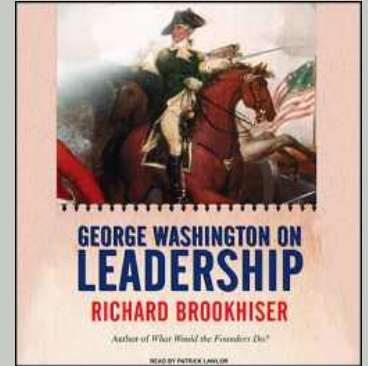


## “GEORGE WASHINGTON ON LEADERSHIP” BY RICHARD BROOKHISER

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## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In the eyes of many Americans, George Washington could be considered one of the greatest leaders ever to have lived. Whether looking at his accomplishments on the battlefield, or his leadership skills as the first president of the United States, it would be difficult for any person to rebuke Washington's leadership skillset. Washington always led by example, using his size and unusual demeanor to gain success. He was able to check his ego at the door and did not allow his flaws to cloud his judgement.

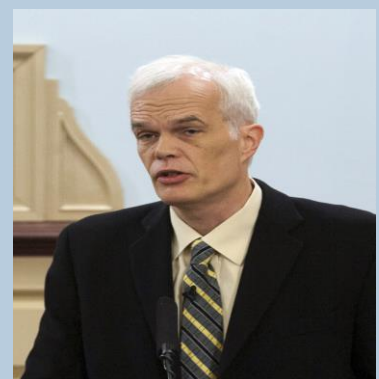
Washington truly is a great example of how a leader should lead. A leader must know their limits and know how to accept and adapt to the unknown. Washington's most admirable leadership skill however was his ability to know his limitations, as well as know when it was his time to step down and give up all the power for which he possessed. Many of the powerful leaders from history were unable to realize that power is temporary and would ultimately have to be given up.

Author Richard Brookhiser chooses to investigate many of Washington's leadership skills revolving around problems, people, and self while leading throughout his life land owner, soldier, and president.

***“Human happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected.”***

— George Washington

Richard Brookhiser is a journalist, historian and biographer. Brookhiser is also a senior editor at *National Review*. He is the author of *What Would the Founders Do?*, as well as other biographies pertaining to George Washington and Alexander Hamilton.



## SECTION ONE - PROBLEMS

### WHEN BEING A LEADER

In section one of Brookhires book, he delves in to the problems Washington experiences as the General of the continental army during the American revolution for independence from Great Britain. Washington was a forward thinking man, which served him well throughout his life. Washington was able to look at a situation and know what needed to be accomplished in order to have success. He also understood that in life not everyone and everything functioned the same or properly at all times. Washington understood that an army needed leadership right down to the finest detail.

Washington was also strategic in all of his decision-making. Washington's main goal as leader was "the defense of American liberty" (Brookhiser, 21). Washington again being ahead of his time, so the ultimate goal, and that was to establish a free and autonomous nation.

Brookhiser also brings to light the fact that while Washington was strategic, he was also realistic which may have made him seem pessimistic when he issued orders. In tough situations leaders must make tough calls and must be "obliged to prepare for bad contingencies." (Brookhiser, 37)

Washington was also a master communicator, and knew when to speak and when to remain quiet. The skill of biting ones tongue is a lesson many never learn, however, this cannot be said for Washington. He was able to "adopt a strategy of keeping his mouth shut." (78)

"Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence. True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to appellation." – George Washington



## PRINCIPLE AND APPLICATION TO LEADERSHIP

### Principle

Leaders will always have a plethora of problems they will encounter from day to day. Whether it is in the areas of the small details in the school, making strategic decisions while constructing a seating plan, or knowing when to speak up at a staff meeting. Leaders must be calculated and know what is going on around them. They must be able to adapt to the situation and make their staff feel valued and heard. It is important to not take anything personally. That being said a leader must know that what they say, or the decisions they make may be taken personally by their staff/workers. Being calculated is everything.

### Connecting to Leadership

No matter what a leader does, his or her decisions will be scrutinized. Being a leader or put in a leadership position is "tough business" and one must know this going in. All one has to do is look to the past and see how one decision can change everything. Leaders must believe in what they are doing and be willing to make adaptations to their original plan. They must be willing to listen to people around them and not subside to ego or arrogance. Being able to take advice from "someone beneath you" in the job hierarchy can be a game changer. The most successful people from History were able to do this, not only during times of success, but also in times of failure.

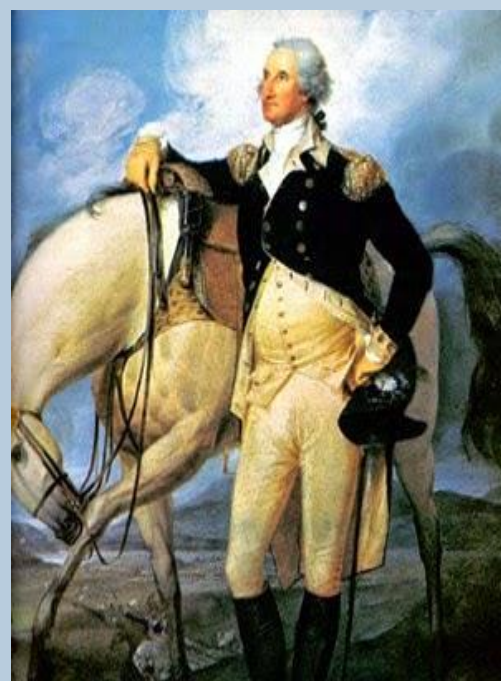


## DIRECTION

"There is but one straight course, and that is to seek truth and pursue it steadily." -George Washington

