

Athenian Leadership Society Dialogue

Colin Powell: It Worked For Me



Florida Association of City Clerks

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Facilitator:

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To: Participants in Athenian Dialogue (City Clerks Association)

From: Mike Abels, Facilitator

Subject: Preparation for Athenian Dialogue

The time is drawing near for our Athenian Dialogue where we will discuss the leadership principles advocated by General Colin Powell in his book It Worked For Me: In Life and Leadership.

I am sure that you have probably started reading the leadership principles put forth by General Powell. To show you the format for the Dialogue, you have received the workbook that we will be using. As you will see by the order of the workbook, we will not review all Chapters in sequential order.

You will note that this book was written about 14 years ago. Some of the discussions, for example technology, is outdated. However, while General Powell's analysis of technology may reflect a different time, I believe that is an important benchmark to review and consider. A key aspect of leadership is projecting where the future will take your operations and making plans to operate in the future that lies ahead. As you read General Powell's discussion, consider the changes you see from the date this book was written to today and then consider what future changes may affect your leadership.

Before we meet, I would ask you to please read through the workbook and become familiar with the topics and questions we will be discussing and take any notes on ideas you would like to discuss. This will reduce our review time during the dialogue, thus allowing us time to substantively discuss more topics.

I look forward to seeing you on October 4th. I believe It Worked For Me is an excellent book that will enable us to discuss a broad range of leadership topics. As you will see in the workbook, at the end of the Dialogue you will have the opportunity to develop your personalized leadership action plan. This plan will serve as a tool for you to incorporate the leadership principles we discuss into the leadership skills you use as city clerk.

Colin Powell Biography

Colin Powell was born to an immigrant family in Harlem a borough of Manhattan New York city. He was raised in the Bronx and attended public schools where he admits he was a very mediocre student. After high school he went to the City College of New York where in 1958 he earned a degree in geology. Again, Powell admits that in college he was not a stellar student and his GPA was about a 2.0. For his graduate education, the Army sent Powell to George Washington University, and in 1971 he earned an MBA from George Washington University.

Powell's main love in college was the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and upon graduation he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army. He served two tours in Vietnam. During his second tour he was assigned to investigate claims that Americans had committed war atrocities later known as the My Lai massacre. Powell's report basically dismissed the charges saying "In direct refutation of this portrayal is the fact that relations between American soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent"

He went on to serve 35 years in the Army retiring as a four star general, with his last assignment being the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff (JCS). As Chairman of the JCS, Powell in the 1991 Persian Gulf War oversaw Operation Desert Storm. During this war he gained fame with the "Powell Doctrine" which emphasized using overwhelming force to insure success and minimize casualties. His significant assignments included two tours in Vietnam, serving as the National Security Advisor to President Ronald Reagan, and serving as Chairman of the JCS.

President George Bush appointed Powell as Secretary of State. As secretary of State Powell was instrumental in advocating for building the case for the United States invasion of Iraq. However, he was also instrumental in slowing the march to war by convincing the Bush administration that international support was a necessity for any American attack on Iraq. What he is best known for is his speech to the United Nations that said there was indisputable proof that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. This claim which was proven false, was the catalytic moment that solidified international support for an American attack on Iraq.

It's A Changing World- Setting the Stage

A starting point for our dialogue will discuss how quickly the world is changing and how that affects your job as a manager and leader. General Powell's book has at least two instances we can use as examples of extraordinary change. One is in chapter 16 where he discusses technology that existed in 2012 when he wrote the book, with the second being on page 260 in Chapter 41 where he says he reimbursed the United States \$1,200 for the value of a gun given to him by Russian President Gorbachev. He made that payment because any personal gift he received as Secretary of State was a gift to the United States. Compare his ethical decision to the decision of our current President where he accepted a gift of an airplane from the country of Qatar, spent hundreds of millions in government funds to modify the plane, and then stating when he leaves office, he will retain the aircraft for his presidential library.

- What are the forces, political, environmental, societal, economic etc. that are affecting the way you lead or manage. Are they impacting you positively or negatively?
- How have the forces you identified evolved since the year 2020? What changes have you made to your leadership and management over these six years?
- How do you think they may further change from now to the year 2030?
- Do you need to make leadership or management modifications now because of these changes? If so, what are the changes?

Notes:

Leadership Principles

Chapter 1

As is true with most of us Colin Powell had a number of extremely positive accomplishments in his working career, and, he also had several, what can only be called "failures".

