

A Look at the Importance of Leadership and Its Key Traits from a Historical Perspective

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to consider leadership from a historical perspective by looking at five leaders who, in the face of a difficult situation, persevered and succeeded. After describing the situation and how that leader succeeded in changing things, some of his or her “leadership” traits that most likely accounted for the change will be discussed. This paper is organized as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Abraham Lincoln
3. General Oliver P. Smith, USMC
4. Ronald Reagan
5. Mother Teresa
6. Darwin E. Smith
7. Summary and conclusion

2. Abraham Lincoln

The Situation. Born February 12, 1809, Lincoln grew up in relative poverty. Largely self-educated, he passed the bar and began practicing law in 1837 in Springfield, Illinois.¹⁾ After serving in the Illinois House of Representatives, he

1) Wikipedia, July 10, 2009.

was elected to one term in the U. S. House of Representatives in 1846 serving from March 1847 until March 1849. Returning to politics in 1854, Lincoln helped form the new Republican Party that was based mainly on an anti-slavery platform. Although he lost to Stephen A. Douglas in the race for the Senate in 1858, Lincoln was elected as the 16th President of the United States on November 6, 1860 and took office March 4, 1861.²⁾



Abraham Lincoln

According to Phillips (1992) this was the situation at that time:

...the South had taken control of all federal agencies and had seized almost every fort and arsenal in the Southern Territory. Most of the Mississippi River, lifeblood of the nation's commerce and trade, was obstructed or in Southern hands. Washington was left almost completely defenseless, protected only by a portion of the nation's army, which in 1861 was unprepared for war. It was a scattered, dilapidated, poorly equipped, and disorganized array of some 16,000 soldiers, many them Southern sympathizers. (p. 7)

Furthermore, Lincoln had no support in Congress with, according to Phillips, the Senate even having passed a resolution for the War Department to lower military spending.

On top of this Lincoln had little general support:

...he was a Washington outsider who was viewed widely as a second-rate country lawyer and completely ill-equipped and unable to handle the presidency. He commanded no respect from anyone in the nation except his most loyal supporters. Even the members of his newly appointed cabinet

2) Ibid.

considered him a figurehead whom they could control. (Phillips, p. 8)

This was the situation when war broke out with the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, only a little more than a month after Lincoln took office. On top of this Lincoln had to find someone competent to lead the Union forces, which at the time were commanded by the seventy-five-year-old General Winfield Scott who was “...physically unable to command in the field, and his theories and strategies of warfare were outdated” (Phillips, p. 114). It took Lincoln three years to find a general he could put in charge who would aggressively prosecute the war after many disappointments from the likes of generals McClellan, Halleck, and Burnside.³⁾

How Lincoln Succeeded. Against all odds, as the foregoing gives a taste of, Lincoln not only saved the Union—that is the United States and all it stood for—but abolished slavery by his Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863.⁴⁾ Besides these two momentous events, Lincoln constantly kept America focused on its founding roots as a nation dedicated to the principles of freedom and democracy. Perhaps one of the best examples of that is his famous Gettysburg Address which ended “...and that government: of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Surely had the Civil War been lost so would the United States as such a country. In fact, it is likely that other wars and skirmishes would have continued endlessly.

What were some of Lincoln's leadership traits that helped him succeed? Phillips (1992) devotes a whole book to this question but I will try to pick out

3) General Ulysses S. Grant was placed in charge of all the Union forces on March 10, 1864 (Phillips, p. 130).

4) Actually the proclamation consisted of two executive orders, one issued on September 22, 1862 that gave freedom to all slaves in any Confederate state that did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863 and another on that date naming such states. The prohibition against slavery was then made a part of the U. S. Constitution with the ratification of the 13th Amendment on December 18, 1865.

what I believe are the most significant traits that led to success. Perhaps the most important was Lincoln's vision of a nation where men could be free. The Gettysburg Address already mentioned is one example; another cited by Phillips (p. 164) was his address to a special session of Congress on July 4, 1861 shortly after war had broken out:

This is essentially a people's contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders—to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all—to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.

Of course the Emancipation Proclamation was another very practical example of this vision. It was Lincoln's constant reaffirmation of this vision that laid the groundwork and provided the rationale for his actions during the war, many of which were quite controversial such as the suspension of *habeas corpus*.

Lincoln, by nature, was goal and results oriented. Knowing the war could not be won in one fell swoop, Lincoln would "...set specific short-term goals that his generals and cabinet members could focus on with intent and immediacy" (p. 110). And Lincoln himself set the example often working late to get all the paperwork done: "He was a positive model for subordinates, displaying remarkable persistence" (p. 110).

Another trait was his ability to form meaningful relationships with others. This was manifest by his willingness to see almost anyone at anytime and even often being out where the "troops" were. In fact he seemed to welcome the chance to talk with others to not only listen to them but win them to over to some position he held; this he often did with a story to make a point—Lincoln was a masterful storyteller. Even when he was let down by those he had trusted he would do things to control his emotions when such seemed more prudent,

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such as writing letters to vent his discouragement yet not send them. An example of this is one he wrote to General Burnside in 1963 after Burnside had failed to follow a direct order to support General Rosecrans at Chattanooga, Tennessee (Phillips, p. 81). In fact, many of the traits Phillips discusses relate to Lincoln's relationships with others—an obvious lesson for any leader since it is usually through others that big things are accomplished.

As a leader, he truly exemplified the famous “with malice for none and charity for all” in his Second Inaugural Address and was the epitome of honesty and integrity. All this made Lincoln the kind of person others knew they could trust even if they didn't agree with him on something.

In summing up, Lincoln is cited by Collins in his famous book *Good to Great* as a classic example of a “Level 5 leader”: that is one who “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical combination of humility plus professional will” (Collins, 2001, p. 20). Surely Lincoln with his focus on others versus himself and steadfast pursuit of his vision was this kind of leader. More will be said about this paradox when we get to another leader, Darwin E. Smith of Kimberly-Clark.

