

11-6-2006

Gleaves Whitney on Leadership

Gleaves Whitney
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ask_gleaves

Recommended Citation

Whitney, Gleaves, "Gleaves Whitney on Leadership" (2006). *Ask Gleaves*. Paper 13.
http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ask_gleaves/13

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ask Gleaves by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Gleaves Whitney on Leadership

What is leadership and how can we tell who an effective leader is?

These are perennial questions people have been asking since Homer sang of the exploits of Odysseus, Agamemnon, and their kin during the Trojan War. What is it about the way human beings are hardwired that makes it possible for one person to take charge of a situation, and get thousands and even millions of others to follow? Are leaders born or made? How important is virtue to leadership? What combination of nature and nurture explains, say, a Churchill?

In the face of these questions, leadership studies have proliferated in recent decades to the point of word-weariness. Over the past half century, authors have generated some 1,400 studies and 65 classification systems to get a handle on leadership.^[1] Amid this forest of print, a thoughtful work like James MacGregor Burns's seminal study of transformational leadership stands tall and never goes out of season.^[2] Yet no author, not even Burns, has written the final word. No weekend seminar, no Beltway consultant, can exhaust the search for the leader's allure and power. Leadership, like the charisma on which it is often based, ultimately is irreducible and not entirely explicable.

Five Ways of Defining Leadership

One way to plumb the mystery of leadership is to look at diverse ways of defining a leader -- by examples, signs, comparison, etymology, and traits.

Examples We know from observation that leaders are the people who take charge of something that needs to be done. This is common to them all. We tend to think of the greatest leaders as alpha males who are Olympian in stature -- Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte. Plutarch's *Lives* and Thomas Carlyle's *Great Men* seem inevitable, and we hold such great leaders up as models. Yet caution against easy generalization is advised. For the evidence of history also reveals a surprising array of unlikely individuals who rose to the top. One thinks of Moses. He started life out as a slave and lacked confidence because of a speech impediment; yet he grew in strength of character and for four decades led a disheartened people out of Egypt to found a nation in the Promised Land. Even more boggling is the example of a 12-year-old shepherd in the thirteenth century named Stephen of Cloyes; he somehow inspired tens of thousands of children from across France to join him on a crusade to Jerusalem. Other unlikely leaders have been King David (the youngest child in his family), Cleopatra (who turned on her own brother-husband), Emperor Claudius (who used his disability to advantage), Joan of Arc (a teenage warrior), Queen Elizabeth I (who was long considered illegitimate and thus not an heir to the throne), Mahatma Gandhi (small of stature and humble in bearing), and Presidents Abraham Lincoln (considered inferior to his many rivals), Ulysses Grant (who could barely get a command at the beginning of the Civil War), Harry Truman (a haberdasher without a college degree), Dwight Eisenhower (whose army career almost ended on the eve of World War II), and Gerald Ford (who never sought the Oval Office).

What often defines great leaders in the popular imagination is the display of boldness and decisiveness at key moments -- moments that can become turning points in history. One thinks of Jefferson creating the United States Marine Corps and sending them with a fledgling navy to the Mediterranean to end the menace of the Barbary pirates; of Lincoln willing to have a showdown with the South at Fort Sumter; of Eisenhower giving the go-ahead to retake Fortress Europe from the Nazis on D-Day; of Truman giving the okay to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima; of the arch-anticommunist, Nixon, opening the door to China; of Reagan in Berlin with the challenging words, "Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Signs Leaders are the people who take charge. This is one obvious sign of leadership. But it is not a solo project. Leaders must get others on board. So a complementary sign of leadership is the ability to attract and retain followers, for if there are no followers, there is no leader. George Washington illustrates the point brilliantly. He was unanimously elected to preside over the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and later unanimously elected to the U.S. presidency by the Electoral College, not once, but twice, ratifying him as the greatest American leader of his generation. Indeed, America's first presidential campaign was not about candidates wooing the public, but about the public wooing one candidate: the gentleman-farmer from Virginia, enjoying retirement at Mount Vernon, was deluged by visitors and letters from fellow citizens urging him to be their first president, and he obliged.

Several of Washington's successors built up large, enduring followings who would get the presidents' heir apparent elected. This, too, is an important sign of effective leadership. From the late 1790s to the 1820s, Thomas Jefferson succeeded in founding and building up a party, the Democratic-Republicans, as he consolidated power; together with his hand-picked successors, James Madison and James Monroe, the so-called Virginia Dynasty would dominate American politics for a quarter of a century. In the 1820s and '30s, Andrew Jackson took the next great step and successfully broadened the franchise that supported him, thus becoming a founder of the modern Democratic Party; his hand-picked successor, Martin Van Buren, extended Jacksonian policies another four years. From 1854-1865, Abraham Lincoln likewise succeeded in building up a new party, the Republicans, based on "free soil, free labor, and free men"; Republicans would dominate national politics for all but a few years until the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912. Since the 1930s, a sizeable band of Democrats has remained loyal to the memory of Franklin Roosevelt; Harry S Truman was his handpicked successor. And in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan cultivated a large bloc of voters known as "Reagan Democrats" who put him (and kept him) in the White House for eight years; George H. W. Bush carried the Reagan Revolution forward an additional four years.

