

Learning From Reagan

The Gipper's secrets for effective leadership: infectious confidence, good instincts and a belief in one's core values.

Ronald Reagan was a monumental president, and he led our nation in a monumental time. He was a man of stolid faith and a friend to the body of Christ. He made the world measurably safer by helping end the Cold War.

President Reagan's merits and accomplishments are innumerable, yet the greatest lesson of his life is his model leadership. In his book, *Eyewitness to Power*, journalist and Reagan staffer David R. Gergen explores Reagan's sometimes enigmatic, frequently brilliant, always captivating leadership style.

Having served four American presidents, Gergen concludes, "Ronald Reagan taught me more about leadership than anyone I've ever known." As we ministry leaders serve the body of Christ, I believe we have much to learn from the model of Ronald Reagan.

Gergen identifies a number of Reagan's subtle leadership traits. First is a contagious confidence. People wanted to follow him because they believed he was onto something that was good and big.

He was "by nature a dreamer who liked to dream of what the country could be," Gergen writes, and people embraced his simple, clear picture of what they could become. He painted a positive, real portrait of the future and showed people how they could fit into it—and America responded.

Similarly, all over the world we see the largest churches

growing around a simple, clear presentation of the positive, hopeful vision of who God is calling His people to be.

Second is a reliance upon ideas and instincts. Margaret Thatcher reportedly once said that Reagan “only had five or six ideas, but all of them were big and all of them were good.”

Reagan had an unusual understanding of the power and consequences of ideas—for one, that people naturally create wealth when their innovation and creativity is empowered by the government—and a rare gift for communicating the broadest and most complex of them with passion and clarity.

His leadership instincts were otherworldly. Reagan intuitively felt how best to connect with people, communicate ideas and resolve conflicts. This intuition was perhaps his single most valuable attribute. He learned to trust his ideas and instincts, and they served as a beacon in a thousand dark nights.

The single most neglected ministry resource of any pastor is his intellect and intuition. Certainly there is no substitute for hearing God in the Scriptures and in times of prayer, yet too often we expend energy trying to implement someone else’s formula for success.

No doubt, there is much we have to learn from successful practitioners in the body of Christ, but good ministry often comes from a pastor’s God-given intuition. When we cultivate the strong flow of the Holy Spirit’s activity in our lives as leaders and learn to trust His guidance through our instincts, we unlock a powerful force to serve people and advance the

gospel.

Third, Ronald Reagan maintained amid the domestic and global storms of his day a steadiness in his core beliefs. Long before taking office, he settled upon an immovable inner constitution that informed his decisions and empowered his leadership.

Chief among his convictions was that America is a chosen nation with a special mission. Getting a core and sticking to it no matter what was an anchor for him, giving him a constant grid for what was negotiable and what was not.

Foundational to strong biblical leadership is a personal inner core—a set of rock-solid, unwavering central convictions that drive everything we do. Out of this core can flow a wide variety of ministry ideas that evolve through the stages of life and ministry, but they are always anchored by this governing set of principles that defines who we are.

The apostle Paul had as a core " ... that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel ... and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6, NIV), and " ... that in every way ... Christ is preached" (Phil. 1:18).

From these core ideas emanated the fullness of Paul's ministry, and there stands his legacy. We must know our core, and if we don't have one we must go to the mountaintop, meet with God and get one.

Simply put: The leadership of Ronald Reagan is a lasting legacy for all Americans and the subtle secrets of his extraordinary manner offer essential coaching for us as

ministry leaders.

God give us more Ronald Reagans to serve our people and lead our nation.

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