Through and because of his successes and failures General Powell developed 13 principles of leadership. They are:

1. It ain't as bad as you think. It will look better in the morning.
2. Get mad, then get over it
3. Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when you position falls, your ego goes with it.
4. It can be done.
5. Be careful what you choose: you may get it
6. Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision
7. You can't make someone else's choices, you shouldn't let someone else make yours.
8. Check small things.
9. Share credit
10. Remain clam. Be kind.
11. Have a vision. Be demanding.
12. Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers
13. Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier

Consider these principles of leadership and write down two that you feel has special relevance to you. Also select one or two that you don't agree with, or that you feel is not really correct. Lastly, write out a leadership principle of your own, one that you feel is particularly important in guiding your leadership role as a city clerk.

Principles I Agree With

Principles that are not applicable

Leadership Principles That Guide Me

Your Mission

Chapter 1

Your Mission & the City

General Powell talks about how he worked hard, and was dedicated in school, but he never excelled. He tried his best but sometimes his best wasn't well- all that great. Even when reaching the pinnacle of success in the Army, serving as a brigadier general, he received an evaluation that said his performance was below standard. As General Powell says, and as a retired military officer I can verify, a substandard report at that level would normally end your career. Instead someone else saw different qualities and basically rescued him, and moved him into another position.

I would guess that in all our career we have experienced what could be career damaging or even career ending events. Importantly, maybe we have seen another employee who "screwed up" but yet we see something much greater of value in that employee if they can only be channeled or redirected.

What leadership principle have you learned from either a "poor performance" evaluation, a destructive conflict with a supervisor or management peer?

General Powell talks about that in his fourth year as Secretary of State he felt he was out of sync with the Bush Administration. What he felt should be the mission of foreign policy was not the mission as set by the Secretary of Defense and other foreign policy makers in the Bush Administration. Because their perception of the mission was not aligned, a consistent foreign policy direction was jeopardized.

Over the years I have seen that one of the greatest conflicts that can occur in city hall is when two or more constitutional officers have conflicting missions. Is the mission of your office in sync with that of the city manager, with other city departments?

Look at your role as city clerk. What drives the passion you feel in your job? What is the mission for you and your office?

My passions

My Mission(s)

Missions for my office

Areas in city where missions are not aligned

What I can do to bring closer alignment in the Clerks mission and other units of the city.

The World Is Changing Fast-And Generation Y Does Not Live to Work

Chapter 4

In chapter four General Powell says that one of his cardinal rule is to not be a “busy bastard”. A “busy bastard”: never leaves the office until late at night, works on weekends, and generally feels guilty if they are not working at something 50 or more hours a week. Well those of you who may be of the “boomer” generation you know that being a “busy bastard” is part of the generational culture. But this is not true with other generations who “work to live.” They follow the philosophy of General Powell which is “don’t run if you can walk; don’t stand up if you can sit down; don’t sit down if you can lie down; and don’t stay awake if you can go to sleep”.

Your job as a manager is changing quickly as our work force changes. The work values possessed by those mid-career or beginning their career may be much different than that motivating the older generation who may be the leaders of their organizations. The question is how do you manage when disparate work values exist? To explore this question let’s look at some of the generational differences.

Generational Differences in the Workplace

For the first time in history, there are five generations in the workplace. They are:

- **Baby Boomers**—born 1946 to 1964
- **Generation X**—born 1965 to 1980
- **Millennials**—born 1981 to 2000
- **Generation Z**—born 2001 to 2020



GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE WORKPLACE

TRADITIONALISTS Born: 1925 – 1945

Dependable | Straightforward | Tactful | Loyal

Shaped by:

The Great Depression,
World War II, radio,
and movies

Motivated by:

Respect, recognition,
providing long-term
value to the company

Communication style:

Personal touch,
handwritten notes
instead of email

Worldview:

Obedience over
individualism; age equals
seniority; advancing
through the hierarchy



BABY BOOMERS Born: 1946 – 1964

Optimistic | Competitive | Workaholic | Team-Oriented

Shaped by:

Vietnam War, Civil
Rights Movement,
Watergate

Motivated by:

Company loyalty,
teamwork, duty

Communication style:

Whatever is most
efficient, including
phone calls and
face-to-face

Worldview:

Achievement comes
after paying one's dues;
sacrifice for success



Baby Boomers who expect to or
already are working past age 70 or
do not plan to retire¹

