

## **A bulldog who never gave up - Churchill's legacy to leadership**

***By David Parmenter***

Sir Winston Churchill is so iconic that his statute facing the Houses of Parliament simply says 'Churchill'. What is fascinating is that Churchill's success came after many calamities that would have floored a mere mortal. Churchill's lessons to leadership are quite profound and are different from many other leaders. I also believe there are lessons we can apply to leadership in a business environment.

### **Lesson 1 Always believe you have a legacy to leave the human race.**

Andy Warhol famously said everybody had 15 minutes of fame in them. We all have a unique mix of attributes, skills and experiences that can be put to use leaving a lasting legacy. The trick is to find it. It is not always obvious.

Churchill failed his time at Eaton in style. In fact you could say he refused to learn. It was only in the army,, with time on his hands, that he discovered his love of reading. It was his need to finance his Calvary horses that lead Churchill to earn some money as a war correspondent.

Churchill knew he had 'war' in his blood. He was a descendent from the famous warrior the First Duke of Marlborough, and was, by accident, born at Blenheim Palace., His parents were attending a dance at the palace, held by the current Duke, when his mother went into premature labour. In fact, over a five year period between 1895 –1900 he sought action in India, the North West frontier, Sudan, South Africa and Cuba.. Every time it got a bit quiet he wanted to get in the thick of it elsewhere. He achieved this in collusion with his mother and using all the contacts that the name Churchill granted.

Churchill performed a rare feat in the early twentieth century. He crossed the floor and joined the opposition in a move he calculated carefully. He realised that he would get nowhere in the Conservative Party, and they would definitely be losing the election. Churchill left the sinking ship. Whilst this alienation from the Conservative Party caused many problems later on, he achieved his objective, a Ministerial post in the new Government within nineteen months of his crossing 'the floor'.

If you were to make a one paragraph statement as to what your legacy is to be what would it say? Helping form this legacy in your mind gives meaning to life and helps put up a guiding star in the sky which will shine bright no matter what dark clouds are over you.

### **Lesson 2 Have a good hobby so in times of crisis you have a refuse.**

Churchill had three major career crisis's, the calamity of the Dardanelles (World War One), the wilderness years of 1930-1939 where he was consigned to the backbenches of the opposition, the calamitous defeat at the polls just months after Victory Day in 1945.

Lesser mortals would have consigned their life to depression. Churchill turned to his love of writing, his painting and his landscaping of his beloved Chartwell property. These hobbies kept him afloat and enabled him to build up his resolve to fight again.

Have you a passion that absorbs your time, that can be a 'safe house' when times are tough? If you do not have one you need to establish one ASAP.

### **Lesson 3 When you stuff up it is better to 'fall on your sword' as you will surely rise again soon**

Churchill was blamed for the botched Gallipoli expedition. He, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was dismissed and he resigned from Parliament to enlist back in the army. He became 'a must visit' curiosity in the trenches of Flanders.

It was, however only six months later that he was recalled to take up a role in Parliament.

By falling on his sword early on Churchill did not waste his energy on a hopeless cause. He gave less ammunition to his enemies in the House of Parliament.

When you have made a mistake, know that it will not define you or your contribution. Know that you will recover to fight another day. With this assurance, take the blame and move on.

#### **Lesson 4 Have a sanctuary where you can escape the maddening crowd**

When Churchill first saw Chartwell House he realised immediately its potential as a sanctuary for him and his family. I can assure all readers, that if they were to visit Chartwell they would want to swap houses immediately. The setting, the ambience, the design all lead to an almost perfect sanctuary.

As Churchill once said "Everyday away from Chartwell is a day wasted". It was in this creative environment that he could dictate his books starting in the afternoons and working long into the night.

His wife was given free range to modernise, decorate and extend Chartwell to fit the needs of the family. Churchill understood the importance of having a supportive partner, giving her the freedom to pursue her own goals. Lady Churchill was honoured by Britain and Russia, the latter for her efforts as Chairman of the Red Cross Aid to Russia.

Having a grand house does not in itself create a sanctuary. The difference is subtle. Do you feel a day away from your house is a day wasted. If not maybe your sanctuary is yet to be occupied.

#### **Lesson 5 The written word is mightier than the sword**

Churchill's first stint of fame came as a war correspondent. He wrote in a style that was user friendly, and a blend of fact, autobiography and descriptive text. He was blunt, to the point and did not hold back from saying what others feared to say. He would be critical of his superiors' handling of the army, their organisation, tactics, nothing was sacred. He went where 'angels feared to tread' and his dispatches become the 'must read' in high society back in London.

Time and time again he came back to writing and was awarded the Noble prize for Literature in 1953. Whilst it could be said he was not the most knowledgeable historian he wrote in a style that made history interesting. It was his writing "History of the English speaking peoples" that at last made him financially secure. He was so destitute after losing the premiership that a subscription was established and Chartwell was purchased from the Churchill's and then leased to them for the rest of their lives.

Far too many leaders today do not pay enough attention to the power of the written word in helping build your profile. This important point did not escape Obama who wrote his memoirs 'Dreams From My Father' four years before he ran for President.

Maybe it is about time you started to make your views, thoughts and learnings more public.

#### **Lesson 6 Never let a lack of a degree or a sound education hold you back**

Churchill was a total failure at school. He never went to University. He hated the establishment. He was whipped but never succumbed to the mindless mediocrity of learning for the sake of learning.