3. General Oliver P. Smith, USMC

*The Situation.*⁵⁾ General Smith is included in this list of outstanding leaders primarily for his actions during November and December 1950 while leading the 1st Marine Division in North Korea. Born October 26, 1893, General Smith was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve in April 1917. General Smith saw duty in the Banana



MajGen O. P. Smith

5) Mostly from Wikipedia (accessed September 29, 2009)—see “Olive P. Smith” and “Battle of Chosin Reservoir.”

Wars (1928–1931 in Haiti) and World War II (New Britain, Peleliu, and Okinawa).

In June 1950, Major General Smith was named Commanding General (CG) of the First Marine Division⁶⁾ that was rapidly being brought up to strength for operations in the Korean War—a war that had begun on 25 June with the invasion of South Korea by North Korea. After participating in the Inchon landing, the Division, part of the U.S. Army X Corps commanded by Lieutenant General Edward Almond, continued pushing its way North to the Yalu River as part of the strategy of cutting off the Chinese supply lines. By the time it had reached the Chosin Reservoir, in eastern North Korea, it was obvious the Chinese were sending massive numbers of troops into the conflict. Despite orders from his superior, General Almond—who didn't believe the Chinese threat that great—General Smith prudently slowed the advance of his division and began stocking up on supplies along the Division's route of advance. Finally at the end of November 1950 things came to a head with the rout of the U.S. Eighth Army in western North Korea and the encirclement of the other U.S. forces in the Chosin vicinity.

At this point there was no choice for General Smith but to do all he could to save as many U.S. forces as possible by withdrawing from the Chosin area to the western port at Hungnam some 70 miles to the South. To accomplish this, Smith faced overwhelming odds that included a huge and determined enemy force, rugged mountainous terrain, sub-zero harsh winter conditions, limited chances for reinforcement, and a single route of withdrawal affording the enemy a “sitting target” so to speak. And that route was a poor road often dominated by high terrain that had to be secured for safe passage.

6) The First Marine Division consists of three infantry regiments (the 1st, 5th, and 7th Marines), an artillery regiment (the 11th Marines), and various other units such as motor transport, tanks, and engineers.

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How Smith succeeded. After consolidating his forces at a place just south of the Chosin, Hagaru-ri, Smith commenced the withdrawal “at first light on 6 December, with the Seventh Marines⁷⁾ in the lead” (La Bree, 2001, p. 176). The withdrawal was well planned and executed and, at Smith’s insistence, included the bringing out the wounded and dead not already air-evacuated and as much equipment as possible. By December 11 *and much heroic effort* the ordeal was over. Perhaps one of the best summaries of this amazing “success” story is a report by General Douglas MacArthur⁸⁾ to the United Nations on January 31, 1951 (La Bree, p. 184):

In this epic action, the First Marine Division and attached elements of the [Army] Seventh Division, marched and fought over 60 miles in bitter cold along a narrow, tortuous, ice-covered road against opposition of from six to eight Chinese Communist Force divisions which suffered staggering losses. Success was due in no small part to the unprecedented extent and effectiveness of air support. The basic element, however, was the quality of soldierly courage displayed by the personnel of the ground units who maintained their integrity in the face of continuous attacks by numerically superior forces, consistently held their positions until their wounded had been evacuated, and doggedly refused to abandon supplies and equipment to the enemy.

Although this report does not mention Smith either by name or title (CG, 1st MarDiv) it was his extraordinary leadership abilities that made the difference between success and what could well have been a tragic failure.

What were some of Smith’s leadership traits that helped him succeed? Perhaps one of the most important was his ability to get the best from his subordinates. As La Bree (2001) states in his preface (p. x) “He never forgot

7) One of Smith’s three infantry regiments.

8) General MacArthur was in command of the United Nations forces in Korea.

that his most important weapon was the individual rifleman, and he had the knack of obtaining the best his troops had to give by setting an example of confidence and faith in their ability to succeed.” Accordingly he did not hesitate to delegate but not without providing a clear message of what he expected and ensuring that such occurred:

He was known throughout the Marine Corps as a commander who gave a lot of latitude to his subordinates. He wanted the goals reached; he did not particularly care about the methods used, but he never failed to follow through to see that his orders were carried out. He did not make an issue of his authority, but he had a low tolerance for individuals who were “not up to the job.” He expected and received maximum performance from his subordinates. (La Bree, p. 168)

Because of this method of operating, it was important for the general to surround himself with good people and this was certainly the case in Korea where his three infantry regimental commanders were exceptionally good at their jobs. This was also true of his staff; as quoted in La Bree (p. 106) his G-3 (operations officer, Colonel Alpha Bowser) wrote: “all of the Division staff G’s had performed the same jobs during World War II.... The general’s eyes twinkled as he said ‘I wasn’t born yesterday, I knew that in this case we had no time for on-the-job training.’” Furthermore, he looked after his subordinates. According to Hammel (1981) “He liked self-reliant subordinates, and he saw to their advancement in his own quiet way” (p. 143).

Another trait that no doubt made him a good leader was his tolerance for reasonable mistakes by his subordinates since he saw that as a way for them to learn. As quoted in La Bree: “I don’t want an officer on my staff who never makes an error or a mistake because I will strongly suspect that he isn’t doing anything or [that he is] blaming his mistakes on someone else” (p. 106).