10,000

Baby Boomers reach retirement
age every day²



GENERATION X Born: 1965 – 1980

Flexible | Informal | Skeptical | Independent

Shaped by:

The AIDS epidemic,
the fall of the Berlin
Wall, the dot-com boom

Motivated by:

Diversity, work-life
balance, their personal-
professional interests
rather than the
company's interests

Communication style:

Whatever is most
efficient, including
phone calls and
face-to-face

Worldview:

Favoring diversity;
quick to move on if their
employer fails to meet
their needs; resistant to
change at work if it affects
their personal lives



Startup founders who are Gen
Xers—the highest percentage³

BY 2028

Gen Xers will outnumber
Baby Boomers⁴

MILLENNIALS Born: 1981 – 2000

Competitive | Civic- and Open-Minded | Achievement-Oriented

Shaped by:

Columbine, 9/11,
the internet

Motivated by:

Responsibility,
the quality of their
manager, unique work
experiences

Communication style:

IMs, texts, and email

Worldview:

Seeking challenge,
growth, and development;
a fun work life and work-
life balance; likely to leave
an organization if they
don't like change



Percentage of global workforce to
be made up of Millennials by 2025⁵

18% men

12% women

Millennials ages 25–34 living at
home with their parents⁶



GENERATION Z Born: 2001 – 2020



What challenges are you experiencing in leading employees who possess different value systems? Describe two of these leadership challenges.

Describe a technique you use to address situations where value differences result could result in organizational dysfunction.

Meanness vs Kindness

Chapter 5

As any manager working in city government has experienced, we are functioning in a “mean” environment. In this era of “gotha” politics some may think that General Powell’s principle of showing kindness while expecting nothing in return may be a recipe for self-destruction. However, General Powell is addressing how you treat employees and goes on to say that kindness means “You can never err by treating everyone in the building with respect, thoughtfulness, and a kind word.”

However, in our world is there a difference with the political darth vaders we deal with who have a unitary mission oriented to destroying the system we are sworn to uphold? Will this philosophy of “kindness work with these people?

Can we use this philosophy as our primary leadership principle with our employees? General Powell goes on to say that people treated as important will go above and beyond to insure mission success. Do you believe this is true?

Many city clerks have told me they have four clienteles. Employees who work for you, elected officials and possibly city managers who you work for, other managers in city government, and, the public. Now looking at the employees who work for you.

Employees are broken down into two groups. First there are those that are highly motivated, very positive, and dedicated to accomplishing the mission of the office. The second are those employees who want the pay check but will not exert themselves unless pushed and pulled.

Citizens we deal with also can be broken down into two groups. The most difficult are the darth vaders described above. The second group are those citizens who are basically positive and only want to either resolve a problem, or, to contribute their efforts in making the city a better place to live.

- First would you agree with the description of employees stated above? Why or why not?
- Is General Powell correct about treating employees as important? Will this work with both groups of employees?
- Secondly, is the description of the two groups of citizens correct?
- How do you successfully manage citizens of your city?

Notes:

When You're Not Up to Your Butt In Problems You Are No Longer Leading Chapter 6

In chapter six General Powell says that solving problems is the foundation of leadership. "If your desk is clean and no one is bringing you problems, you should be very worried. It means that people don't think you can solve them or don't want to hear about them." He goes on to say, "either way it means you followers have lost confidence in you and you are no longer their leader,..." General Powell advises that you should walk around and look for a problem. He says that when you do you will find some.

Now wait a minute General Powell, how does this leadership concept conflict with not be a micromanager "busy bastard"?

Where should a leader put their emphasis? Isn't our responsibility to train our subordinates to identify problems and then solve them on their own?

Isn't our transformational leadership role one of strategically planning for the future and building our subordinates so they will recognize problems, and then design solutions to those problems without relying on us to be their "parents".

Lets talk about our leadership role and take any notes that you feel will be useful when you develop your leadership development plan.

Notes:

Organizational Pyramids & The New Matrix

Chapter 8

General Powell says that as you have risen in the leadership pyramid the complexities of your leadership role have changed; they have expanded from one from where you had responsibility as a technical expert and technical manager, to one where you identify and work on issues that involve, but go beyond the city clerk's office. With the increase in complexity your role assumes responsibility for identifying problems of the city and community, bringing these issues to those who should be concerned, and, serving as a resource for information and solutions.