He won his 'tertiary spurs' later on in life when university after university gave him honorary degrees. He had, in fact, put himself through his own university. He studied and became an expert in many areas such as Navy, Army, Aviation and History.

Whilst tertiary education is a valuable asset never let it hold you back. If you succeed in life you will end up getting an honorary doctorate in any case.

### **Lesson 7 Learn to be a great orator.**

Churchill is remembered most for his great speeches. These were very carefully constructed in his great study at Chartwell. He would rehearse the words until he was sure 'they danced' that they sent a clear message to 'the common man'. He used words that a fourteen year old would understand.

His delivery was legendary; slow, deliberate and repetitive. He was an actor delivering a performance to his audience the people of Britain, the Commonwealth, and importantly the Americans.

Leaders need to realise that being a good orator is a vital part of leadership. Time and effort needs to be devoted to delivering a meaningful message. Special coaching and endless practice should be seen as an important investment rather than a chore.

### **Lesson 8 Manage PR.**

Churchill understood the power of public relations. He never missed an opportunity to present his ideas in the best light. The pictures of him with his 'V' for victory sign, or him holding a Tommy gun in his business suit standing over rubble are iconic.

His war time speeches, so carefully prepared, would be a must listen to by all who could get to a radio.

Whilst the press had often written ruinous headings about Churchill during his 'fall from grace', he realised the importance of the press and worked closely with them to promote the image of the bull dog who could never surrender. His use of radio and papers is unparalleled amongst modern day leaders. Had Churchill had the media we have today one can imagine the dramatic impact Churchill would have been able to make.

Start befriending the press, issue them useful copy, be available for comment, be not afraid to speak out on issues you feel passionate about. Find yourself a leader who has managed PR well and use their experience.

### **Lesson 9 Personal contact with key decision makers is vital .**

When you walk through Chartwell, Blenheim Place or his war rooms in Westminster you are struck by the amount of personal letters he wrote. These were not correspondence dictated to his secretaries but hand written letters or notes. Churchill knew who the important decision makers were and maintained regular contact. In fact, he devoted as much time writing to President Roosevelt as drafting major speeches to Parliament. Churchill's correspondence bypassed the cabinet and the bureaucrats helped forge the alliance with the United States.

Who are you in regular contact with? Make the time this week to dust off some contacts you have with decision makers.

## **Lesson 10 See the future.**

Like all great leaders Churchill spent a lot of time thinking about what the future had in store. He was the first to see the rise of Hitler as a major menace. After the war he understood the importance of a united Europe to prevent a further war. Churchill supported a practical rebuilding of Germany thus avoiding the harsh retribution levied against Germany following World War One.

Last, but by no means least, he saw the need to end the 'Cold War' as the atomic bomb made any form of warfare impossible between the super powers.

The key was that Churchill created an environment where he could think deeply, uninterrupted about what is going to happen next. He tried, as much as possible, to own the future.

Have you planned your working week to allow for some 'blue ocean' time? How about a Friday morning where you stay at your home office until lunchtime, where you spend time making all the strategic calls, finishing off the strategic reports and thinking about the future. Once you start doing this you will find it addictive.

## **Lesson 11 Stay close to scientists / technology advancements.**

Churchill had an unfailing regard for scientists and engineers. He gave them free range to create new methods of warfare. They came up with many inventions including the floating Mulberry harbours (key to the Normandy offensive), the bouncing bomb, and modifications to the spitfire Merlin engine enabling the plane to keep up with the V1 flying bombs.

He was conversant with technology, he understood it and he was able to communicate with 'techos' and inspire them to greater accomplishments.

How close are you to the creative techs in your organisation? If not how about taking one or two out for a great coffee.

## **Lesson 12 Understand your body rhythms and work patterns.**

Churchill worked late and rose late. He was not a morning person. He knew what made him efficient and kept to that regime, never allowing events to disorganise him. Even during the war he was only woken if the matter was urgent.

While working to 2am and arising for breakfast at eleven may not be your style it is important to develop one and ensure that you keep to it, fighting off the need to conform to the organisational requirements where you can.

## **In closing.**

Churchill was a flawed leader on a number of counts, he does not rate as a serving leader as Sir Ernest Shackleton clearly did. He was reckless with his life and with those he was in charge of. Yet through the many leadership traits he did have he left a legacy that will be remembered for all time. Whilst we will not all be able to leave such a legacy we can, and should leave a legacy that says we were here, we added up to something, we had something to say, we changed people lives for the better. Sir Winston Churchill does show us a way forward if we choose to learn.

## W riter's biography



David Parmenter is a writer, speaker and facilitator. He runs speaking tours in Australia, Asia and Europe. John Wiley & Sons Inc. published two of his books in 2007: *Key Performance Indicators – developing, implementing and using winning KPIs* and *Pareto's 80/20 Rule for the Corporate Accountant – better practices from winning finance teams*. David has also worked for Ernst & Young, BP Oil Ltd, Arthur Andersen, and Price Waterhouse. David is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. He can be contacted at [parmenter@waymark.co.nz](mailto:parmenter@waymark.co.nz) or telephone +64 4 499 0007. His recent thinking is accessible from [www.DavidParmenter.Com](http://www.DavidParmenter.Com)

