

Leadership Lessons from General George C. Marshall

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General George C. Marshall

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of hearing a presentation by author and futurist Jack Uldrich. The subject was his book, *Soldier, Statesman, Peacemaker: Leadership Lessons from George C. Marshall*.

Most of us know Marshall from our American History as a WWII general and the architect of the Marshall Plan. In addition to his role as a general Marshall served as Secretary of State, Secretary of defense, President of the Red Cross, the president's emissary to China and, to cap it all off, he won the Nobel Peace prize in 1953. President Harry Truman said of him, "The more I see and talk with him, the more certain I am that he is the great one of the age." Winston Churchill called him "the organizer of victory" and "the last great American." Tom Brokaw, author of the bestseller, "The Greatest Generation," called Marshall "the godfather of the Greatest Generation."

George C. Marshall was one of that rare breed of people who are highly successful in everything they do. Many people succeed in one area but rarely do we see leaders who are so consistently effective in such a broad range of areas. In his study of Marshall's life Uldrich discovered that, regardless of what challenge Marshall accepted, his life and leadership was consistently guided by a set of unchanging principles. In his speech, as well as in the book, Uldrich describes these nine principles that characterized Marshall's leadership. We all have something to learn from each of these.

1. The principle of integrity-Doing the right thing.
2. The principle of action- Mastering the situation.
3. The principle of selflessness- Serving the greater good
4. The principle of candor- Speaking your mind
5. The principle of preparation- Laying the groundwork

6. The principle of learning and teaching- Sharing knowledge
7. The principle of fairness-Choosing and rewarding the right people
8. The principle of vision-Focusing on the big picture
9. The principle of caring- Supporting the troops.

When I look at these and reflect on Jack Uldrich's remarks, I see three big themes.

1. **Integrity.** Marshall focused on what was right, not what was popular. To have integrity one must be willing to speak the truth (candor). Uldrich related a story of a meeting with FDR and his advisors very early in the war. FDR had decided that the US needed to expand the military to a specific size. As he asked his advisors for their opinions, one by one they eagerly agreed; until he came to Marshall. Marshall challenged him by stating that it wasn't just about troop size but also training and equipping. His focus on doing the right thing and courage to be honest about where he thought the president was wrong impressed FDR greatly. From then on General Marshall was one of FDR's "go to" people.
1. **Selflessness.** Marshall focused on others. Senator Richard Russell said of him, "Most men are slaves of their ambition, General Marshall is a slave of his duties." He was the logical person to lead the high-profile Operation Overlord (The D-Day invasion) but FDR felt that because of his broad knowledge of the global conflict he was needed in Washington. Marshall accepted his assignment delegating the high profile command to Dwight Eisenhower. The rest, as they say, is history. The important thing about this story is that Marshall never complained about Eisenhower getting credit for this great victory in the public eye. His concern was rightly on winning the war. He was also concerned first and foremost with the well being of the troops. His concern for properly training, preparing and equipping them was well known.
1. **Vision.** Marshall was a visionary and a master strategist. He quickly recognized the potential of the Jeep which gave the Allies a huge advantage in mobility over the Germans in Europe. He also crafted the "Germany first" strategy that stated that the US must first defeat Germany. After Pearl Harbor the citizens of the US were justifiably focused on defeating Japan. Marshall, however, saw the potential for a Germany that, if left unchecked, could dominate Europe and Russia. With access to all of these resources, they would be almost impossible for the US to defeat. Going after Germany first, while not a popular policy with the citizenry, was the right strategic decision.

As you lead the organizations you have been entrusted with, I challenge you to ask yourself these three questions: Am I leading with integrity? Am I focused on the success of others? Do I really see the big picture? All three are easy to say but very hard to consistently do. What made George C. Marshall a great leader was his ability to consistently DO each of these day after day. That is a great lesson in leadership.

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