*"Be courteous to all, but intimate with few; and let those be well- tried before you give them your confidence."* – George Washington

"Washington ran two start-ups, the army and the presidency, and chaired the most important committee meeting in history, the Constitutional Convention."  
(Brookhiser, 1)



## PART TWO – PEOPLE

*Richard Brookhiser makes numerous statements in part two pertaining to people and how unique everyone is. According to Brookhiser one will meet a two types of people in life – smart people and weird people. Washington was no different. He encountered people of affluence and of poverty; people of intelligence and people of simplicity (to put it politely) (Brookhiser, 87-94). Leaders must be able to work with various different people and be able to harness their abilities and lack thereof. Like Washington, a leader must be able to bring out the best in all his or her soldiers if you will. One does not usual get to decide who will fight, but one must do the best with what they have. Great leaders are able to do so. Adapt, conserve and realize the potential in the most dyer of situations. Leaders must remain calm and not panic even when the chips are stacked against them. What would the world be like if Churchill, Jobs, Gates, Obama quit when times were tough.*

## PART THREE – SELF

### “Identify Your Strengths”

Leaders must portray leadership qualities in order to have success, and Washington fit this bill (no pun intended) perfectly. “Having the raw materials of an impressive appearance, he improved [his best qualities] and then broadcast them” (p.173). Washington was able to take and enhance his image tenfold to help provoke an even greater lore that he had established during the revolution. In order for people to want to follow, they need examples to follow. Exemplifying confidence while including humility is the best way to ensure people trust in a leader. If one wants to be a leader, one must start looking like one. Self-perception was as important in the past as it is today, even without Facebook, twitter, and Instagram.

### Top Ten George Washington Talents – according to John Adams...

- 1) He was good looking
- 2) He was tall.
- 3) He had an impressive body
- 4) He looked great when he moved
- 5) He was really rich
- 6) He was Virginian
- 7) Good political record
- 8) He knew when to keep his mouth shut
- 9) He exercised good self-control
- 10) He hid his temper well

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*“It is better to offer no excuse, rather than a bad one”*

– George Washington

“A person who feels appreciated will always do more than what is expected.”

– Anonymous



-Allan Atkins

PART THREE CONTINUED“BUILD YOUR STRENGTHS”

“Some leadership qualities may be in us ready-made; they just need to be identified. Other [qualities] . . . have to be developed, matured, built up, if we are to succeed” (p. 185). Responsible leaders must realize that they are not perfect and that their skills will need improvement over time. No leader good leader is perfect at any point. What makes a person a good leader is not their ability to lead, their ability to change and grow in various situations.



Remember the difference  
between a  
boss and a leader;  
a boss says “Go!”  
a leader says “Let’s go!”

—E.M. Kelly

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“AVOID WEAKNESSES” OR  
EMBRACE IT?

In television and movies, leaders are usually portrayed as perfect beings with zero character flaws. George Washington may have been a great leader; however, he was not without weakness. Washington lacked speaking skills and tried to avoid public speaking at all costs. It was said of Washington’s speaking skills that, “[he] was agitate and embarrassed [by speaking] than ever he was by leveled cannon or pointed musket” (p.200). Leaders need to show humility and embrace their weaknesses. While it may seem contradictory to show flaws in a leadership role, subordinates will likely respond well to their authority figures humbles. Being above does not necessarily mean above in character and professionalism.

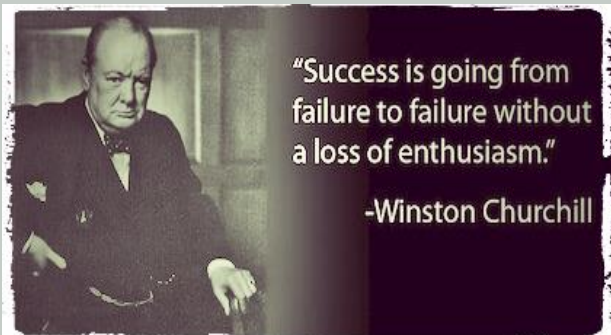
*“A leader is best when people barely know he exists...when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say: We did it ourselves.”*

— Lao-Tzu

WORK TOGETHER!



NOT STAND ABOVE...



*“Washington went through his life burdened with cares, and surrounded by difficulties and failures. There was daily cause to be angry, and no doubt he often was. Some of his flare-ups were revealed by his associates only to close friends or diaries, to protect the hero’s reputation. Why did they protect him? Because he had earned their admiration over the long haul by keeping his eye on the task at hand...” (Brookhiser, 225)*

Richard Brookhiser does a fantastic job of blending history and leadership principles and philosophy. He is able to provide excellent insight into the thoughts and feeling of Washington, a man who was flawed and sometimes out of place, however, was able to overcome these numerous obstacles and go on to be America’s most beloved Presidents.



George Washington is a fantastic figure from history to use as a case study for leadership. He may not have always been the most charismatic or enthusiastic person; however, he demonstrated his leadership skills in other ways that made his subordinates and followers love and respect him. Washington is an example of what a leader should be – humble, open minded, intelligent, realistic, and most importantly, human.

*“Discourage vice in every shape, and impress upon the mind of every man, from the first to the lowest, the importance of the cause, and what it is they are contending for. It is much easier at all times to prevent an evil than to rectify mistakes.” – George Washington*