General Smith also was able to maintain his resolve to accomplish his goal

despite many adverse conditions. For example, he was operating under a commander, Army Lieutenant General Almond, who seemed to have little respect or, for that matter, understanding about Marines. In one encounter, General Almond told Smith he could destroy as much of his equipment as necessary to aid the withdrawal. To this Smith replied, "I think General, that my command is perfectly able to bring its equipment out intact" (Hammel, p. 215). Add to this all the challenges that faced Smith during the withdrawal such as not having the help of his assistant division commander (who was on emergency leave), a division staff spread out along the MSR⁹⁾ during critical times, the need to defend Hagaru-ri with all available personnel making it necessary to turn down desperate pleas for help; all this besides the formidable odds due to the overwhelming strength and tenacity of the enemy forces. Through it all General Smith remained steadfast in his goal of getting his division back to Hungnam as an intact, fighting unit.

Finally Smith was not one to promote himself. The famous headline that appeared in U.S. newspaper at the outset of Smith's withdrawal from the Chosin, "Retreat Hell! We're attacking in another direction," was an embellishment of Smith answer to a reporter's question. The reporter had suggested the withdrawal in effect "adds up to a retreat" to which Smith thoughtfully replied "No, not a retreat. It will be an attack in another direction" (Hammel, p. 304). In no way had Smith expected his answer to be headlined as it was.

Perhaps this quote from La Bree (p. 221) best sums up Smith's character as a leader:

His calm air reflected confidence in his own abilities. He was not a posturer; indeed, he deplored such conduct. But even though he was self-

9) Main supply route—the road along which they were withdrawing.

effacing and unassuming, no subordinate of his ever had a problem understanding who was in charge. Men in his command soon understood that General Smith “knew what he was doing” at all times. His thoroughness in evaluating alternatives was a hallmark of his leadership style.

4. Ronald Reagan

*The Situation*¹⁰⁾. Born in 1911 in Tampico, Illinois, Reagan began work after college as a radio announcer—mostly baseball. In 1937 a screen test landed him an acting job in Hollywood where he made mostly “B movies.” In a sense his “political” career began when he was elected to the Screen Actors Guild, a union representing film and television performers. Subsequently he was elected president of the guild several times through 1959. In the 1950s Reagan began doing work in television and gained considerable national exposure by hosting the highly popular General Electric Theater. A turning point for Reagan was a speech he gave for the Republican presidential nominee, Barry Goldwater, in 1964¹¹⁾, which brought him to the attention of the Republicans in California who nominated him to run for Governor in 1966. Reagan won the 1966 election for governor and was reelected to another four-year term in 1970. After losing his bid to be the Republican Party’s nominee for the 1976 presidential elections, Reagan tried again—this time successfully—in 1980 and went on to win the



Ronald Reagan

10) Most of this information is from Wikipedia accessed July 31, 2009.

11) This was his famous “Time for Choosing” speech lambasting the state of America under the Democrats. Unfortunately, Goldwater lost.

election. He was reelected to a second term in a landslide in 1984.¹²⁾

At the time of Reagan's election, coming on the heels of the Jimmy Carter presidency, America was in poor shape. As described by Morrison (2000, p. 2):

Recession threatened as inflation rose to double digits. The much heralded "misery index" came back to haunt the Democrats as millions of Americans found it impossible to afford a new home or buy a new car. The long lines for gasoline and threats of rationing caused a profound sense of what President Carter termed "malaise."¹³⁾

Carter had urged Americans to adjust themselves to a new era of limits. People told pollsters that they believed their children would live less prosperous lives than they did. Economists described the economy of the seventies as "stagflation" a combination of inflation, high interest rates, and unemployment.

Furthermore, America was locked in a cold war with the Soviets to which there seemed no end. It was a period of what to some might seem an insane defense policy of "mutually assured destruction"¹⁴⁾ whereby both the U.S. and the Soviets had amassed sufficient nuclear and delivery means to wipe out the other should a nuclear war start.

How Reagan succeeded. Reagan had strong views about both how to fix the economy and how to deal with the Soviets. One of the first things he did was to eliminate the price controls on oil and gasoline that had been in response to the energy crisis. Reagan felt this distortion of the market forces was in fact exacerbating the problem. According to D'Souza (1997, p. 89) Reagan was

12) Running against Democrat Walter Mondale, Reagan won every state except Minnesota (Washington, D.C. was the only other exception).

13) Actually Morrison is probably referring to Carter's infamous "Malaise" speech given on July 15, 1979. Carter did not use the word malaise but the speech itself was a graphic depiction of such a state in America at that time.

14) With the apt acronym MAD.

right: “Reagan predicted that oil and gas prices would fall dramatically, and he proved right.”

Reagan also felt that taxes had reached a confiscatory level with the marginal tax rate¹⁵⁾ as high as 70 percent. In a show of his remarkable leadership/negotiating abilities Reagan was able to win support for significant tax cuts in 1981, his first year in office. As described by D’Souza (p. 93) according to this legislation “...taxes would be reduced by 25 percent across the board, with a 5 percent reduction the first year and 10 percent for each of the two subsequent years.” Other provisions of this bill would adjust taxes for inflation starting in 1985, reduce estate and business taxes, and make it easier to make tax-deductible contributions to retirement accounts.

The simple idea that Reagan was promoting was that by letting people keep more of their earnings they would use those earnings to not only buy more goods as consumers but to invest more in production (supply) thus creating a cycle of economic expansion and, in the end, a greater source of government revenue than over-taxation. This theory became known as “supply-side economics.” By 1983 Reagan’s plan began paying off with “seven years of uninterrupted growth.” As D’Souza (1997) goes on to describe it:

At a growth rate of 3.5 percent, well above the nation’s historic average, the gross domestic product expanded by nearly a third in real terms. Measured in 1990 dollars, median family income, which had declined during the 1970s, climbed from \$33,409 in 1980 to \$38,493 in 1989, a 15 percent increase. (p. 109)

15) The marginal tax rate is the amount of taxes paid on the next dollar earned. It is obvious that at some point it will not be worth earning that “next dollar” if almost all of it goes to the government in taxes. The ultimate situation is zero tax revenue when taxes are 100 percent and there is no reason to earn money—as shown by the famous (Arthur) Laffer curve.