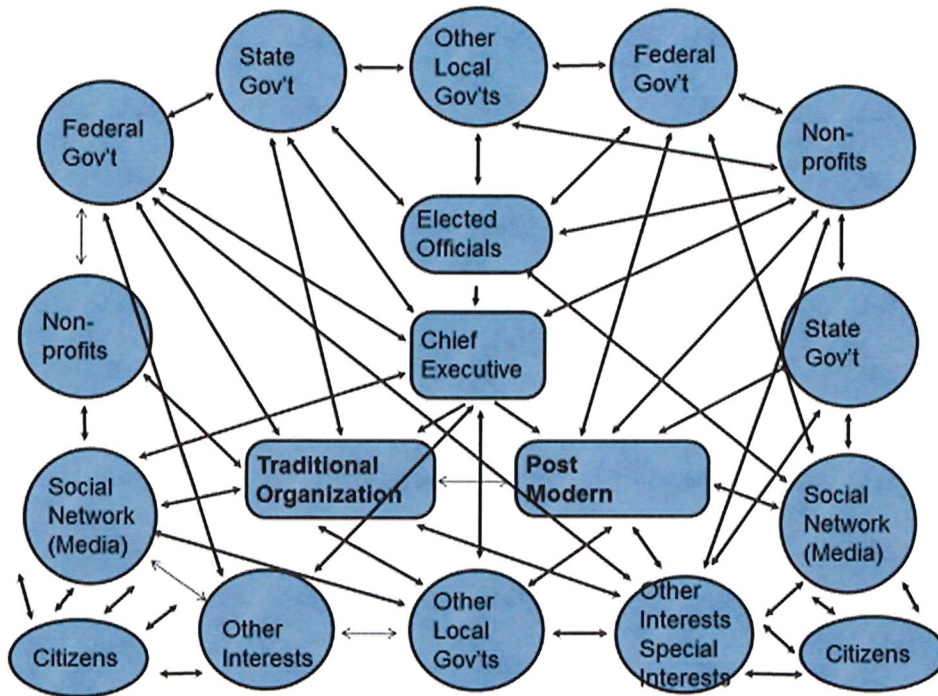
The traditional role for the city clerk has been to perform the technical role associated with preparing the council agenda, conducting elections, facilitating candidate registration, public records production etc. But successful municipal operations will no longer allow you to be a manager in a siloed city clerk's office, responsible only for the charter mandated responsibilities of your office. Think about your job ten years ago, and what it is today. How has it changed, and how will it change as you move into the future?

Job of the City Clerk 5-10 years ago:

Job of the City Clerk today:

Job of the City Clerk in the Future:

City Government as a Complex System



Trust & Moral Courage In An Era of Cynicism

Chapter 10

City government and their top officials increasingly are living in a world of political camps, distrust, people playing one person off of others, and fostering rivalries and conflict. In many cases this is resulting in city managers, council, clerks, city attorneys, and department managers experiencing an increasing degree of administrative and political conflict. A natural reaction is to become more isolated, expose your true emotions less, and, reduce chances of conflict by not speaking publically about potential controversial issues.

While he does not specifically address the life of managers in city government, General Powell says that managers should start out trusting people. Trust them and they will trust you, and because of that, they will work to ensure your success. Now this addresses employees and not external political persons, but are the principles the same? Applying this principle to employees General Powell says managers must empower their employees to freely address external constituencies with information. This means speaking to civic groups, homeowners associations etc.

General Powell also says that employees respect leaders with moral courage, those who will always do the right thing and risk their jobs for principle.

- Does the role of the city clerk in the political environment described above require you to sacrifice principle for political peace? How do you address the political factions that you must interact with?
- What skills do you think are effective in building trust? Trust with staff, trust with other employees, trust with citizens?
- Do you speak to community groups? Should you empower and train your employees to speak to these groups?
- Are you required to take actions or make decisions that could put your job at risk? How do you approach these situations?

Notes:

As A Leader It is Not Important to be Liked-Just Respected

Chapter 11

As a manager we probably spend as much time with our employees as we do our families. General Powell says that an important element of leadership is a degree of separateness from your employees. It is ok to socialize with those you supervise but not “hanging out with them”. Leaders must “maintain a certain distance from employees, and can’t get too close”.

He also says that a good leader will know his/her followers, but have a place of privacy where employees cannot enter. General Powell says that respect is a critical function of leader success and that “familiarity breeds contempt”. Respect goes two ways, the leader must respect those the leader supervises and those supervised but respect their leader. General Powell claims that it is not important that employees “like” their supervisor.

