

**Good news-** The books written by Senators Biden, McCain, and Obama are good books and get good reviews! They are mostly well-written. Some are classics! And, of course, all are now very timely.

**Bad news-** They are not all great books, and some are difficult to slog through. And, I couldn't find an actual book that Sarah Palin wrote, just a biography.

**Good news-** No matter what your politics, these leaders share some characteristics of leadership that I think we can all learn from and apply in our lives at work and at home, and as usual, I have skimmed them and gleaned what I think are their best and most practical ideas, and offer some applications to you. Hopefully you can put them to use right away.

**More good news-** I am a real-life, registered Independent and intend to keep this opinion piece positive and non-political!

### Summary:

I am a baby-boomer and have been around for a number of presidents (and vice-presidents). I remember lots of gaffs and problems, of course, but I positively remember:

- John Kennedy for his vigor and handling the Cuban Missile Crisis and Space Race
- Lyndon Johnson for his homespun style and Civil Rights efforts
- Richard Nixon for his tenacity and opening the door to China
- Gerald Ford for picking up the pieces after Watergate
- Jimmy Carter for his Mid-East peace efforts and his Habitat for Humanity
- Ronald Reagan as the "Great Communicator" and for ending the cold war
- George H.W. Bush for his "Thousand Points of Light"
- Bill Clinton for his charisma and a booming economy and
- George W. Bush for handling the tragedy of 9/11/2001

All of these Presidents lead America and all are remembered not only for what they did but also how they lead. Of these nine, four were Vice Presidents too, so as we look at the potential leaders of America for the next four years, it is worth looking not only at John McCain and Barack Obama, but also at Joe Biden and Sarah Palin. What will they be remembered for? What do they have in common now? What lessons can we learn from them, so far, that might help us as leaders?

I was in high school and college and remember the John McCain P.O.W. hero story when it happened. I have lived in or very near the state of Delaware and remember when Joe Biden's wife and daughter were killed in that tragic car accident 36 years ago. I watched as Barack Obama addressed the Democratic Convention in 2004 and said to my wife, "That guy might be president someday!" And I remember the "bridge to nowhere" and the Hockey Mom Governor who went right back to work after her fifth child was born. After reading (parts of) their books and examining their quotes, I think they all share or at least combine to make up this list of leadership traits. Following are those traits, with an example for each from those seeking the highest offices in our land. I could have chosen other quotes as examples, since all four candidates have had plenty to say over the years, but I chose these.

#### 1. Resiliency/Perseverance (John McCain from Faith of My Fathers)

After five years in torturous captivity in Hanoi, North Viet Nam: Eventually, [the Vietnamese asked if I considered their release offer. "What is your answer?" "No, thank you." "Why?" "American prisoners cannot accept parole, or amnesty or special favors. We must be released in the order of our capture. My final answer is no."

#### 2. Vision (Barack Obama from The Audacity of Hope)

A line in my speech at the '04 Democratic National Convention struck a chord. "There is not a black America and white America, a Latino America or an Asian America--there is the United States of America." -an America that fulfills Dr. King's promise that we be judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character.

I have no choice but to believe this vision. As the child of a black man and white woman, born in the melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who is half-Indonesian, but who is usually mistaken for Mexican, and a brother-in-law and niece of Chinese descent, with some relatives who resemble Margaret Thatcher and others who could pass for Bernie Mac, I never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe.

#### 3. Drive/Energy (Sarah Palin from her RNC Vice-Presidential Acceptance Speech)

What's the difference between a Hockey Mom and a pit bull? Lipstick!

#### 4. Communication (Joe Biden from Promises to Keep)

My childhood impediment was a stutter. When I was at home with my brothers and sister, hanging with neighborhood friends, or shooting the bull on the ball field, I was fine, but when I got thrown into a new situation or a new school, had to read in front of the class, or wanted to ask out a girl, I just couldn't do it. My freshman year, because of the stutter, I got an exemption from public speaking. Everybody knew it. It was like having to stand in the corner with the dunce cap. There were days I wondered: How would I ever bear it?

It's a funny thing to say, but even if I could, I would not wish away the darkest days of the stutter. That impediment ended up being a godsend for me. Carrying it strengthened me and made me a better person. The very things it taught me turned out to be invaluable lessons for my life as well as my chosen career.