Furthermore interest rates fell dramatically¹⁶⁾ and the stock market more than doubled despite the big drop on Black Monday, October 1987. And, perhaps most important, "...these results were achieved with low inflation. The double-digit price increases of the Carter years simply vanished; inflation became an insignificant problem in the Reagan era" (D'Souza, p. 110).

At the same time he was working to improve the economy, Reagan was also doing what he could to end the Soviet threat. Reagan made well known his disdain for the Soviets as evidenced by his famous "evil empire" speech on March 8, 1983. In it he sought to show that simply going for a "nuclear freeze" was tantamount to labeling "...both sides equally at fault and to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil"¹⁷⁾

In working to bring down this "evil empire," Reagan took several approaches such as aiding those movements resisting the Soviets (for example Poland's Solidarity and the Mujahaddin in Afghanistan), a massive buildup of U.S. defenses, and initiating a major program to build a ballistic missile defense system¹⁸⁾. In fact Reagan's missile defense system became a major sticking point at a summit meeting with the Soviets in 1986.¹⁹⁾ Ultimately the Soviet Union collapsed in December of 1991. Although controversial, many believe Reagan was largely responsible for this due to his belief that its system of government was inherently evil (by denying people their basic freedoms) and

16) Interest rates fell from 21 percent in 1980 to less than 10 percent (D'Souza).

17) Wikipedia's "Evil empire" entry accessed September 29, 2009.

18) The Strategic Defensive Initiative (SDI)—nicknamed "Star Wars."

19) This was a summit meeting with the head of the Soviets, Mikhail Gorbachev, at Reykjavik, Iceland. Major concessions in arms reductions on both sides would have resulted except Reagan refused to give up his missile defense program as the Soviets demanded.

the policies he implemented to bring it down—especially the buildup of U.S. defenses at a time when the Soviet economy could not match it. As the former Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, said on the occasion of Reagan’s death: “Ronald Reagan had a higher claim than any other leader to have won the Cold War for liberty and he did it without a shot being fired”²⁰⁾

What were some of Reagan’s leadership traits that helped him succeed? In many ways, Reagan’s situation, although perhaps not as dire, paralleled Lincoln’s. The country was basically “down in the dumps” with a stagflating economy, an energy crisis, and a nuclear-based cold war with the Soviets that had no end in sight; all this epitomized by then President Carter’s famous 1979 “malaise” speech. Similar to Lincoln, Reagan was a visionary. Where Lincoln’s vision was basically one of a united America where everyone is free including the slaves, Reagan’s was one of an America once more seen as a great nation where everyone is “free” to pursue his or her dream. In fact, Reagan most eloquently described this when he gave his farewell speech to the nation on January 11, 1989 and spoke of his view of America as that “shinning city upon the hill²¹⁾”:

But in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That’s how I saw it and see it still.

Like Lincoln, it was his vision of America that underlay and drove all his

20) Associated Press news article June 5, 2004, *Reagan and Thatcher, political soul mates*.

21) The “city on a hill” expression originated in a sermon given by Puritan leader John Winthrop in 1630.

actions as a leader.

A vision without the determination to pursue it is worthless; Reagan showed such determination time and time again. For example when running for the Republican nomination for president in 1976 against Gerald Ford, Reagan suffered several early defeats and was urged by almost everyone including his wife to give it up. Reagan refused and, using borrowed money, continued his campaign and almost won, gaining 1,070 delegates to Ford's 1,187 (D'Souza, pp. 78–79). Not leaving it there, he then went on to devise and use a winning strategy that ultimately won him eight years in the White House.

Other examples of this determination were his tax cuts, defense buildup, and refusal to give up his Strategic Defense Initiative, all very controversial yet, in Reagan mind, essential for making America once more the great nation he envisioned.

Another leadership trait that probably played a big role in Reagan's ability to win over people to his views was his affable character. Again like Lincoln, Reagan liked to tell stories and use humor. His quotes are legend and were often about the problems caused by too much government; for example: "Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it." Perhaps it was this genial character that often misled people to think Reagan was an intellectual lightweight. However he was in fact quite well read. According to D'Souza during his "wilderness years" between being governor of California and president (1974–1980) "He read widely, looking not for a new philosophy but for ammunition for his views" (p. 75).

Another trait that must have contributed greatly to Reagan's leadership abilities was his communication skills. In fact he was known as "The Great Communicator." This was not some "natural" thing but something Reagan intentionally worked at: "He was a perfectionist who constantly reworked his

material and rehearsed his speeches until his delivery and timing were perfect” (D’Souza, p. 54). His speeches often included stories and humor. He also did his homework by backing up his ideas with facts as perhaps best shown by his famous “Time for Choosing” speech for Barry Goldwater in 1964. D’Souza also mentions his ability to “read” his audience (p. 54).

Reagan was also willing to negotiate and compromise, another important leadership trait. According to Cannon (1991, p. 153) “While Reagan tried to stuff everything he heard or read into the view of the world he had brought with him to Washington, he appreciated the value of compromise and negotiation.” However he also learned to not be too trusting—when he thought he had a deal with Congress in 1982 to reduce domestic spending in return for some tax increases Reagan reluctantly agreed to, the cuts in spending never occurred.²²⁾

Perhaps an overriding reason for Reagan’s success as a leader was his character, which is well portrayed in a book by Peggy Noonan (2001) who worked closely with him. Noonan argues that the secret of Reagan’s success was his character—his courage, his kindness, his persistence, his honesty, and his almost heroic patience in the face of setbacks (from the write-up on the book’s front flap). One very notable example of his decency was Reagan’s concern for the unborn who, due to the *Roe vs. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court in 1973, were being aborted at the rate of more than a million each year in America!²³⁾ He shared Mother Teresa’s view that abortion was “the greatest misery of our time” (Noonan, p. 100) and often spoke out against it.