Leadership is about relationships. However else one defines it, the psychological bond between the leader and the led is central. Since leaders inspire people to gather around shared values to pursue common purposes, the question is: how do they do it? We shall examine charisma under the traits of leaders, below.

Comparison Leaders can also be understood by comparing them to managers. Managers seek to make the system run better; leaders set out to change the system. The U.S. presidency has had its fair share of both. Many post-Civil War presidents regarded themselves largely as managers of the executive branch of the federal government. They were interested in fine tuning the system, not setting a bold, new direction. This is not to denigrate the importance of good managers, but it explains why posterity is not particularly riveted by what Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland, or Benjamin Harrison did. With Theodore Roosevelt a true leader came back to the White House, for he took charge of the executive branch and succeeded in introducing significant changes in American governance. One generation later the contrast was evident when comparing the stewarding style of Calvin Coolidge with the change-inducing style of Franklin Roosevelt. The former was a manager, the latter a leader.

Another distinction between managers and leaders is the degree to which leaders need to inspire followers. Leaders get their followers to focus on their shared values to pursue a common purpose.

In addition to the distinction between managers and leaders, we should also briefly contrast leaders in a liberal democracy who must earn the trust of followers, and tyrants in a dictatorship who do not. The former are duly authorized by the fundamental law of the land to exercise power; the latter are under no such constraint. Any ruler who is not under the law wields power without legitimacy.

Etymology The origins of the word "leader" are telling. The word comes down to us from the Old English *lihan*, which means "to travel," "to go before" (i.e., to show the way or guide).^[3] Perhaps the image that best captures the meaning is of the pioneer who blazes a trail for others. Vivid illustrations of this sense of leadership populate U.S. history. At the beginning of our nation, it took a leader the



"George Washington was unanimously elected to preside over the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and later unanimously elected to the U.S. presidency by the Electoral College, not once, but twice, ratifying him as the greatest American leader of his generation."

Also see: [Great Communication](#)



caliber of George Washington to blaze a trail for succeeding presidents. The Constitution provided for the presidency, but Washington had to create the office. Many of his precedents -- like taking the oath of office with his hand on a Bible, delivering an inaugural address, forming a cabinet, making a farewell message, and peacefully transferring power after two terms -- stand to this day.

Other presidents have been trail blazers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt struck out on a new path when he educated Americans about the importance of conservation. In the 1930s and early 1940s, his cousin Franklin Roosevelt proved to be a pathfinder when he persistently acclimated citizens to a larger role for the federal government and patiently led Americans out of isolationist thinking. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan successfully charted a new course for dealing with the Soviet Empire. Each of these presidents lived up to the traditional etymological sense of the leader as a pathfinder, showing us the way into the future.

Traits Another way to define a thing is by looking at its traits. Whether born or made, the best leaders -- even the unlikeliest among them -- possess key attributes to a high degree. Because there is such interest in leadership traits, the next section is devoted to them.

Traits of Effective and Virtuous Leaders

Most studies measure leaders by how effective they are; those at the top are judged by well-known performance criteria like the ability to set an agenda, build a consensus, project optimism, and solve problems pragmatically -- important qualities, all. We want our leaders to be effective. But we also want our leaders to be *virtuous*. The best leaders combine effectiveness *and* *virtue*: effective when measured by performance criteria, and virtuous when measured by long-standing intellectual and moral qualities. It's the distinction between politicians, who are effective, and statesmen, who are virtuous. Following are the traits that mark the effective leader *and* the virtuous leader. We begin with passion and vision, because these traits supply the spark that puts one on the road to leadership.

1. Ambition ... and Passion In pursuing their goals, effective leaders have ambition; virtuous leaders have passion.

First-rate leaders don't just take charge for the sake of taking charge. They have the drive to change something -- the way people think, their military unit, their business, their association, their city, state, or nation. They have a contagious passion, the need to earn the respect of their community, the drive to make a difference, to put their scent on the world. Thomas Jefferson and James Polk had the drive to expand the United States across the North American continent. Theodore Roosevelt was compelled to make the United States universally respected as a global power. Woodrow Wilson tirelessly sought to expand democracy and position the U.S. to dominate a new world order.