#### 5. Honesty (John McCain from Why Courage Matters)

Most of us accept social norms: that it's right to be honest, to respect the rights of others, to have compassion. But accepting the appropriateness of these qualities, wanting them, and teaching our children to want them aren't the same as actually possessing them. Accepting their validity isn't moral courage. How honest are we if we tell the truth most of the time & stay silent only when telling the truth might get us fired or earn us a broken nose? We need moral courage to be honest all the time.

#### 6. Empathy/Perspective (Barack Obama from Audacity of Hope)

During the early part of my US Senate race, no blinding insights emerged from months of conversation. What struck me was how much of what (people) believed seemed to hold constant across race, region, religion, and class. I told them that government couldn't solve all their problems. But with a slight change in priorities we could make sure every child had a decent shot at life and meet the challenges we faced as a nation.

#### 7. Managing Change (Joe Biden from Promises to Keep)

[Just after Biden's 30th birthday, after his election but before his inauguration into the Senate, he was informed his family had been in a traffic accident.] I kept telling myself that everything was going to be OK, but the minute I got to the hospital & saw my brother's face, I knew the worst had happened. My three children had been in the car with my wife when the accident happened. Neilia had been killed & so had our baby daughter. The boys were alive.

*Washington & the Senate had no hold on me. I was supposed to be sworn in, in two weeks, but I could not bear to imagine the scene without Neilia. I told the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, I wasn't going to be a Senator. Mansfield told me I owed it to Neilia to be a Senator. My wife had worked too hard for me to kick it away. Give me six months, Joe, Sen. Mansfield kept saying. So I agreed. Six months.*

### **8. Charisma (Sarah Palin from her State of the State Address 1/15/08)**

We are on the same team, if we have got the same goal. With so much opportunity in Alaska, let's look at challenges like we do in our own families: save money, spend wisely, and we will secure our tomorrow. Invest in solid foundations like education and deferred maintenance. Pull together, (don't) tear down. Be positive. Respect our treasured past, but look forward now. These are leadership characteristics expected by those who elect us to lead, to serve, to work for Alaskans. What a responsibility we have!

### **9. Decision Making/Judgment (Joe Biden from Promises to Keep)**

After I finished an interview on the morning of 9/11, my cell phone rang. President Bush was on the line. "I just watched you, and I'm really proud of you. You were saying the right things." When I asked him when he was heading to Washington, he said the intelligence community told him he shouldn't. I recalled a story about the leader of the French resistance, Charles de Gaulle, near the close of World War II. When France was liberated, there was a parade down the Champs-Elysees in Paris, led by de Gaulle. As they walked, shots rang out, and everyone hit the ground except de Gaulle. He continued to walk ramrod straight. With that one defiant action he lifted France off its knees. "Mr. President, come back to Washington," I said. [President Bush famously did].

### **10. Courage (John McCain from Why Courage Matters)**

We are taught to understand, correctly, that courage is not the absence of fear, but the capacity for action despite our fears. The stories cherished most by all sinners whose consciences are not permanently mute concern the life-redeeming act of courage. They're not, however, as abundant in real life as they are in fiction. Better to look to the lives of good men and women who in a crucible risked or sacrificed their own security for someone else.

### **Applications:**

Let's keep the applications very simple. You wouldn't be on my BVC Opinion distribution list unless you were very good leaders and demonstrated many or all of these ten characteristics already. So, here is a simple, but hopefully helpful suggestion:

1. Assess yourself against this list of ten characteristics and pick one that doesn't or two that don't score as high as the others for whatever reason. If you choose "decision making" for example, google it, learn more about it, follow the lead of others who are better at it, take a course on it, read a book on it, whatever, do something to get better at it!
2. Then pick another one, "charisma" for example. We can get better at all of these, even honesty and charisma. Again, look at others who have charisma, learn from them, dress better, look better, work on your image, be more confident, friendly, articulate, whatever it takes.
3. If you want to be President (I mean a better leader) and you agree that developing these characteristics might help, then self-assess, learn more and work to get better!

### **And Finally:**

I work with many clients on these leadership traits and I am working on a couple of them, myself. And I intend to continue using what I learn with more clients in the future. If you want more thoughts about these books, or want to add your own, check out my blog. You can visit it at <http://richsteel.blogspot.com> This opinion and others are posted on my web site: [www.rsbsvc.com](http://www.rsbsvc.com)

To talk more about this and other topics, e-mail me (Rich Steel) at [rsbvc@aol.com](mailto:rsbvc@aol.com) or call me at my office on 610 388 3680 or on my cell at 610 324 8466.