Leaders must be accessible to managers who report to them. General Powell states that those who reported to him could call him seven days a week

With subordinates General Powell says he “wanted to know details about his employees; the naked truth, who was naughty and who was nice”.

- Can you be with employees 8+ hours a day and maintain a “leadership distance”? What about “hanging out” with employees?
- Is it ok to not be liked? Can you be liked as a friend and still be a respected leader? Can you be respected and not be liked?
- Do you really need to know details about your employees? Instead of details are knowing major life events enough?

Notes:

Set High Standards & Make Immediate Corrections

Chapter 14

Never walk past a mistake. If you do it creates an environment for bigger mistakes. High standards will flow up & down the organization. When you make fair corrections they are appreciated. Question-where does mistake correction become perceived micromanagement? Should you give employees time to identify and correct the mistake before stepping in? If you do will that be perceived by employees as you not caring about quality work?

Notes:

Good Managers are Good Leaders?

Chapter 15

“Good managers are good leaders”. “Good management gets 100 percent of a team’s capability. Great leaders seek a higher ground. They take their followers to 110-150 percent of what anyone thought was possible. Great leaders do not just motivate followers they inspire them”.

Is management equivalent to leadership? Is a manager by definition a leader?

Management is typically defined as a power relationship between people and focused on day to day implementation of mission. On the other hand leadership is motivating others to take actions they normally would not take with or without consideration of personal gain and as defined by others.....

- Does being a good manager mean you are a good leader? Do managers have to possess the principles of leadership outlined by General Powell? (See Appendix Principles of Leadership)
- Are the thirteen rules outlined by General Powell in Chapter 1 characteristics of a good manager, a good leader, or maybe both?
- Is your primary role to be a manager or a leader? Can you be both?

One process of management and leadership is setting high but not impossible standards, creating an environment of trust, and showing passion for your mission.

- Is passion necessary? If so, how do you display passion in your job as city clerk?

Notes:

The Old/New Technological World

Chapter 16

Technology has transformed your world, and will continue to present unknown leadership and management challenges to your office. Technology described by Powell and now AI has eliminated the physical, time, and volume constraints on your ability to store and produce electronic communication and concepts. It is also presenting you with incredible problems for insuring that the law is followed with respect to open meetings and public records.

General Powell who wrote this book 14 years ago discusses bringing the “most modern technology” to the State Department. The technology he describes sounds today like he is describing the dinosaur age. He says nothing about AI. But the cost of modern technology, especially technology designed to address the future that you envision for public records and public meetings, is very expensive and its proper use and outcome is unknown. And it takes people to manage the data produced and collected. Usually such “nice to have” capital and personnel costs are the first thing cut from the city budget.

- Have you developed a leadership plan to prepare for what technology will bring in the future? Look at the revolutionary technology changes that have occurred from the date this book was written to today. Now look 10 years into the future. What will our world of technology look like in 10 years? What do you need to do to prepare for the changes we are likely to experience?
- What is your role with social media, AI, and the Sunshine law? Do you have a role in advocating for legislation that recognizes the complexity of indirect private communication and the storage of information passed through social media, as well as the multitude of new media possibilities that are emerging daily.
- What is your new leadership role in this rapidly changing, complex electronic world especially the introduction of AI? Are you investing in the education required by you and your staff in order that you can adapt and effectively use our rapidly changing technological world?

Notes:

What You Don't Know Is Important. City Clerks "Intelligence" Role for Communication Within the City

Chapter 17 & 18

There is so much happening, and happening so fast in city government that it is impossible to know everything that is occurring, or may soon happen. General Powell in discussing the infamous speech he gave at the United Nations (UN), where he claimed that Iraqis possessed weapons of mass destruction when in fact they didn't, is a perfect example of his principle that what you don't know is as important as what you do know. He questions why someone didn't have the courage to stand up and challenge him before he made this disastrous speech which served as the justification for the US to invade Iraq. Why didn't he have accurate "intelligence" about what was really going on in Iraq?

City Clerks are a rich source of information about what is really going on with elected officials, candidates, other city departments, and city stakeholders. What is your obligation to insure the city manager, department heads, city council are aware of accurate information? Are you responsible for addressing rumor control and insuring truth is communicated to other managers in the city/county?

