



tampa bay leadership review

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP: WHY IT IS DIFFERENT AND WHY IT MATTERS THE MOST

by **F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.**, Dean, Sykes College of Business

As one reflects upon the battle currently underway between the two 2016 Presidential candidates, one wonders why this campaign feels so different compared with those of the past. Many cite the candidates' vast differences, and sincerely wonder whom can best lead our country. While any voting citizen can argue for or against either aspirant, in the end it will be America's choice. The beauty of our democratic system makes it possible to accept the will of the people and to make a peaceful transition. Ultimately, the person elected must possess the ability to lead 300 million diverse individuals. While the United States has always been highly heterogeneous, the forty-four individuals who have held the office have reflected different styles, backgrounds, education levels and demeanors. We started with George Washington, a reluctant leader who called himself "as lucky as one going to his execution" following his election. Then there were those who had to make political deals to get elected. Some, such as Abraham Lincoln, resorted to maneuvering delegates into the party convention, while others, such as John F. Kennedy, found themselves accused of tactics such as ballot fraud. Still others took advantage of the prevailing political situation to seize the office. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding their election, those who become President realize that the leadership of an entire nation requires unique skills and perspectives. Evidently, the job of President of the United States presents a much more difficult road than becoming a C suite executive or a leader in business, the military or any industry for that matter. The lives and stability of millions depend on the way each office holder makes decisions. Among the key traits required for a President to be successful, are the following:



F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D.

1. Building a vision of the future for the nation: Many candidates have written a book or two or unveil their long-term plans in a document that maps out their policies. Many of these promises never see the light of day but provide a framework for sharing their views with the public. A candidate must possess a broad vision in order to reach multiple goals and to deal with the relentless analysis of those policies by a number of groups and individuals — many not sympathetic to the candidate and his vision.

2. Working constructively with a team of rivals: This trait forms an important part of managing a country versus running a company. The President is the head of a nation comprised of 50 states, each with its own agendas, politics, people and problems. Flexibility and open-mindedness prove crucial in making all citizens feel that the President hears their voices.

3. Bringing all on the train with a sense of unity: The President must join a divided group of citizens, many of whom did not vote for him or her. This task requires a strong political will to engage, rather than to polarize, the electorate. When a President cannot cajole a congress of members of the opposite party to compromise, then major planned accomplishments either don't happen or face changes and restrictions that dilute the original intent. Partisan politics can halt all progress.

4. Planning and executing visible results: Millions of eyes scrutinize a President's every action and decision. He or she cannot strategize in secret, and success requires more than strong organizational skills and persistence. The President must possess skills beyond objective decision-making and understand all facets of the political landscape in order to function effectively. Imagine what competing corporations would have to do if their board meetings all occurred in public.

5. Staying consistently popular: While polls reflect changing public opinion and many chief executives do not maintain their initial popularity, they must maintain connections with the people. An unpopular President may achieve a great deal by passing legislation and executing plans, but if he loses his connection to the people, his ability to function with a high level of success diminishes greatly. As a result, he must — in a sense — continue to campaign until his last day in office.

Successful and popular Presidents know their limits and hope history judges them fairly and kindly. All Presidents influence history, and their acts live on forever. In summary, Presidential leadership can be described as requiring all of the skills of leaders in business, social and military arenas put together. This demonstrates why Presidential leadership styles receive such a high level of study and interest. Whether the leader of a company or the leader of a nation, each individual faces challenges that extend far beyond those experienced in any other setting.



Abraham Lincoln,
16th President
1861-1865



Franklin D. Roosevelt,
32nd President
1933-1945



45th President

WHAT DOES \$10 MILLION DOLLAR LEADERSHIP LOOK LIKE?

by Edward Valaitis, Managing Partner, Edison Avenue

On a beautiful sunny day in the summer of 2002, I found myself in a large meeting room with the top 120 executives of Textron, a Fortune 200 company. The company is best known for its Bell Helicopter, Textron Automotive, Cessna Aircraft and E-Z Go golf carts, as well as its role in producing the V-22 Osprey. I was there as part of a strategic consulting firm facilitating the transformation or implosion of Textron — it was not completely clear which one it was at the time.



