



Lead the People

By **DAVE SIMANOFF** The Tampa Tribune

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Many Americans remember John F. Kennedy as a visionary leader, an inspirational speaker, and the motivation for social change and justice.

Theodore C. Sorensen remembers Kennedy as all those things and something else: his boss.

Sorensen was Kennedy's special counsel, policy adviser and speechwriter. He's not surprised that four decades after Kennedy's death, the president's legacy of leadership remains strong.

"Kennedy had the single most important quality for leadership, and that's judgment," Sorensen said. "A great leader has to make difficult decisions."

A great leader is also a great communicator, Sorensen said. For Kennedy, "the great speeches are not great because of their wordsmithing - they're great because of the values he conveyed: compassion, service to others, world peace, American justice."

Kennedy is one of five presidents we're studying this President's Day in our search for leadership lessons that can be applied in any office - oval or otherwise. In our history books we have discovered both exemplary leadership skills and cautionary tales.

We start, most appropriately, with the first president.

George Washington

He marshaled an underdog army to victory over the British. He led a newly founded country as its first president. And he ran a business empire, producing tobacco, textiles, whiskey and wheat.

How did George Washington do it? By delegating tasks to other people.

The father of our country wasn't a micromanager, said Willard Sterne Randall, a distinguished scholar in history at Champlain College in Burlington, Vt., and author of "George Washington: A Life."

"He, after all, set up the first cabinet," Randall said. "He gave tasks to each of the secretaries."

The cabinet met on Tuesday afternoons. When Washington assigned a task to a cabinet member, he expected a written report within 10 days, Randall said.

If Washington were alive today, he'd be a multimillionaire, Randall said. The president believed in diversifying his business interests at his company, Mount Vernon, and also thought diversity was important for the American economy.

Washington wanted people around him to be respectful but not pompous, and he dismissed any notions of regal titles in favor of being called Mr. President.

"He was polite and formal, but not fancy," Randall said. "As president, he greeted people at the door himself in a plain black suit. The British ambassador mistook him for the butler."

Theodore Roosevelt

At the Battle of San Juan, during the Spanish-American War, Theodore Roosevelt didn't hide behind his soldiers.

Instead, he famously led his Rough Riders regiment into the fight.

And he continued leading by example when he became the country's 26th president after William McKinley was assassinated in 1901.

"He was the first president that understood personnel management," said James Strock, a management consultant and author of "Theodore Roosevelt on Leadership."

"He helped set up the federal civil service system," he said. That gave Roosevelt "a much deeper appreciation" of the people who worked for him, he said.

Roosevelt was very conscious in his efforts to be a good leader and role model - he wanted to prove that people born

without significant advantages could become successful in life, Strock said.

Roosevelt once told an audience, "I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life; I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well."

However, Roosevelt never planned on becoming president. In fact, he had intended to study law at night while serving as vice president, Strock said.

"Roosevelt often said, 'You do the best you can with what you have, where you are,'" he said. "If you do that, the rest will take care of itself."

John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy inspired an entire nation to reach for the stars.

Literally.

In 1961, Kennedy said the United States would place a man on the moon within a decade. The technology for a manned mission to the moon didn't exist at the time.

"What he was really doing was making the impossible seem possible," said Suzanne Bates, a communications consultant in Boston and author of "Speak Like a CEO: Secrets for Commanding Attention and Getting Results."

"By stating the words, he made it happen. That's really the mark of a leader."

Kennedy was successful not just because he was likeable or because he was the first president to exploit the relatively new medium of television. He succeeded in inspiring people because he talked about big ideas, Bates said.

"People tend to focus on his charisma and his style," she said. "But it's also the power of his ideas, combined with his ability to effortlessly express those ideas."

William Henry Harrison

The country's ninth president doesn't leave a long legacy of leadership because he died of pneumonia after just 30 days in office. However, Harrison's experience highlights the importance for leaders to have a good succession plan.

Harrison died long before the 25th Amendment, which clearly outlines the country's presidential succession plans. After Harrison died, it was unclear whether Vice President John Tyler would actually become president, or whether he would remain vice president but have presidential powers. The constitutional crisis was short-lived but hotly debated. Tyler was eventually accepted as president, but many critics continued calling him "His Accidency."

Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon has two legacies: He's the president who resigned in disgrace after the Watergate scandal, but he's also the sharp diplomat who revitalized the United States' relationship with China.

The lesson from Nixon? Smarts aren't everything in leadership.

"He was an extremely bright individual - one of the smartest presidents we've had - but he had severe personality flaws," said Hugh A. Wilson, a professor emeritus of political science at Adelphi University in Garden City, N.Y.

The flaws include paranoia and anti-Semitism, as well as problems relating to other people, Wilson said.

"He spent an inordinate amount of time worrying about the enemy," Wilson said. "When you do that, you waste precious energy, and you run the risk of getting into situations that bounce back onto you."

Leaders like Nixon can engender a lot of support and loyalty from aides and subordinates. As a result, these kinds of leaders may be hindered because they don't get experience different opinions and viewpoints when they make decisions or set policy.

"The leadership qualities of people like Kennedy and Roosevelt and Lincoln [came from] how they created multiple sources of information," by relying on many different advisers to bring them varying options and advice, Wilson said.

If the presidents were alive today, which companies would they be running? Which CEOs would they most likely be like? Match the U.S. presidents to the modern CEOs.

U.S. presidents:

George Washington's varied business interests, and his willingness to take a risk as the country's first president, reminds us of what serial entrepreneur?

Richard Nixon secretly recorded conversations with Oval Office guests and resigned after the Watergate scandal. What corporate leader recently resigned after it was discovered that the company was spying on its own board members?

John F. Kennedy is widely acknowledged as one of the country's most inspiring and charismatic presidents. What CEO has been known to incite fevered attention for new products during keynote speeches and product launches?

William Henry Harrison died after 30 days in office, prompting a short-lived constitutional crisis. What CEO recently passed away?

Theodore Roosevelt understood the needs of his workers, whether they were civil servants or soldiers. Which CEO today shares a similar commitment to employees?

Modern CEOs:

Richard Branson, CEO of the Virgin Group, has founded successful businesses in industries as diverse as air travel, music and banking.

Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Inc., who most recently generated massive amounts of buzz when he introduced the iPhone in January.

Jim Cantalupo, CEO of McDonalds Corp., died of a heart attack in 2004, just as his company was in the midst of a massive effort to improve sales and service. A successor was named almost immediately.

Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, says he's committed to providing fair employee benefits, including health care for full-time and most part-time workers.

Patricia Dunn, former chairwoman of Hewlett-Packard Co., stepped down in September 2006.

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