2. Ability to Set an Agenda ... and Vision Effective leaders have an agenda that will get them through the next election; virtuous leaders have a vision that will inspire the nation through the next generation.

The best leaders take charge because they see a big job to be done, a significant task to be tackled, a great challenge to be met, a fiery trial to be endured. And they can get people emotionally engaged with themselves and/or the job, task, challenge, or trial at hand. For George Washington the emotionally engaging challenge was to establish a new republic in a world of monarchs. For Abraham Lincoln it was to save the United States against itself. For Franklin Roosevelt it was to save the United States against totalitarian regimes dedicated to its destruction. John F. Kennedy endeavored to expand the frontier of freedom around the globe. Lyndon Johnson dreamed of America becoming a Great Society for all its citizens. Gerald Ford sought to heal a nation deeply wounded by Vietnam, Watergate, an energy crisis, and cynicism. Jimmy Carter sought to expand America's crusade for human rights around the globe. Ronald Reagan urged us not to accommodate the Soviet Union but to throw it in the dustbin of history and thereby win the Cold War. What George H. W. Bush called "the vision thing" is essential to bold governance, and the stronger the emotional support for the vision, the greater the bond between leader and led.

Passion and vision -- these are the two foundational traits that drive the leader to develop the other traits, and these we now explore.

3. Reliability ... and Trust Effective leaders are reliable; virtuous leaders are trustworthy. I had the privilege of interviewing President Gerald R. Ford in Vail during the summer of 2005. At one point I asked him what the most important quality of a good leader is, especially in our system of government. Without hesitation he said, "Trust -- the people need to have trust in their leaders, and our leaders need to have trust in each other." Trust is a foundational relational trait that is necessary to both effective and virtuous leadership. As a Congressional leader and as president, Ford was always regarded as a truthful man -- his word could be trusted on both sides of the aisle -- and that was desperately needed to restore confidence in the presidency in the mid 1970, after what Presidents Johnson and Nixon had done in the office. Ford also said that trust was the prerequisite to successful relations with foreign leaders who needed assurance that America's commitments and treaties would be honored. It is no accident, says Henry Kissinger, that Ford has remained friends with a number of foreign leaders since he left office. Trust, after all, is one of the foundations of friendship.

4. Ability to Build a Consensus ... and to Unify Leaders who passionately believe in what they are doing, who are trusted, and who have an emotionally engaging vision are going to find consensus building easier. They can get people from diverse backgrounds with a variety of agendas on board. In a parliamentary system or constitutional republic, this quality is particularly important. We saw this trait skillfully displayed by George Washington, who kept two enemies, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, in his administration's orbit. More recently we saw it with George H. W. Bush, who in 1991 reached across the aisle and got most Democratic as well as Republican leaders, not to mention a majority of foreign leaders, to support the Persian Gulf War.

Whereas effective leaders are consensus builders, good leaders are unifiers. Several of our nation's founders worried that factions would be the undoing of the republic. Washington, especially, feared that Americans might lose sight of their great national purposes. He admonished citizens not to succumb entirely to parochial interests or form parties that would entrench them in partisan bickering. Aware of the precedents he was setting, Washington sought to define the presidency as a national office that transcends narrow politicking. It is precisely this spirit that underlay his efforts to negotiate a viable path between (and above) the intellectual duels between his secretary of the Treasury, the Federalist Hamilton, and his secretary of state, the Democratic-Republican Jefferson. In more recent times, Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg displayed remarkable bipartisanship when he abandoned isolationist policies to work with Democratic Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman to spearhead efforts to create the United Nations and other multilateral institutions.

5. Social Skills ... and Charisma This mysterious trait -- charisma -- is more easily identified than analyzed. It does not seem to be learned. It is a natural attribute of those fortunate enough to have it. Charisma -- *mojo* -- is a fundamental element in the personality of great leaders. And while charisma includes likeability and attractiveness, at a deeper level it is the empathetic (or sympathetic) bond that develops between followers and their leader. In short, charisma is emotional connection. Followers identify with the effective leader and feel understood. It's JFK standing by the Wall and declaring, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*." It's Ronald Reagan asserting that he will restore the pride that Americans should have in their country. It's Bill Clinton saying, "I feel your pain."

Charisma is what makes it so easy for leaders to woo followers. Yes, leadership involves a kind of wooing or courtship not unlike that between lovers. Charisma is the personality trait that makes followers "fall in love" with the leader. Here is how the journalist William Allen White described his first encounter with Theodore Roosevelt, in 1897:

He sounded in my heart the first trumpet call of the new time that was to be.... I had never known such a man as he, and never shall again. He overcame me. And in the hour or two we spent that day at lunch, and in a walk down F Street, he poured into my heart such visions, such ideals, such hopes, such a new attitude toward life and patriotism and the meaning of things as I had never dreamed men had.... After that I was his man.

