

ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP

It is said that leaders are not born or endowed with special mental powers, its essence to be absorbed or learned as an art rather than as a science, an exercise, perhaps, of trial and error or in more grandiose terms, ESP, that extra sensory perception that seems to cling to special people. In simple terms, it is the art of persuasion and it bespeaks of character, integrity, intelligence and a 'something' that make others follow one's lead. When I think of leadership, I visualize a Lincoln or a Churchill beset with the trials and travails of their situation, war and salvation.

For Lincoln, the country was on edge, the nation divided, hatreds were flaring and passions running high. He was determined to serve the nation honestly and well. As Kearns told us (Team of Rivals) Lincoln possessed the ability and persuasion to bring his disgruntled opponents together—those whose reputation and experience assumed one or the other would win the nomination—in his cabinet, marshal their talents to preserve the Union and win the war. Too, Churchill as recorded by Lukacs (Five Days in May, 1940) was able to persuade the War Cabinet, conservative and labour (Halifax, the favorite of the King and party to succeed the discredited Chamberlain) and the labour leaders, Attlee, Greenwood to abide by the goal to fight rather than negotiate. Again the essence of Churchill leadership in their darkest hours, prevailed despite bitter, contested arguments to the contrary. For God and country was the moment yet almost led to capitulation. This cabinet like the Lincoln one was an art form, led by charismatic leadership.

We learned at the inauguration our new President was inspired by Lincoln, hand on the bible, 'bringing peoples together' train trip from Illinois to Washington DC, and other recall of the great emancipator. Churchill was not part of the legacy and the bust was returned to sender. An omen perhaps. Among his opportunities was the chance to lead, to open doors with the opposition and his mantle as Commander-in-Chief. A true leader realizes he is responsible for what his unit (administration) does or does not do, to accept the credit and the blame and not castigate others and seek scapegoats. Lincoln and Churchill example. With domestic and international challenges he had a myriad of opportunities and the jury is out!

McCain along with Gates could have complemented a 'loyal opposition' to his cabinet and provide experience which seemed lacking. Early acceptance of the Bowles-Simpson results aimed at debt reduction and tax increases cried out. It was not to be. Instead we see a 'leader' who inferred America's finest hours as non-sequiturs, her alleged transgressions required apologies, and Christianity a staple of the Founding Fathers a misnomer, while racism and colonial mindset was really our bedrock. Aura seems to include in his mantel, an ideologue, birthright, character, integrity, and suspect motives.

Churchill may have had someone like this in mind when he classified some world leaders and consequences: "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." And Lincoln's speeches often referred to his reliance on God and faith.

"Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying, and expanding the heritage of values, we have received that those who come after may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible, and more generously as a pattern of the way we should live."