Edward Valaitis

Textron's financial performance and stock had been taking a beating for a long time. The world had changed and conglomerates no longer seemed fashionable or necessary in the modern world. If one wanted a diversified investment portfolio he/she could buy shares in a good mutual fund. At the time, Textron did not resemble General Electric with its highly respected "GE Way" style of management, which it applied across all lines of business with outstanding results.

The future of Textron seemed to balance on a knife's edge in that meeting room. The group of presidents, COOs and CFOs were asked a series of questions which they answered via anonymous polling devices. The answers instantly appeared on a jumbo screen for all to see. There was one particular question I will never forget that summed up the company's state of crisis at the time: "Would you buy stock in Textron today?" The projected bar charts began to bounce and update themselves as the polling results came in with a resounding 80 percent of the senior executives saying they would not buy stock in the company. A hushed silence fell over the room as all eyes turned to Lewis Campbell, the CEO of Textron. At this time, there was intense pressure from Wall Street to divide up the company and throw out the leadership. I can best describe what happened next as decision time.

In the lyrics from a famous song, Kenny Rogers sings, "You could've heard a pin drop when Tommy stopped and locked the door." The same hushed intensity filled the room as it became clear that Campbell had a life altering decision to make. He could accept and embrace the fact that he was part of the problem or he could walk away with his golden parachute and let someone else deal with it. As I stood there in my mid-thirties I was not sure what I would decide under those circumstances. In order for true, deep and lasting change to take place, one must fundamentally change him/herself first and then the organization. He exhibited tremendous courage under fire and bravely continued on with the strategic meeting.

The next step in the process was extremely painful, but essential to build trust and produce a long-lasting change. The group was ushered into an adjoining room and was given some time to view a wall 40 feet high by 200 feet long that was nicknamed the "Wall of Shame." Giant banners covered the wall with anonymous quotes from those same 120 individuals regarding what they "really" thought about the state of the company, its culture and its leadership. Many of the comments were so brutal and damning, they would have had many leaders scrambling to place blame or run for the nearest exit. The CEO accepted the fact that he was part of the problem and would have to change himself.

In order for change to take hold, everyone involved has to agree on the current state of reality. If a consensus cannot be reached, there is no chance of envisioning an aligned future. This principle could be equally

applied to the political gridlock in which the United States has been experiencing, but I digress. Early in my career as a leader, I made the mistake of implementing change at a professional services firm without first building a common understanding and awareness of the current state and the need for change among my team. As a result, an internal revolt occurred and I learned the hard way that good intent and right action have no value without an effective change in leadership. The next time I had a bite at the entrepreneurship apple I built a \$30 million business in three years by following these leadership principles.

In Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled* he states, "the successful psychotherapist must bring to the relationship the same courage and sense of commitment as the patient." If Campbell did not build consensus on the need for change, or found himself calculating the distance to the door rather than locking himself in the room to face the brutal truth, the group would have sensed his lack of total commitment and no change would have been possible.

How did the story end? As expected with this type of undertaking, the transformational journey experienced both ups and downs. Textron stock rose from \$14 to a peak of \$73 dollars per share as a result of a leadership team that embraced change and transformed the company. The process of change was deeply painful for the leadership and employees, but the rewards of climbing the mountain made the journey worth the effort. During his last year at Textron, Campbell earned about \$10 million in total compensation; and from my perspective, as a witness on the ground, he earned every dime for the jobs saved, jobs created and value returned to shareholders. By working in the field of mergers and acquisitions, I regularly see the value destruction that occurs when leadership fails to effectively implement change.