One final trait that should be mentioned is Reagan’s willingness to take risks

22) Reagan tried his best to reduce the deficit at the same time he was increasing defense spending and this meant cutting domestic spending, especially by attacking the many programs that were either unnecessary or wasteful. Unfortunately a Congress beholden to constituent beneficiaries of those programs controlled most of this spending.

23) As of this writing, abortion continues essentially unchecked in America.

if he felt the payoffs were worth it. This was demonstrated time and again by such things as his bold tax cuts, sticking with high interest rates to fight inflation, massive defensive spending, and his move from détente to confrontation with the Soviets.

5. Mother Teresa

The Situation. Mother Teresa was born August 26, 1910 in Skopje, Serbia. Skopje is now the capital of the Republic of Macedonia. Mother Teresa's given name is Agnes Bojaxhiu; she took the name Teresa when she joined the sisters of Loreto, a Catholic order of missionary nuns, in 1928. And, upon taking her final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in 1937, she became "Mother Teresa."²⁴⁾ By that time Mother Teresa had been teaching very poor children



Mother Teresa

in Calcutta, India. It was this experience with the poor that eventually led Mother Teresa to feel she was being called by God to do more for them. After much prayer and reflection she confided to her spiritual advisor, Father Van Exem, her "vision." According to Father Van Exem as quoted in Spink (1997):

She was to start a new congregation. That congregation would work for the poorest of the poor in the slums in a spirit of poverty and cheerfulness. There would be a special vow of charity for the poor. There would be no institutions, hospitals, or big dispensaries. The work was to be among the abandoned, those with nobody, the very poorest. (p. 23).

This was in 1946. By 1948 she had obtained the necessary permission from the Catholic Church to begin carrying out her dream and, in December of that

24) According to Spink (1997, p. 17) taking the title of "mother" was then normal for Loreto sisters.

year, began *on her own* teaching poor children in the slums of Calcutta. She was soon joined by some of her former students when she was a Loreto sister. And, on October 7, 1950 with a total of eleven candidates, Mother Teresa's new congregation was officially formed with the name Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa was active in expanding the efforts of the Missionaries of Charity almost up to the time of her death on September 5, 1997 at the age of 87. She did all this despite many hardships related to both her own physical condition, especially in her later years, and controversies surrounding her work. Typical of the work of the Missionaries was: comforting those dying; taking in abandoned children; caring for the sick including the mentally ill, lepers, and AIDS victims; educating and providing skills to help the poor stand on their own; etc.—in other words, wherever there was a need. All this was done in the spirit of seeing and serving Christ in “the least of these.”²⁵⁾

How Mother Teresa succeeded. The congregation grew rapidly under Mother Teresa's leadership and continuously expanded its service to the “poorest of the poor,” first throughout India and then, beginning in 1965, to other countries. According to a Wikipedia entry²⁶⁾ the Missionaries of Charity now “consists of over 4,500 sisters and is active in 133 countries.” And Mother Teresa didn't stop at founding an organization only for sisters actively serving the poor. According to that same Wikipedia entry:

The Missionaries of Charity Brothers (active Branch) were founded in 1963, and a contemplative branch of the Sisters followed in 1976. In 1984, the Missionaries of Charity Fathers was founded by Mother Teresa with Fr.

25) Matthew 25:31–46 relates the story of Christ describing the Last Judgment when He will tell those who saw him hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. and helped him to “inherit the kingdom [of heaven]” and those who didn't depart “into the eternal fire [Hell].” Upon being asked when they saw him that way He replies: “what you did for one of these least ones, you did for me.”

26) “Missionaries of Charity” accessed September 17, 2009.

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Joseph Langford, to combine the vocation of the Missionaries of Charity with the ministerial priesthood. Lay Catholics and non-Catholics constitute the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, and the Lay Missionaries of Charity.

In other words, she made it possible for almost anyone to contribute to her work, be it through lay and clerical volunteer efforts or spiritually by prayer and the offering up of individual suffering.

As her work became known it also attracted the funds needed to carry it out. Mother Teresa was totally against active fund raising believing that if it was God's will the resources needed for her work would be provided from somewhere, and they were. A quote from Spink gives some idea of the magnitude of the work of the Missionaries of Charity:

By 1979 there were some 800,000 Co-Workers [volunteers] scattered over five continents. In that year 2,194 bales of provisions were shipped from Great Britain alone. One million tablets of dapsone [for treating leprosy] were dispatched monthly. So great a volume of material could not be handled without some degree of organization. Goods must be assembled at collecting centres, sorted, transported and deposited at the docks in such a condition that bales destined for India could be fumigated in accordance with trade stipulations. (p. 134)

Perhaps one of the most honored people anywhere, Mother Teresa won many, many awards recognizing her work for the poor including the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1979. Any money associated with those rewards was put to use helping the poor.

Besides helping the poor through the worldwide organization she created, Mother Teresa must be credited with helping those who were part of her efforts either directly as members of the organization or indirectly due to the giving of their volunteer efforts, prayers, and money. Although impossible to quantify,

such acts of charity surely help those who do them become better people. Also difficult to quantify would be the good Mother Teresa must surely have brought to a very secular world by continually stressing the importance of the family and speaking out against the evil of abortion, two things she unabashedly spoke of in her Nobel Peace Prize lecture.

What were some of Mother Teresa's leadership traits that helped her succeed? From a perusal of the Spink biography, which I used as a primary reference, there were many traits that could be considered associated with "leadership." However I will try to narrow them down to those I believe were the most important in contributing to Mother Teresa's success as a leader.