As this passage suggests, leaders with *mojo* elicit something else -- followers who will project their highest ideals onto the person at the top. Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan all had this effect on others, young people especially.

Because of their charisma, the best leaders are talent magnets, surrounding themselves with individuals who can help them implement their vision and make up for their deficiencies. Washington attracted, arguably, the two smartest Americans in his day -- Jefferson and Hamilton -- to his cabinet. John Quincy Adams, Lincoln, FDR, JFK, and Gerald Ford have all been praised for the exceptional talent assembled among their advisers.

6. Ability to Communicate ... and to Act Effective leaders do not have to be Nobel laureates in literature, but they can express their vision to a diverse audience with conviction, clarity, and persuasiveness. Some of our greatest communicators in chief have been Lincoln, TR, Wilson, FDR, JFK, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. They have defined the rhetorical presidency.

Part of the ability to communicate involves acting. Effective leaders know how to communicate with words and symbols; virtuous leaders know how to act as the occasion warrants, even when it goes against their grain. It's part of the package that includes communicating empathetically and connecting emotionally with people. A number of our presidents from George Washington (who was a devotee of the theater) to Bill Clinton (who was a born thespian) had a brilliant sense of stage presence. One of the silliest criticisms ever leveled against President Ronald Reagan was that he was an actor. In fact, knowing how to act presidential on all occasions and in all the diverse roles our chief executives are expected to play -- as head of state, head of government, head of the military, head of their political party -- is a boon to their performance.

7. Knowledge ... and Skill Ancient philosophers distinguished between intellectual and moral virtues. For Aristotle, one intellectual virtue is the technical skill (*techné*) to get things done. Effective leaders are perceived by those around them as having the skill to make the changes they envision. They are practiced in statecraft, possessing the intellect, the understanding, to master key facts, discern causality, glean insights from authorities, and choose smart solutions to meet the challenges they face. It's not just that they are smart. They also have to know the process by which to get things done in their world. An effective U.S. senator, for example, needs to acquire knowledge of the U.S. Constitution, legislative precedents, parliamentary procedure, and the role of constituents, lobbyists, the media, and political parties to get bills passed. It is no accident that the "Master of the Senate," Lyndon Johnson, succeeded as president in getting a thousand bills passed to bring his vision of the Great Society to life. Indeed, he was able to push through numerous bills that his predecessor, JFK, could not close the sale on. I can think of no other president with this record of achievement after just five years in office, and much of his achievement was based on superior knowledge of how the system worked.

8. Opportunism ... and Foresight Effective leaders know an opportunity when they see one. Perhaps it's an opponent's tactical mistake; perhaps it's a death that has left a void; perhaps the situation suddenly changes and the leader must act quickly and boldly to push through a needed reform.

So politicians are opportunistic. But statesmen take it up a notch; they have foresight. The Greek historian Thucydides observed that the chief quality of a great leader is their foresight -- the ability to anticipate a problem before it explodes and makes a situation unmanageable. Our founding presidents -- Washington and Jefferson, in particular -- anticipated how tragic the unresolved issue of slavery would be to the future of the republic, and they urged Americans to resist breaking into sectional factions that could lead to civil war.

9. Ability to Compromise ... and to Adapt Cicero long ago pointed out that another intellectual virtue is adaptability. Intelligence can be defined a number of ways, but one of its surest signs is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. It's the nimble mind. Look at how, during the Civil War, Lincoln would change generals as the situation required (he had four generals-in-chief of the Union Army during the four-year-long conflict). Early in his first term, Eisenhower abandoned his campaign pledge to abolish Social Security when he saw there was not really the political will among Americans to do so; citizens had grown used to big government because of the New Deal and especially because of World War II. Southerner Lyndon Johnson went from blocking civil rights legislation in the 1950s in the Senate to championing civil rights in the 1960s in the White House. Ronald Reagan did a 180 when he abandoned his previous stance of not negotiating with three of his Soviet counterparts but became open to sitting down with a new kind of communist leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1985.

Adaptability can also be seen in the way presidents have embraced new technologies: one thinks of Lincoln using the telegraph in the Civil War, of McKinley setting up his war room with telephones, of FDR using the radio for his fireside chats, of JFK adapting so adroitly to the use of television, and of Bill Clinton adopting the Internet.

And this point is critical: The willingness to compromise is not a weakness in our deliberative form of government; it is often necessary to get things done. Likewise, stubbornness is not a strength. It is -- stubbornness -- and it is a character flaw that has gotten presidents in a lot of trouble. Following the First World War, Woodrow Wilson refused to compromise one iota on the fourteenth of his Fourteen Points, which would establish the League of Nations. "Anyone who opposes me," he thundered, "I'll crush!" The president's intransigence only stiffened Republican opposition to the League in the U.S. Senate and killed any chance the United States would enter the international body.

Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Joseph Ellis writes of George Washington's adaptability at a critical time in the birth of the United States:

"Until the winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge, Washington thought of the war against Britain as a contest between two armies. When the British army presented itself for battle, as it did on Long Island in the summer of 1776, Washington felt honor-bound to fight ¶ a decision that proved calamitous on that occasion and nearly lost the war at the very start. That's because the British had a force of 32,000 men against his 12,000. If Washington had not changed his thinking, the American Revolution almost surely would have failed because the Continental Army was no match for the British leviathan.

"But at Valley Forge, Washington began to grasp an elemental idea: Namely, he did not have to win the war. Time and space were on his side. And no matter how many battles the British army won, it could not sustain control over the countryside unless it was enlarged tenfold, at a cost that British voters would never support. Eventually the British would recognize that they faced an impossibly open-ended mission and would decide to abandon their North American empire. Which is exactly what happened." [Joseph J. Ellis, "Washington: The Crying Game," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 2006]

Other manifestations of intellectual virtue, besides skill and adaptability, include (1) the resourcefulness to get the most relevant, insightful knowledge about a topic, what Cicero called *inventio*; (2) the ability to arrange the material by means of an organizing principle that makes the knowledge more manageable, useful, and easily communicated, what Cicero called *dispositio*; and (3) the memory to command the arguments ex temporaneously, Cicero's *memoria*. In addition to these, another intellectual virtue is necessary to good leadership, and to that we turn next.

10. Pragmatic Problem Solving Skills ... and Prudence Effective leaders are not ideologues. They do not squeeze the world into the over-intellectualized schemes of coffeehouse philosophers. Good leaders deal with the facts and historic reality of a situation. They try to anticipate the real consequences of their decisions. Being prudent is more than being practical or pragmatic. Prudence (*phronesis* in Aristotle's writings) is an intellectual virtue that complements skill and adaptability. Prudence is good judgment, even wisdom, in making decisions. It is knowing the right thing to do, to the right degree, at the right time. President Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon 31 days after taking office is one of the best examples of prudence in recent decades. Ford's decision was exceedingly controversial in 1974; he was harshly criticized in the media; and yet, over time, it has been seen as the right thing to do to heal a nation wounded by Vietnam, cynicism, and not a little hopelessness.

The United States stays on a sound course when its leaders pursue "the politics of prudence," to quote political philosopher and historian Russell Kirk.

Aristotle taught that intellectual and moral virtues can be cultivated and become "second nature" (thus supplanting our first or original

nature where it is lacking in virtue). Such intellectual virtues as adaptability and prudence are fostered by the willingness of a leader to listen to advisers who can speak frankly. This is the purpose of a kitchen cabinet, and we saw it brilliantly on display when President Truman settled on the Berlin Air Lift as a way to save the beleaguered city without provoking all-out war (1948), and when President Kennedy confronted the Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).

The intellectual virtues of skill, adaptability, and prudence are critically important to seeing what needs to be done -- and when, why, and how it should be done. But another virtue is needed to actually do the thing, and that is the moral virtue of courage.

11. Concern ... and Courage In a conversation with the former president of Poland, Lech Walesa, I asked what made a good leader, and he immediately said, "Courage!" The good leader has to be unafraid to act boldly, even when it is the unpopular thing to do. Within 30 days of taking office, Gerald Ford made the extremely controversial decision to pardon his predecessor, Richard Nixon. Ford knew his popularity would plummet, but he explained that the nation needed to heal and there were many problems to confront. He was worried that the gathering storm surrounding Nixon would consume his days and energies. Numerous writers like Bob Woodward, Roger Wilkins, and Richard Reeves, who initially criticized Ford, have changed their minds and vindicated the 38th president's courageous decision. In 2001, Ford received the John F. Kennedy Foundation's Profile in Courage award because of that decision.

Courage is evident when the leader stays calm in a gathering crisis. This attribute was memorably expressed by the first lines of Kipling's poem "If":

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs....*

Courage is also evident when the leader has to be tough. Toughness -- which is not the same as a thick skin -- enables a leader to make hard decisions. Controversy will dog someone who sets out on an unpopular course. But as my friend and colleague Rusty Hills likes to say, "To govern is to choose. You have to make decisions. You have to avoid paralysis by analysis."

12. Optimism ... and Hope Effective leaders convey optimism; *good* leaders express hope. Optimism is a welcome trait in a leader -- certainly it beats temperamental pessimism -- but the etymology of the word suggests that it goes only as deep as the optic nerve; it's based on what one can see. Hope, by contrast, arises from a deeper source, or more transcendent one. In some traditions it is considered a theological virtue, for it's a confidence in forces unseen that work toward the betterment of the human condition. Where optimism connotes the superficial, hope connotes the supernatural.

