

Leadership: The Churchill approach

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Churchill as Leader – overcoming adversity



The optimist sees opportunity in every danger, The pessimist sees danger in every opportunity



Leadership – the challenge to organisations throughout the world. Have we got it right? How do we improve and who can we talk to? Here at Xafinity Skillbase we think you can look to the past for a view of the future.

The greatest Briton, Winston Churchill, our heroic wartime icon is often quoted as possessing the defined qualities of leadership. Few, however, realise that his road to greatness was neither straight, nor smooth. Sounds familiar even in our more modern times?

We shouldn't dwell on failure, but let's recognise that failure was a set back for Churchill – he rose to overcome and 'pick himself up' throughout these difficult years. Failures in politics in the 1930s – he was an unwelcome 'war-like' figure. He had to wage a constant battle with defeats, setbacks, obstacles, and even personal depression (he called this his 'black dog').

Churchill's ability to bounce back from difficulties and problems can be traced to a simple formula for success that he practiced his entire life. Using the Churchill approach, we at Xafinity Skillbase believe we can teach you to:

- achieve heroic results;
- harness relentless resolve;
- turn adversity into advantage.

The art of communication was the driver by which Churchill established his brand of leadership – intense and powerful communication. Stories and pictures conjured by the power of his words.

Emotive and powerful – his words would “conjure up” the truth with a ‘flavour of the moment’. Often the truth was represented as a ‘wish list’. This list contained ‘factual statements’ looking forward to success – the future intent, told as if it was happening “now”.

For Churchill, within two months of becoming Prime Minister in May 1940, France fell to the Nazi invader and all organised resistance to Nazi rule on the continent of Europe was at an end. Many, even among Britain's friends abroad, believed that it would be no more than a matter of weeks before Britain, too, ran up the white flag of surrender.

Churchill's great strength as a War Leader rested in his burning conviction, despite the odds, that in our island we were unconquerable. Second, and equal to that, was his ability to communicate that spirit to the British Nation and to inspire them to feats of which they did not know themselves to be capable. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

In the words of Edward R. Murrow, repeated by President John F. Kennedy: “He mobilised the English language and sent it into battle.”

Churchill's unshakable resolve and puckish sense of humour, conveyed in his wartime radio broadcasts, galvanised a nation that hung on his every word. Thus as France fell and the British Army retreated from Dunkirk, he told the House of Commons, on 4 June 1940:

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

His power of communication allowed him to inspire and capture the imagination of everyone in the British Isles. Can you imagine how he might have been able to use PowerPoint to do this? Of course not. Passion and enthusiasm require relationships and connections to be in place – he was able to connect to his audience using the medium of radio, but his words were the conjurer's wand to a magic land of success, action and team spirit.

We believe Churchill's Leadership Traits can be viewed as **The Nine Steps:**

1. Self-belief
2. Communication
3. Charisma
4. Action This Day!
5. Courage
6. Creativity
7. Vision
8. Energy
9. Collaborative approach

We can use these nine steps to 'temperature check' our leadership style.

By reviewing each of the nine steps, recognising examples / situations and taking feedback from others, individuals can see instantly where their strengths are and in which areas they need to develop.

Perhaps in the uncertain business world we currently find ourselves, we should leave the last words to Churchill himself...

*"The optimist sees opportunity in every danger,
The pessimist sees danger in every opportunity"*

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