As with Lincoln and Reagan she had a definite vision and a determination to carry it out. Mother Teresa saw this vision of starting a congregation to help the poor as a call from God that she was obliged to answer. As expressed by Spink this call:

...urged her to respond with a specific apostolate, and having received that enjoinder it was not in accordance either with her own personality or with her religious convictions to delay unduly. (p. 25)

Related to this conviction was her trait for hard work, not only in promoting her vision which garnered her many supporters, but also by doing whatever had to be done from the most menial tasks to the many trips she had to make in the later years as the congregation expanded internationally.

She was also a born organizer and used this trait to mold her organization as necessary to meet whatever need arose. Describing her response to a major cyclone in 1977, Spink states "The incident proved to be only one of many similar disasters to which Mother Teresa was frequently able to respond with conspicuous speed and efficiency" (p. 81).

Another trait was her ability to communicate which she did continuously in providing guidance to her sisters and dealing with those supporting her

work—either seeking their help or thanking them for what they had done. She also wrote many letters of encouragement, continually emphasizing the need to stay focused on the on the true purpose of the organization; i.e., serving the poorest of the poor both materially and spiritually. The Spink book is replete with examples of Mother Teresa writing letters to people to the point of where one has to wondered where she found the time given all the other things she had to do!

She took no personal credit for the work of the congregation seeing it as “God’s work.” For example she was quite adamant that much of the earliest documentation dealing with the establishment of the congregation be destroyed so as not to make it seem she played a major part in it (Spink, pp. 34–35). Also she was truly uncomfortable with all the recognition she received, especially from the media. “She was painfully uncomfortable in front of cameras, to such a point that she claimed that for every photograph taken of her a soul should be released from purgatory” (Spink, p. 159). However, in the interest of promoting “God’s work” she not only put up with the media but also cooperated with it.

Another important leadership trait is the simple fact she was a very good and holy person. It seems her every action was based on love—for the poor, for her sisters, for God. It was this obvious characteristic of her nature that served as and example to all she met and especially her fellow sisters and religious brothers and priests.

This didn’t mean she wasn’t strict. According to Spink (p. 110) she: “...was a firm believer in strict adherence to regulations, in details of discipline, tidiness of housekeeping, in religious dress, uniformity of forms of prayer and devotions.” Mother Teresa felt this was necessary to ensure her sisters could meet the challenges of working with the poor in God’s name.

She was decisive. When she saw a need she quickly sized up the situation and took action:

She was a woman who saw at once a person's immediate urgent need and went to meet it in a simple and direct way. If she encountered a starving child she would not make a survey or set up a study course. Instead she would go at once to get milk for the child by the shortest possible route, and frequently, more long-term care would follow in her train. (Spink, p. 203)

This trait would seem to go against the need for planning but it may be telling us something in that too often leaders do too much "planning" and not enough "executing."

These then are some of the leadership traits Mother Teresa exhibited that contributed to her success. She was first and foremost true to her core beliefs, especially that we need to see and serve Christ in our fellow man. And it was the manifestation of this belief in her actions that convinced people both within and outside of her organization of her sincerity. And it was this sincerity that drew people to her and accounted for her leadership ability to accomplish such great things.

6. Darwin E. Smith

The Situation. Born April 16, 1926 in Garrett, Indiana, USA, Darwin Smith is no doubt the least known of the five leaders discussed in this paper. He came to prominence with the publication in 2001 of the best selling book *Good To Great* by Jim Collins. This book describes a five-year study by Collins and his research team to find out what made the difference between companies that were merely "good" and those that went on to become "great." Starting with a total of 1,435 companies listed by Fortune from 1965 through 1995, only eleven companies were



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found that met Collins' criteria of "great." One of these was Kimberly-Clark²⁷⁾, a paper products company in Neenah, Wisconsin that Smith headed for 20 years from 1971. A key finding of the Collins' study was the part a company's leader played in making it great and how that leader differed from leaders in companies that were only "good." Darwin Smith has become a classic example of that sort of leader, referred to in the study as a Level 5 leader.

After graduating with distinction from Indiana University and Harvard Law School, Smith went on to work for a Chicago law firm. In 1958 he joined Kimberly-Clark's legal department. According to Barboza (1995) this was with the intention "to stay only long enough to gain corporate experience." However, and fortunately for Kimberly-Clark, that was not to be. After being named general attorney one year after joining its legal department:

He was elected vice president of law and finance in 1962, executive vice president in 1969, president in 1970, and chairman of the board²⁸⁾ and chief executive officer in 1971. (Paper Industry International Hall of Fame, Inc. (2004 Inductees))

Smith retired as CEO in 1991 and as chairman of the board in 1992. He passed away on December 26, 1995.

How Darwin Smith succeeded. When Smith took over Kimberly-Clark in 1971, it was "a stodgy old paper company whose stock had fallen 36 percent behind the general market over the previous twenty years" (Collins, 2001, p. 17). Discussing Smith's time at Kimberly-Clark, Collins continues:

Smith created a stunning transformation, turning Kimberly-Clark into the leading paper-based consumer products company in the world. Under his stewardship, Kimberly-Clark generated cumulative stock returns 4.1 times the general market, handily beating its direct rivals Scott Paper and Procter

27) Famous for such products as Kleenex tissues and Huggies disposable diapers.

