

Teddy's Tips on Leadership

“In a moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing.”

Theodore Roosevelt

We all make decisions. Every day. Every week. Every year. Imagine having to make the decisions the President of the United States faces. And you think you have it hard?

Theodore Roosevelt had to face tough decisions throughout his life. As a youth, he was sickly and couldn't attend school. His aunt came to live with his family to serve as his tutor. By his teens, he made a decision to build his body so that he could participate in the activities other teens were doing. He worked hard physically and overcame asthma and other childhood ailments that were holding him back.

He kept up his exercise regiment throughout his entire life. He called it living the “Strenuous Life.” One of his favorite games when he was a father was to lead his children (four boys and two daughters) and their cousins on Point-to-Point walks in the woods. They would plot two points and hike from one to the other in a straight line. Their motto was “Over or Under, but Never Around.” They climbed boulders, scaled fences, forded streams, and swam across rivers to practice the strenuous life and complete the hike.

Roosevelt was faced with another monumental decision at the age of 25. His wife had just given birth to their first child. Two days later his wife died, as did his mother. The two most important women in his life left him on the same day and in the same house. His career had been going well - he had just been elected minority leader of the New York State Assembly (the youngest ever elected to that position). He wrote in his

journal that day, “The light has gone out of my life.”

He asked one of his sisters to care for the newborn while he finished his term in the Assembly. He then made a decision to go to the Dakota territories and become a cowboy. After two years out west, and having failed as a rancher, but excelled as a leader of men, he returned to his home in New York, remarried, and raised a family.

“I never would have been President if it had not been for my experiences in North Dakota,”

He felt his experiences in the Badlands, initially as a sportsman hunter, and later as a rancher “took the snob out of him” and taught him to see people as worthy based on their character and accomplishments, rather than on their economic worth, formal education or social standing.

Historians agree that had he not made the decision to go out west, he most likely would never have become President later in life. So much of what he learned in those two years in the wilderness – perseverance, courage, character, integrity, fortitude, and leadership served him well in his life as Police Commissioner of New York City, as a Colonel leading the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War, as Governor of New York, and as the 26th President of the United States.

Throughout his life, and especially as President, Roosevelt did not hesitate to make decisions. Not everyone who worked with

him agreed with his decisions, but he never left his subordinates guessing. He never left them having to make decisions because he wouldn't.

He never left Congress guessing. He made sure they knew exactly where he stood on all the issues. And he usually got his way.

What can we learn from Roosevelt and his decision making? Knowing that the questions are often more important than the answers, here are some questions for you to ponder.

Do you make decisions in the face of adversity?

Do you make decisions even when they are unpopular but you believe them to be right?

Do you procrastinate and hope problems disappear so you don't have to make a decision?

Do you think through your decisions before announcing them, considering both the positive and negative consequences of that decision?

Are you prepared to face the consequences of your decisions?

Are you prepared to rethink your decisions if they prove to have been bad decisions?

David Markovitz Brings Teddy Roosevelt Back to Life for You. David conducts keynote presentations as Teddy and conducts breakout workshops as David. Learn more about his programs at www.TeddyLeads.com.