In our dialogues several city clerks have expressed the feeling they are "stove piped" from city management. Reporting to council they feel they may be betraying their elected bosses if they pass unpleasant, but yet accurate information to city management. It is the idea of some that it is much better to do the "official" job of the clerk's office then it is to be the linking pin of information between city stakeholders, elected officials, and city management. General Powell talks about the consequences of an organizations inability to communicate "unpleasant" information. When American troops tortured the prisoners in Abu Ghraib the people who knew did not pass the "unpleasant" information up to the Secretary of Defense. If they had done so, the problem could have been dealt with earlier and possibly the terrible public relations that transpired could have been prevented.

- What leadership role should you play in the overall leadership of the city? Are you a member of a team with smooth flowing information channels, or, are you just one unit of a city that does not effectively communicate, and therefore, does not anticipate future changes and disruptions that may be about to occur in the city/county?

- Does your city have communication channels that allow “unpleasant” information to be passed to those who need to know? What is your role in creating an open system of communication? What responsibility do you have for proactively addressing inaccurate information you hear from the public and candidates running for office?

Notes:

One Team-One Mission With Several Branches

Chapter 22

General Powell emphasizes that everyone in the organization must come together as a team if the mission of the city is going to be accomplished. An organization operating as a unified team will be an effective organization. Everyone in the organization must believe they are part of a team, and that the team moves in a common direction, even though, in city government, each unit such as the Clerk's office has different functions from other city departments. General Powell concludes by saying many organizations do not function as a unified team and are in essence they are warring tribes. He says these organizations fail.

City government because of its disparate departmental functions, and because in some cities there is not a unity of command (all departments reporting to one manager), often looks like warring tribes. There is not a unified sense of team, and that lack of unity causes the organization to be less than effective.

Look at your city.

- Does your city view itself as a team, or is it a band of warring tribes?
- Does your office see itself as part of the city team?
- What is your role in building a city team?

Notes:

360 Evaluation & After Action Reports

Chapter 27

Most city's use a traditional evaluation for evaluating personnel where the supervisor rates their subordinates on effectiveness of the employee in accomplishing their job duties as well as meeting certain traits such as reporting to work on time etc. However, earlier we discussed that the traditional organization work place is changing from an individual based to a team based structure. With that change many managers are modifying their personnel evaluation system to a 360 evaluation, or one where evaluations are completed by co-workers, subordinate employees, and possibly even by employees in other work units that have a work relationship with an employee.

- Do you use a 360 evaluation?
- Would a 360 evaluation be effective for employees in your office?
- What about for you?

General Powell presents the management concept of using after action reports (AAR) as a means of providing an honest self-examination of how an operation worked, how decisions were made, what were the strengths and weaknesses of an operation, and, how could changes could be made to improve management operations in the future. AARs focus is on learning, and not on assigning grades. While General Powell discusses AARs in a military environment, I have found they are equally effective to improve operations in city government. Do you or could you use an AAR process in evaluating completed operations in the clerk's office? Example, what about an AAR after an election has taken place?

- What are the main operations or tasks completed by your office? Could an AAR be an effective evaluation device for you to determine the effectiveness of your operations and what actions could make them more effective? Identify the areas you believe could be improved through an AAR.
- Does your city use 360 evaluations? How effective are they? What changes should be made to increase their effectiveness?

Notes:

Building Your Team In Depth

Chapter 29

A critical component of leadership is insuring your job goes on seamlessly if you are on vacation or not available to make decisions. General Powell discusses this by using the example of a training exercise where the company commander was removed and General Powell easily took command because his commander had trained him and kept him informed about operations. In my career I have seen too many leaders who have never given a thought to succession or building a leadership team in depth.

- Can you leave your office for an extended period of time? Say a three week vacation. Is your staff ready to assume your responsibilities?
- Have you built your team in depth? From your experience what tips do you have for other managers?

Notes:

Building Your Team In Depth

Chapter 30

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Notes:

Responsibility for Outcomes

Chapter 34

Using the label of the “pottery barn rule” General Powell discusses his role and responsibility for the outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He says that if “you are in charge then you have to take charge”. Discussing the invasion of Iraq General Powell says that with the invasion the U.S. broke Iraq. However, we did not take responsibility for the unexpected outcome, and did not show any proactive steps to repair the negative impacts of the invasion. He says that leaders must have a “bias for action” and “own” the outcome of your leadership actions or responsibilities.

While General Powell says we must have a bias for action, he also says that “we should try not to break it”.