America's founders were men and women of hope. They had to be to endure the hardships of the Revolution and emerge with the strength to lay the foundations of the greatest nation on earth. George Washington was almost the personification of the virtue of hope. Although he was president of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he had said little during the deliberations. But at the conclusion of the Convention, he remarked: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hands of God." Our nation's Founding Father was confident that Providence would smile on the new nation.

Every president after Washington who looked confidently westward was also expressing hope in, and to, their countrymen. Franklin Roosevelt helped shepherd the nation through the Great Depression by constantly expressing hope (we had a rendezvous with destiny and had nothing to fear but fear itself). Ronald Reagan helped restore America's pride in herself by frequently communicating hope (we were a city on a hill). Bill Clinton -- "the Man from Hope" -- played off the fact that he was born in Hope, Arkansas.

Prudence, courage, hope -- such qualities are essential not just to effective but to *virtuous* leadership. As a people, as a postmodern culture, we do not tend enough to the virtues of leadership -- but more about that later.

13. Luck ... and More Luck Rare is the team that wins the trophy without some lucky breaks along the way. This is not to diminish their achievement, but to remind ourselves of a common observation, and it is the same with great leaders. In the conversation with President Walesa mentioned above, he said he asked people being considered for promotion whether they were lucky. If they were generals, did they win battles? Luck has played a significant role in successful presidencies. Thomas Jefferson was fortunate that France was willing to unload Louisiana during his first term, a dream he cherished. But the conditions had to be ripe. By 1803, France found herself in an impending war with Britain and needed the money to fight; a slave revolt in Haiti drained France's treasury and diverted Napoleon's attention from the North American mainland; and Caribbean mosquitoes carried the epidemic that decimated the French Army in the Western Hemisphere. Finally, Napoleon was suggestible and was willing to let go of Louisiana for much less than it was worth. As a result, the United States doubled its size under Thomas Jefferson.

Nowhere has luck been more evident than when presidents have avoided assassination. Andrew Jackson was certainly fortunate when neither of the pistols wielded by his intended assassin fired. Theodore Roosevelt was lucky that the bullet intended for his heart was slowed by the thickly folded speech in his breastpocket. Gerald Ford, too, had the good fortune of escaping harm at the hands of two different assassins on two different occasions. And Ronald Reagan had the luck of the Irish when the bullet from John Hinckley's gun missed his heart.

To review: the point of defining leadership so thoroughly is to enable us to walk around a fascinating human behavior and see it from different angles. We have defined leadership in five ways. Drawing from observation, study, and experience, we know that leaders take charge (as copious examples illustrate), attract followers (a major sign), inspire change (in comparison with managers), and show others the way (reflecting the etymology of the word). In addition, truly good leaders possess a number of major traits to a high degree. The best possess performance qualities that make them effective, and intellectual and moral qualities that make them virtuous. In a word, politicians can be effective leaders; statesmen, virtuous leaders.

Having defined leadership and looked at the chief traits of the best leaders in a self-governing polity, we turn now to other aspects of leadership, beginning with the role of character.

Role of Character

I am often asked how important character is to leadership. The better angels of our nature want to believe that integrity is the *sine qua non* of successful leadership. We want our leaders to be heroes, models of human excellence. Regrettably, many of history's most powerful leaders have been effective without being virtuous in the full moral sense of the term. Xerxes, Julius Caesar, Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, Robespierre, Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, Idi Amin were all despicable characters; they populate a gallery of the grotesque. Nevertheless, they got throngs to become their followers and do their bidding. In a sense, they were effective, even great, leaders (great in the sense of being consequential to human history.)

And yet -- and yet -- the truth adds up to more than truisms. As we have seen, the best leaders possess certain virtues, and these virtues can never be separated from character. Character can be defined as the habitual disposition to choose what is good, and it is never a sideshow to superior leadership. Ancient writers were adamant on this point. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* champion *arete* -- variously translated as moral excellence, a noble character, and the fulfillment of one's potential through difficult trials. Plutarch's sketches of eminent Greeks and Romans highlight fortitude and magnanimity. Aristotle consistently argued that the best leaders possess *ethos*, or integrity and an excellent reputation; they also possess the virtue of prudence to a high degree. These qualities, while never out of season, are especially needed in a representative form of government in which the people are sovereign. In a democracy or republic, trust is critically important. The people must trust that their leaders' values are in accord with their own better values, that they are in a partnership among equals to make a better future.

