolated empires is being replaced by teams. In the church we have built an ethos of stardom revolving around the pastor. Effective leaders build teams around them.”

John Maxwell tells the story of a Midwestern fair, where many spectators gathered for an old fashioned horse pull (an event where various weights are put on a horse-drawn sled and pulled along the ground). The grand-champion horse pulled a sled with 4,500 pounds

on it. The runner up was close, with a 4,400-pound pull. Some of the men wondered what the two horses could pull if hitched together. Separately they totaled nearly 9,000 pounds, but when hitched and working together as a “team” they pulled over 12,000 pounds.. Sounds like a passage of scripture I know, “Two are better than one — if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.” Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 (NIV) Someone has noted that TEAM could stand for “Together Each Accomplishes More.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was a leader who was confident in himself and others. For the Christian leader that translates into confidence in one’s gifts, calling and vision and confidence in God’s character, purpose and promises. Then, with His help and grace, to be able to project that god-confidence to others.

We are duly warned in Philippians 3:3 about “confidence in the flesh.” Caleb and Joshua are classic examples of this confidence in God. They brought back a positive, faith-filled report that took into consideration both the difficulties of the task at hand as well as their confidence in the character and promises of God.

According to Doris Kearns “The real leadership gift is the ability to extend confidence to others, actually believing in the gifts of others.” Doris goes on to say that, “Roosevelt was not only confident in himself but, more important, confident in the American people.”

It is a matter of seeing people with a “10” on their forehead. Seeing the potential in others — affirming them, believing in them and motivating them to go for it. This is the very nature of leadership in my book. Authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner put it this way, “Some people see beyond the horizon and into the future. They believe that dreams can become reality. They open our eyes and lift our spirits. They build trust and strengthen our relationships. They stand firm against the winds of resistance and give us the courage to continue the quest. **We call these people leaders.**”