In our world of meteoric change, at an individual, organizational and national level, effective leadership is synonymous with change. Risk of failure becomes a constant companion each day of an effective leader's life, requiring his/her willingness to renew, risk, and change. In order to lead, one must have the ability to deal with ambiguity, display courage, face the brutal reality and create a common vision. Campbell showed a rare ability to listen profoundly, put aside the threat to his self-image, and changed himself before he asked others to join him on the journey of reinvention. A quote from Proverbs 29:18 succinctly expresses the truth of this paradigm: "Where there is no vision the people perish."

About the Author:

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SAVE THE DATE! TECO Energy Center for Leadership Upcoming Events

Modern Advances in Leadership Certificate Program —
Jan. 17, 2017- April 18, 2017 (Select Tuesday Evenings)

2017 Leadership Summit — Feb. 22, 2017

Retired Lt. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, global strategy and physician leader development at Florida Hospital

Leadership Speaker Series — March 28, 2017

Weston Smith, fraud prevention and ethics advocate at ChalkLine Solutions Inc. and former controller and CFO at HealthSouth

Emotional Intelligence for Leaders — April 27-29, 2017

For more information about upcoming events, please contact:

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RICK THOMAS, CLU, UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA CLASS OF 1972

Chairman Emeritus, University of Tampa Board of Trustees — President and CEO, Thomas Financial Group

by Patrick Jephson, LVO (Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order), Consultant in Reputation and Communications, Previously Chief of Staff to Diana, Princess of Wales, Speaker/Coach, Writer and Broadcaster

On Feb. 16, Rick Thomas, president and CEO of Thomas Financial Group, became one of the latest speakers in The University of Tampa Leadership Speaker Series. A distinguished UT alumnus, Thomas is also chairman emeritus of the University's Board of Trustees and a much-admired leader in the local business community. His rise to prominence was the theme of his address and, characteristically, he told his story with a self-effacing candor that only underscored the value of the lessons it contained.



Patrick Jephson

While some leadership gurus seek to inspire their audiences with tales of visionary entrepreneurs and silver-tongued communicators, whose charisma seems to be matched only by their improbable self-belief, Thomas identified a humbler but no less essential quality in the aspiring leader... tenacity. Indeed, the following quote succinctly expresses his talk's lesson: "Everyone has set-backs in life, that is a given. It's what happens next that counts the most."

Thomas' life offers many examples of setbacks overcome en route to the success that eventually rewarded his tenacity. Before describing his personal experiences, however, he spoke about Sir Winston Churchill, the historical figure whose example had helped guide him from focusing on setbacks to asking "what happened next."

Churchill's legacy as a war leader, soldier, statesman and historian might seem to obscure the many stumbles his career suffered on his way to immortality; as Thomas reminded us, Churchill was no stranger to failure. Consider the following examples, but in each case, also consider Churchill's response:

- Notoriously inept academically, Churchill twice failed the entrance exam to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. Undeterred, he tried again and succeeded on his third attempt, gaining a commission in a prestigious regiment of Lancers and thus, coincidentally, participating in the last ever cavalry charge by the British Army (at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898).
- In World War I, as First Lord of the Admiralty, he gambled and lost in a daring attempt to knock Turkey out of the war in the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign. He responded to this situation by taking a dramatic reduction in rank and by volunteering to serve in the trenches of the Western Front as a battalion commander.
- His romantic life was no less checkered: three times in his twenties he proposed to eligible women and three times he was rejected. Persistence finally had its reward with the fourth attempt when he successfully courted the remarkable Clementine Hozier. By now, he'd learned his lesson and moved quickly to seal the deal — they were married after an engagement of just one month. The marriage produced five children and earned its place among the great lifelong romances of the 20th century.
- Despite his well-deserved reputation as a dashing man of action, Churchill's less than irresistible physical attributes may have adversely affected his luck with women. He possessed a round face, pasty skin, bulging eyes and a lisp. As an ambitious politician, he endured mockery for this speech impediment and suffered numerous electoral defeats before learning to phrase his speeches so as to minimize and to overcome this



Rick Thomas '72

handicap. It's perhaps no coincidence that as his speeches grew in clarity, they also grew in their power to inspire.

