

Are there any great leaders out there?

When I think about great leaders in my lifetime there aren't very many. Initially I came up with Harry Truman, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Interesting that two are black and one of the courageous acts of Harry Truman was to integrate the officer corps of the Navy against howling objections from the senior officers of the Navy and many members of Congress. When I look at the presidential candidates from both parties, none excites me. There are no Harry Trumans in the bunch. To the first three I decided to add one more, H. R. McMaster. The accomplishments of the first three are well-known. McMaster's achievements are a bit less well-known.

I met McMaster in the late 1990's when he was a brigadier general commanding the Opposition Force at Fort Irwin, the center where we train armored brigades. McMaster was humble, articulate, and clearly loved by the troops. I was unaware at the time of his accomplishments. In Desert Storm he commanded a platoon of six tanks that encountered a Republican guard unit of 80 tanks. McMaster's group destroyed every enemy tank without a single loss. McMaster had also written an important book, *Dereliction of Duty*; Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff about decision making in the Vietnam War. The book was his PhD thesis in the history of war.

Subsequent to our meeting McMaster served with distinction in Iraq. When he arrived the policy was that you could take a patrol into a dangerous area but you couldn't stay there. McMaster reasoned that the locals would never point out the insurgents unless we were there to keep them safe. He established his headquarters in Tal Afar and successfully pacified the area, creating a model that allowed us to eventually exit Iraq. McMaster is now a three-star general.

I had the opportunity to meet Harry Truman in 1961 following my freshman year at Yale. He was a friend of a man that my mother worked for. My mother told her boss that I was reading Churchill's history of World War II. The boss said, "he must meet Harry," and arranged the meeting. When I arrived at Truman's office in Independence Missouri they apologized for the fact that he would be about two minutes late. He entered and give me a firm handshake. I was a bit shocked to see that he was shorter than I as I had an image at that time of the president being very large. I had a private audience with Truman for about 15 minutes. He had enormous vitality and was very funny. As an example, his way of ending our discussion was to invite me to tour his library and museum. He took me to the back exit of his office where there was a guest book on a shelf by the door. He suggested I sign. Then he looked at me and said, "when Dwight Eisenhower came to visit me I asked him to sign this." He paused and looked over his glasses and said with emphasis "In case anything was missing." He disliked Eisenhower because Eisenhower had failed to defend George Marshall against Joseph McCarthy who basically called him a traitor. (Marshall was Chief of Staff in World War II and Secretary of State under Truman). This in spite of the fact that Marshall had defended Eisenhower when he had been accused of having an affair with his driver (a woman) and some were calling for his removal as commander of the D-Day operation. Truman was not afraid to say what he thought. To anybody.

Interestingly there were two strong similarities between McMaster and Truman. Talking to either of them was like talking to a friend. There was a humility and realness to their conversation that is not typical of

highly placed persons. You had the feeling that her whole mind was on the conversation you were having. And neither was afraid to say what they thought. McMaster was passed over for promotion to general three times because of his outspoken views. This, in spite of the fact that he was consistently rated among the highest performing officers at his level. Perhaps both of these similarities relate to humility. The first is pretty obvious. For persons in high positions to speak their mind also requires humility will. You have to ignore the altitude of your place. I believe humility is one of the things that separates good leaders from great leaders.

Brooks Carder

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