Contrariwise, when it comes to leadership in a republic, a bad character can be poison to the polity. Cicero's famous fusillade of orations against

Marc Antony -- the *philippics* -- are premised on the idea that a person whose character has become corrupted -- either by a position of power, or by the life he has led before becoming powerful -- should not be in a position of authority over others. They cannot be trusted to serve in a disinterested way and do the right thing. Their character is harmful to the body politic.

It goes without saying (but I shall say it) that even defective men and women can be effective leaders -- they can be judged by a somewhat lesser touchstone than saintliness. George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt or Ronald Reagan, did not have to be saints to attract legions of followers and rack up numerous achievements. Indeed, they could be flawed in the public eye yet still be both effective and virtuous. They could "take charge, attract followers, inspire change, and show others the way."

Leadership and Followership -- a Kind of Friendship

There is a symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers. Leaders want to be admired and respected by their followers. Followers want to like -- even love -- their leaders. This complex psychological relationship bears a resemblance to the Aristotelian description of friendship. Friends, according to Aristotle, (1) help each other, (2) enjoy each other, and (3) elevate each other. Ideally, leaders and followers in the *polis* should do the same.

Leadership as friendship -- that is the democratic way. Our system of government turns Machiavelli on his head, for our leaders would rather be loved than feared.

Three Leadership Styles

The sign on Harry S Truman's desk read, "The buck stops *here!*" True enough, the Constitution authorizes the president alone to make certain decisions, especially in his role as commander in chief. More, the public tends to heap praise or blame for our nation's good or ill fortune on the president alone.

But our chief executives do not reside in splendid isolation on the pinnacle of power. Several factors have ensured that presidential decision-making will be a shared enterprise. First, Article II of the Constitution requires (and at other points encourages) our presidents to consult with Congress. Second, George Washington and his successors set precedents that encourage chief executives to form cabinets comprised of trusted advisers. Finally, the federal government has become such a behemoth that, practically speaking, our presidents must rely on the good judgment of others to execute the laws. Thus by law, by custom, and by necessity, presidents make decisions with the help of others.

This is where an understanding of leadership styles is helpful. All leaders are not cut from the same mold. Depending on temperament, experience, personnel, and the situation at hand, leaders involve those around them to varying degrees. There are three main leadership styles -- magisterial, ministerial, and managerial -- and they are not mutually exclusive even in the same person on the same day. In fact, an effective leader is apt to change his leadership style to fit the personnel and challenge at hand. Briefly:

1. The *magisterial style* is authoritarian. It is the way of prophets and kings, manifesting itself when the leader feels so certain in himself that he does not share the decision-making process with others. (For the most vivid examples, think of religious founders like Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad.) In our deliberative system of government, it is rarely prudent for a leader to block others out of the process when they could help him, but the magisterial style may occur when the president must act quickly, has the necessary information to make a decision, and is unable to devote energy to teaching or mentoring staff. Some of our early presidents occasionally used a magisterial style to get things done -- George Washington and Andrew Jackson, for instance. In more recent times, Gerald Ford displayed hints of a magisterial style when he quickly reached the decision to pardon Richard Nixon.
2. More common in modern democratic societies is the *ministerial style*. Using a team approach, the ministerial leader regards those around him as colleagues -- he is merely *primus inter pares*. The ministerial style is rooted in the tales of King Arthur and his fellow Knights of the Round Table (itself a gesture of equality). Since most leaders learn by hard experience that it is prudent to share the decision-making process with others, they use the ministerial style to insure that diverse viewpoints have been taken into account. This is the whole purpose of kitchen cabinets. Presidents who are secure in themselves and who surround themselves with informed, trusted advisers adopt this style when a key decision must be made. One of the most highlighted examples in recent decades is John F. Kennedy and his aides dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis.
3. Even more common today is the *managerial style*. This style occurs when the leader assigns the practical burden of decision-making to others, then ratifies their decisions so long as they conform to the overall aims of his administration. In this style, bureaucracies are the locus of decision-making. Ronald Reagan was famous for delegating to others, but out of necessity every modern president has used the managerial style to a great extent. In fact the federal government has become such a behemoth that 99 percent of an administration's acts come about through the managerial style. Only when faced with key decisions can the nation's chief executive enjoy the luxury of using the ministerial style.

Studies going back to the 1930s argue overwhelmingly that, in our deliberative system of government, the most effective leaders adopt a ministerial style (sometimes called "democratic" or "participatory" in the literature) to get the most important things done on their agenda. Working with ministerial leaders, aides feel that they are part of a team and are valued for their contributions.