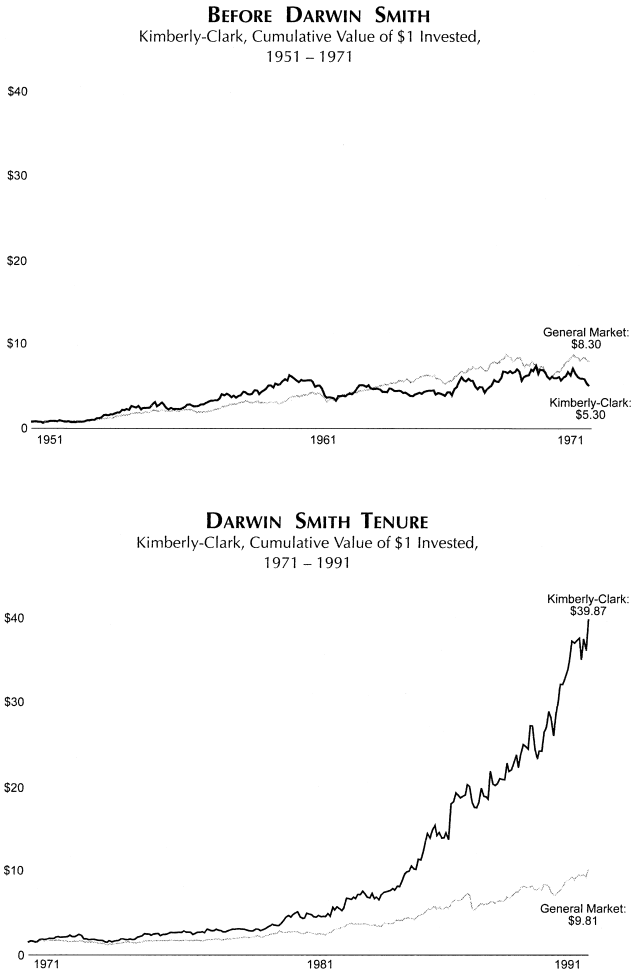
28) Elected to the board of directors in 1967 (same source as this quote).

& Gamble and outperforming such venerable companies as Coca-Cola, Hewlett-Packard, 3M, and General Electric. (pp. 17–18)

Figure 1 below shows this dramatic transformation.

Furthermore, according to Nichols (1992), “...net income rose an average of

Figure 1. Kimberly-Clark’s market performance before and after Smith’s takeover (from Collins, 2001, p. 19).



15 percent a year, dividends were increased every year, and the stock price rose an average of 14.2 percent annually” while Smith was in charge. And Barboza (1995) notes that during Smith’s last 10 years with Kimberly-Clark it was “repeatedly cited by Fortune magazine as the most admired forest products company in the nation.”

What were some of Darwin Smith’s leadership traits that helped him succeed? First and foremost were the two traits that Collins in his book *Good to Great* attributes to Level 5 leaders: personal humility and professional will. Collins illustrates Smith’s strong will by discussing how he worked his way through college and overcame a bout with nose and throat cancer after doctors gave him only a year to live—he lived another 25 years, mostly running Kimberly-Clark. But perhaps the best example of Smith’s resolve was his gutsy decision to sell Kimberly-Clark’s paper mills and go into the consumer products business:

So, like the general who burned the boats upon landing, leaving only one option (succeed or die), Smith announced the decision to sell the mills... ..and throw all the proceeds into the consumer business, investing in brands like Huggies and Kleenex. (Collins, 2001, p. 20)

The move meant Kimberly-Clark would have to go head-to-head with rivals like Scott Paper and giant Procter & Gamble. Kimberly-Clark eventually owned Scott Paper. And Kimberly-Clark’s success under Smith as already described shows this was the right decision. It also shows that Smith was a prudent risk taker. It also could be surmised that once this decision was made it became Smith’s vision for the company as a strong consumer products rival and his determination to make that vision a reality!

As for his personal humility:

A man who carried no airs of self-importance, Smith found his favorite companionship among plumbers and electricians... ..he never cultivated

hero status or executive celebrity status. (Collins, 2001, p. 18)

According to Barboza he “had little interest in joining industry groups or high profile executive associations. Instead he channeled his attentions on Kimberly-Clark...” Collins (pp. 28–29) emphasizes Smith’s self-effacement by contrasting him with Al Dunlap, a “turnaround artist” who was more interested in bragging about himself as a “Rambo in Pinstripes” than about the companies he worked with.²⁹⁾ As one of Collins’ classic Level 5 leaders, Smith was quick to credit success to factors other than himself. And, when things went poorly, he “looked in the mirror” and took full responsibility. Most CEOs do just the opposite!

What were some of the other leadership traits that contributed to Smith’s success as a leader? One was “getting the right people on the bus,” another Level 5 leadership trait. In fact Collins found that the “good to great” companies consistently put getting the right people first and only then let that drive what they felt they could do. As mentioned in the Paper Industry International Hall of Fame citation: “...he persistently examined the company’s leadership group, winnowing those who did not meet his specifications and promoting those who did.” Collins gives a specific example relating to the sell-off of the paper mills. Quoting Dick Auchter, a senior executive:

Many of our people had come up through the paper business. Then, all of a sudden, the crown jewels are being sold off and they’re asking, “What is my future?” And Darwin would say “We need all the talented managers we can get. We keep them.” (Collins, 2001, p. 59)

And keep them he did despite the fact they had little or no consumer experience, the business the company was then going into. Besides keeping good people, another advantage of doing this is those people will be more likely to support

29) Dunlap was also known as “Chainsaw Al” for his drastic methods that often did more harm than good. Interestingly Scott Paper was one of the companies he worked with, a company Kimberly-Clark took over in 1995.

whatever the leader has planned, in this case becoming a consumer products company.

Despite being considered a relatively quiet type, Darwin Smith had the ability to inspire his people to better things. A great example of this was when Kimberly-Clark took on the challenge of competing with Proctor & Gamble. Collins tells of this meeting where Smith told everyone to stand and observe a moment of silence as if someone had passed away. Then, after they did this, he informed them: "That was a moment of silence for P&G." Collins (2001) relates after that "The place went bananas." (p. 81).