- Aren’t these two concepts somewhat contradictory?
- Doesn’t “try not to break it” represent incremental change vs transformational change?
- If a component of leadership is risk taking, if we hesitate to take actions that may “break something” does this mean that we are not leading?
- Does that not suggest approaching our jobs with tight management control to prevent negative outcomes vs. taking bold moves as part of transformational change leadership?

We have all taken leadership or managerial actions that have not worked. A greater problem, I imagine, is we have all had situations where we did not directly cause something to “break”, but yet within the official realm of our job we were responsible for the bad outcome. Example rumors that a member of council has sent messages to another elected official about city business.

Review your leadership outcomes over the past five years. Has there been a leadership action that you have taken that did not work out as planned?

- Did you take responsibility for the outcomes?
- Do you believe that a fundamental part of your job is to identify and take management or leadership actions that involve a moderate to high risk of failure?
- What recommendations would you make to your fellow clerks about this issue?

Notes:

Decisions with Facts

Chapter 35

General Powell, in reviewing his speech to the United Nations where his claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction proved to be totally wrong, says that one of the key lessons from his experience is to analyze what went wrong, internalize the lessons so they will not be repeated, and then get over it. In reviewing the preparation of the speech General Powell says the facts that went into the speech were never thoroughly analyzed. The facts in the speech were molded to fit the policy conclusion that was desired. He says a good decision would have been reached if the facts would have determined the decision.

Have you experienced a comparable situation where an official wants to do something, the “facts”, or contradictory information are ignored, and, the “facts” are then crafted to attain the conclusion desired?

- In our increasingly ideological political environment are we pressured to fit the facts to preconceived conclusions?
- If so, how do we insure the “real facts” are used for decision analysis?
- Do you feel it difficult or impossible to admit management or leadership mistakes?
- Do you find that our current divisive political environment is making it increasing risky to admit management or leadership mistakes?

This chapter is critically important for today because General Powell readily admits his mistake and the fact that this mistake led to an incorrect policy decision. Importantly, General Powell provides a lesson from that mistake and discusses how leaders should learn and correct errors they inevitably make. Unfortunately, our current national political environment suggests leaders should never admit mistakes and either blame mistakes on others or say they never happened in the first place. As a result, we are seeing leadership decisions and mistakes lead to increased polarization, organization dysfunction, and inability for leaders to chart a positive path into the future.

Notes:

The Problems Are Not Yours

Chapter 36

As a linking pin between the public, elected officials, and city administration, City Clerks very often hear about problems or issues that are not the responsibility of the Clerk. General Powell describes such a problem where he was presented with an issue that was not his responsibility, which he knew nothing about, that he had no interest in, yet he had to take it on. In city government many of the issues or problems city government faces only directly affect one or two departments and not the whole city. I have found that when city government is truly effective, departments not directly affected by issues will always take ownership of the problem, and insure that all departments that need to know are immediately told of the problem. Beyond that, in effective cities, those without responsibility for the problem offer to pitch in to help resolve the issue, although the problem or issue is not “theirs”.

- Is your office invested in problems of the city that are not yours to solve?
- Will you take on problems that are not yours to assist other city staff? What are the coordinative processes that allow problems to be shared among several departments? What coordinative processes should be created to make your city organization more effective?
- Does the city work as a team to address problems regardless of who may have responsibility for the problem? If not, what can you do to help build unity of operations?

Notes:

Additional Principles of Leadership-From It Worked For Me by Colin Powell

Commit 100% of yourself to your responsibilities.

Don't be a busy bastard

Show kindness- Mentor the young

Look for problems; be a problem solver.

With increased leadership comes responsibility for moving away from technical to conceptual.

Trust people-set employees free.

Display moral courage-confront the unpopular issues.

Set high but not impossible standards for people and the organization; make instant corrections when mistakes are made.

Leading the technology and law revolution in city government e.g. social media, open meetings and public records.

Be a linking pin for information-elected, public, city management.

Develop and instill a common purpose (mission).

Leaders must be selfless, not selfish.

Leaders must maintain a distance from employees. Can't 'hang out' with them.

Important to be respected; not important to be liked.

Know Your Employees.

Use 360 personnel evaluations and after action reports.

Succession leadership-Build your team in depth.

Take responsibility for outcomes-good and bad.

Take action on problems or issues that are not your responsibility.

Believe in yourself-work hard, study hard.

Anything is possible.

Trust those who work for you.

When you make mistakes learn from them and then move on.