The Limits of Leadership

Leaders, no matter how impressive, are not God. No matter what wave of popularity a leader rides, no matter how great the mandate that puts her into office, no matter what leadership style he adopts, no matter what virtues she displays, no matter how lucky the anointed one seems, there are limits to what a leader can be and do. Leaders are only human. They must obey the same laws of physics; must contend against the same weaknesses, peccadillos, faults, and vices as the rest of humanity; must suffer the same historical tragedies that afflict every people in every age. They will never live up to our greatest hopes for them (which are really hopes for ourselves). For those of us who are wont to judge those who lead, it doesn't hurt to read Shakespeare or Plutarch periodically. In such works we encounter humanity's entire catalog of virtues and vices -- including our own.

No doubt, the catalog of virtues and vices is more open to inspection today than ever before. In our free society; in our representative form of government; in the hyper-critical environment cultivated by the mass media; leaders' virtues and vices are perhaps too much on display. Who can stand the scrutiny? About the pressure-cooker of the modern presidency, John Steinbeck observed:

We give the President more work than a man can do, more responsibility than a man should take, more pressure than a man can bear. We abuse him often and rarely praise him. We wear him out, use him up, eat him up. And with all this, Americans have a love for the President that goes beyond loyalty or party nationality; he is ours, and we exercise the right to destroy him. [*America and Americans* (1946), p. 46]

A Leadership Crisis?

Has the nature of leadership changed during the past 3,300 years human beings have been writing about it? Not really. Effective leaders then, as now, had the essentials -- a contagious passion, an emotionally engaging vision, trust, charisma, the ability to communicate, a skill set to match the challenge, the ability to grow and adapt, prudence, courage, irrepressible hope, the ability to unify, and luck.

These are the constants, but periodically there is a clamor for "new leaders." We hear that a lot these days; a number of observers warn that there is a crisis of leadership in the land, what with style supplanting substance, and celebrity crowding out character. Some of us wonder if

the institutions created by America's founding generation can survive the insouciance of the current generation.

Almost every group I have addressed asks if leaders the caliber of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln are possible today. And the consensus in almost every group is no. The quality of leadership in the U.S. has been diminished by a number of factors:

1. Today's mass media possess the power to tear down a leader in short order. Americans' addiction to and indulgence of the media have granted them unprecedented power. With that power they have also, unfortunately, created a sound-bite culture that appeals to the lowest common denominator. The 24-hour news cycle is crowded with "celebrity news" -- breathless reports of Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and other celebs *du jour* whose every move is overanalyzed. (*Why, for heaven's sake?*) Before radio and TV, citizens had a longer attention span. They learned about their leaders mostly by listening to their (long) speeches, reading their (long) writings, and delving into (long) newspaper reports and op-eds. In print and in town hall meetings, there was an emphasis on character, content, and smart rhetorical strategies. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were the mini-series of the antebellum Heartland; each lasted longer than most movies. Nowadays Americans get most of their news from electronic media sources that discourage sustained discourse or developed arguments around the issues. C-SPAN excepted, hit-and-run sound-bites are the norm. The result has been appalling shallowness.

2. Money may be another factor diminishing the quality of leadership in the U.S. The Center for Responsive Politics, with its opensecrets.org Website, has shown that the Congressional candidate with the most money wins --more than 90 percent of the time. I don't recall Homer, Moses, Aristotle, Plutarch, or Washington saying that lucre made the leader.

3. The devaluation of virtue is yet another factor that has eroded the quality of leadership in our time. We seem to have forgotten Plato's insight that knowledge and virtue form a unity. Accordingly, he believed that the purpose of education is to make people smarter and better. How do we achieve that? We make people smarter by cultivating the intellectual virtues, and better by cultivating the moral virtues. The aim of education should be to implant and cultivate these virtues. But who talks this way nowadays? Postmodern opinion shapers have largely neglected the insights of generations of writers from ancient times through the American founding. Each year scores of books and articles about leadership are published, but in the vast majority of them, you will search in vain for a sustained discussion of the virtues that raise the quality of civic life and leadership. Prudence (as opposed to mere pragmatism) is not a keyword in many of today's leadership studies. Yet such a virtue is essential to good leadership.

Don't we want, don't we need, leaders who are both effective and *virtuous*? Who are not just politicians, but *statesmen*? Who don't just have an agenda, but who have a *vision*? Who are not just consensus builders, but *unifiers*? Not just pragmatic, but also *prudent*? Not just concerned, but also *courageous*? Not just optimistic, but also *hopeful*? Not just reliable, but also *trustworthy*?

Ramping up to 2008, already some two dozen individuals have expressed an interest in running for president. They want to lead the American people. At a minimum, we should be on the lookout for traits that help us assess candidates' capacity not just for effective but for virtuous leadership. While we're at it, we might want to revisit one of the great poems about leadership, "If," by Rudyard Kipling:

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

(*Question submitted by Mark C. of Greenville, Michigan*)

[1] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004), p. 2.

[2] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

[3] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (2006), s.v. "leader."