This power to inspire was not lost on the young Thomas who, in his own way, faced a daunting array of challenges. In overcoming them one by one, he drew strength from Churchill's unusual but undeniable definition of success:

"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

With a modesty that won the audience's undivided attention, Thomas led us through some of the challenges that helped form his own philosophy of leadership. In his determination to confront and overcome these obstacles he would be the last to claim any Churchillian greatness. Yet Thomas' example is no less relevant than Churchill's, especially perhaps to a younger generation given few opportunities to view adversity as just another form of disguised opportunity.



Rick Thomas '72 gives his presentation titled "Never Quit! Tales of Tenacity from the Thames to the Hillsborough" at the Leadership Speaker Series in February.

Consider these stories from Rick's own life: in high school Thomas was a promising football player. However, his ambitions didn't stop at the sideline: "My plan was to make All-State, get a scholarship to the University of Alabama, play football for the legendary coach Bear Bryant, win the national championship, marry the homecoming queen, go to law school, and become the next great trial lawyer in the country."

Alas, only one of his grand plans came to fruition. At the beginning of his senior year of high school he pulled a hamstring, however he still earned a football scholarship to UT. In his senior year of college he applied to law school. Possessing good grades and a strong LSAT performance, he confidently assumed he would gain easy acceptance. He was so confident that, while still an undergraduate, he married his homecoming queen and thus achieved the solitary — and undoubtedly most important — success of his original grand plans. And let romantics take note: he and Sandy celebrate their 44th anniversary this year.

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TECO Energy Center for Leadership

Rick Thomas, CLU, University of Tampa class of 1972

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Back in the decidedly unromantic real world, he saw his other plans fail. While sitting at his commencement he received a rejection letter from the one law school to which he had applied. For a newly-married man, not yet graduated, this situation spelled big trouble: to have no job was bad enough, but he didn't even have an interview for a job. What on earth was he going to do now?

Fate then took a hand, assisted by qualities in Thomas that steered things in the right direction. One of his football coaches phoned to say he had a friend seeking college graduates for his life insurance agency. After a couple of meetings, the friend took Thomas on, despite his protestations that he would, indeed, attend law school.

Six months later Thomas came to one of life's most important realizations: He would achieve everything he had planned and hoped for, just not in the way he had expected. Everything a career in law could offer — professional status, control of his financial destiny and working for himself — existed in the insurance career on which he had already embarked. Fate had another blessing in store: Ron Moore, who had recruited Thomas into the insurance business, became his mentor, accelerating his progress by decades. No wonder Thomas urges young people to seek out a great mentor among the many ready and willing to help in all business arenas.

So began the story of Thomas Financial, one of the great successes of the Tampa Bay financial services industry. Thomas found that his unplanned career choice coincided with the blossoming of the baby-boom generation: they were buying homes, getting married, having children, starting businesses — everything one needs life insurance to protect. He was in the right place at the right time, and he knew it.

From his experiences as a young man struggling to find his niche in life Thomas developed a personal philosophy which has formed the heart of Thomas Financial's success:

- A commitment to excellence
- A work rate that outpaces the competition
- "Get it done before the sun sets on Tampa Bay"

Over the past 40 years, Thomas has seen his business grow with the help of these guiding principles. It now helps Tampa Bay area family businesses manage their family assets and other crucial financial matters.

Within the last 10 years, Thomas Financial has handled \$250 million, a figure projected to grow to \$1.5 billion in the next two decades.

Though he did not dwell on it in his address, Thomas' admiration of Churchill and other historical figures hints at another quality found in the most effective leaders: An ability to form perspectives that reflect upon decades of past experience and look forward to future prosperity. Such perspective adds an invaluable extra dimension to his advice for future generations. It's one that can't be learned in school or read in a book; what makes it rare and precious is that it has to be lived.

Thomas' final words clearly address that sense of enduring optimism:

"Whatever you think is keeping you from your destiny may actually help you find your destiny! Be flexible, be resilient, and be aware."



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