

Teddy's Tips on Leadership

Speak softly and carry a big stick!

Theodore Roosevelt

When Theodore Roosevelt became President upon the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, the United States had the 5th largest Navy in the world. For TR, this would never do. He was determined to build a bigger Navy, and when he left office in 1909, the US had the 2nd largest Navy, second only to Great Britain.

In December 1907 TR sent the entire Navy, dubbed the Great White Fleet since all the ships were painted white for easy visual identification, on an around-the-world cruise. Sixteen battleships, seven destroyers, and nine support steamers set off from Hampton Roads, Virginia. 14,000 men left on a 45,000-mile voyage that wouldn't end for fifteen months. No other nation or navy in history had embarked on such a journey.

TR had three objectives for this audacious and bold endeavor. First, test naval readiness including testing radio transmissions, a new technology. Second, generate international good will. Lastly, demonstrate American naval capability overseas.

TR was concerned with the possibility of war with Japan following recent racial tensions that occurred with immigrants in California. TR made sure that the fleet would stop in Japan, China, the Philippines, and other world powers around the globe.

What can we learn from TR's actions of a century ago?

Here are Six Key Lessons in Leadership we can apply to our endeavors in the 21st century.

#1 Clearly define an aim and align your resources towards achieving that aim. TR wanted the US to become a leading world power. Building a bigger Navy was a key strategy to achieve this aim. What's your aim? What are your strategies to accomplish your aim?

#2 Build your competencies and products and services strategically, where they serve the best purpose. TR felt a strong Navy would enhance national security for a nation that was guarded by an ocean on both sides. Threats would have to come by sea.

#3 Demonstrate your strength in your marketplace. Be visible. Promote your company. This not only helps potential customers see who you are and what you do, but it just might keep competitors or potential competitors at bay.

#4 Use bold strategies and tactics. TR sent the fleet around the world, a very bold move that was unpopular with many serving in Congress. Had TR waited for consensus on this, the fleet would never have left the harbor.

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#5 Sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness than for permission. The Navy's budget contained only enough funding so that the fleet could make it half-way around the world. Without support from Congress, TR sent the fleet off on this mission. He then told Congress that if they wanted the fleet back, they would have to appropriate the necessary funding to do so. When Congress saw the impact that the Great White Fleet had on how the US was perceived in the world, they provided the funding necessary to complete the trip. Besides, they needed their fleet back. Be forewarned however. TR picked his battles carefully, when he had the odds stacked in his favor. Today we call it responsible risk-taking.

#6 Have the courage to stand by your convictions. TR faced much opposition throughout his career. He was a man of character, a man of integrity, a man of his convictions, a principled man. Once he made a decision, he fought hard to follow it through. He didn't waver. His supporters as well as his opponents always knew where he stood.

TR used the Great White Fleet as his Big Stick. Thousands of people poured into each port city as the fleet made their stop to see this show of force. TR succeeded in bringing the United States into the 20th century as a leading world power.

What's your Big Stick?

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.

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