Another trait Smith exhibited to a high degree was that of being a good communicator. This is evidenced by his natural inclination to ask hard questions, listen, and talk with his workers. The decision to sell the paper mills and go into consumer products grew out of questions Smith posed to his managers such as what could Kimberly-Clark become passionate about that would also make economic sense (Collins, 2003). In the Nichols (1992) interview Smith admits, "...I'm not too diplomatic in asking embarrassing questions" when dealing with his executives. He also communicated well with the workers. When asked about his management style by Nichols, Smith said: "There is nothing I like more than walking through the mills and chatting with people."

In fact, Smith had little use of class distinction in the workforce and little patience with anyone who wasted his time or put on airs of self-importance: "...I'm not impressed with anyone who is patently shallow or frivolous. People who attempt to be big shots just don't impress me" (Nichols). This points to the fact that Smith believed in running a disciplined organization.

Despite this, Smith had concern for his people and as shown by his efforts to recognize and improve them. He strongly believed in recognition programs (Nichols) and, according to the Paper Industry International Hall of Fame

citation, he formed “the Equal Educational Opportunities Plan to provide continuing education to all workers, and the Health Management Program to improve physical and mental health.”

Smith was a man of high ethical standards. In the Nichols interview he said there was “quite a bit of room for improvement” when it came to business ethics citing as one critical area the problem of insider trading. And the Hall of Fame citation mentions some of his unselfish volunteer efforts such as working with the Boy Scouts of America.

Like O. P. Smith (and Lincoln for that matter³⁰) Darwin Smith had a tolerance for reasonable mistakes. Asked by Nichols about his “compassion,” Smith said: “After I say what I think [about the mistake], its done and I’m happy to try bailing somebody out... .. because we have to work together.”

Finally, Smith believed in hard work and believed that any CEO who wasn’t thinking about his job “24 hours a day,” as he did was not a good one (Nichols interview).

In summary, Smith was a good person who made sure he had the right people in the right places. He ran a “tight ship” yet communicated well with and sought input from his people. Once a course of action was decided on he pursued it with a firm will to succeed. And when things went well he gave credit to others; when things didn’t go well he was quick to accept responsibility.

7. Summary and Conclusion

What can we conclude from these leadership profiles of these five great leaders? First let’s try to summarize the leadership traits that have been mentioned.

Note that this list is based on what I have been able to glean from the limited

30) Think of all the mistakes his generals made and Lincoln’s patient forbearance.

research that went into this paper and is probably not a complete list either overall or for each individual leader. However, it probably *is* a very good summary of traits found in good leaders and ones that “good leader” wannabes should emulate.

The fact that it may not be complete for each individual leader is evident

Figure 2. Summary of leadership traits mentioned in this paper.

	Trait mentioned in this paper	Lincoln	O. P. Smith	Reagan	M. Teresa	D. E. Smith	Number of times each trait mentioned in this paper
Trait 1	Good communicator	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Trait 2	Resolve in face of difficulties	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Trait 3	Focuses on others versus self	✓	✓		✓	✓	4
Trait 4	Honest and decent person	✓		✓	✓	✓	4
Trait 5	Ability to inspire	✓			✓	✓	3
Trait 6	Concern for his/her people		✓		✓	✓	3
Trait 7	Hard worker	✓			✓	✓	3
Trait 8	Has a vision	✓		✓	✓		3
Trait 9	Affable character	✓		✓			2
Trait 10	Creates meaningful relationships	✓			✓		2
Trait 11	Decisive		✓		✓		2
Trait 12	Prudent yet courageous risk taker			✓		✓	2
Trait 13	Results oriented	✓	✓				2
Trait 14	Runs a disciplined organization				✓	✓	2
Trait 15	Surrounds self with good people		✓			✓	2
Trait 16	Tolerance for reasonable mistakes		✓			✓	2
Trait 17	Delegates with clear expectations		✓				1
Trait 18	Good organizer				✓		1
Trait 19	Willing to negotiate/compromise			✓			1

from the several blanks in Figure 2. Disregarding the first four traits for now, Trait 5, “Ability to inspire” could also easily be attributed to people like O. P. Smith with his confidence under fire exhibited at Chosin and to Reagan with his ability to communicate directly to the American people. Likewise it would be easy to check off Trait 6, “Concern for his/her people” for Lincoln (concern both for the nation as a whole and for those fighting the war) and Reagan (for the American people in his efforts to promote limited government, a good economy, and a strong national defense). And for Trait 7, “Hard worker,” who could doubt that O. P. Smith and Reagan didn’t work hard given their dedication to their job and cause. Also it could easily be argued that both O. P. Smith and D. E. Smith were visionaries (Trait 8, “Has a vision”): O. P. Smith in that his vision was that his Marine division would come out from the Chosin proud and intact, and D. E. Smith in that once the decision was made to go into consumer products that was his vision. And so forth for the other “incomplete” traits (9 through 19).

What does stand out in this Figure 2 summary is the first four traits that were mentioned for at least four of the five leaders. Given the diversity of the sample used in this paper it would appear these traits are probably key to being a good leader regardless of the circumstances. Certainly Traits 2³¹⁾ and 3 are confirmed by the Jim Collins study described in *Good to Great*. As for the other two, “good communicator” and “honest and decent person,” that they are important to good leadership seems quite reasonable. A good leader needs to win the trust of his/her people. And what better way to win that trust than creating a situation where your people know they are dealing with honest person who is always giving them the “straight scoop.” Furthermore, there is something very attractive about decency that draws people to such a leader and also makes them want to

31) Resolve in the face of difficulties is equated to Collins’s “professional will” in a Level 5 leader.

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emulate leaders that model it.

The other 15 traits, while not found to be as obviously consistent in the five leaders examined here, are also worthy of study and practice if one wishes to be an effective and successful leader.

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