

Logos University  
Leadership  
Ps. Jared Davis  
3/2/19

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Research Paper  
On  
George Washington  
and  
*The 21 Irrefutable  
Laws of Leadership*

George Washington is known as one of the greatest leaders of American history. Washington displayed many traits according to John C. Maxwell's book *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Washington showed true leadership during his time as commander in the Revolutionary war and as the first President of the United States. Here are some leadership traits Washington possessed in accordance with Maxwell's Laws of Leadership.

The Law of Solid Ground. According to John C. Maxwell, one of the most important leadership traits anyone could possess is trust- "Trust is the foundation of leadership" [CITATION Joh98 \p 58 \t \l 1033 ]. George Washington exemplified this trait. Washington would make it a point to always live by his word and principles. He was able to lead his troops with his high moral standards. They trusted him because they knew he was a man that had integrity and kept his word. Washington was known to be aloof- almost to the point of being cold.<sup>1</sup> However, with his distance he was always tempered by humility and he was never self-righteous. He was unlike the typical European monarchs who were always seeking self-gain and did not exercise restraint. Washington's troops trusted him, and because of this, they knew that he would keep their needs as priority over his.

The Law of Priorities. After Yorktown in 1783 the Continental Army had not been getting paid for the time they served, and promises of payment in the form of newly-printed money and property were going unfulfilled. This had gone on for years. Their supplies were running low. Throughout the war these men had been sleeping in fields with rocks for pillows and had been so inadequately supplied that they would have to walk barefoot which left the snowy fields red with their blood. Many troops decided to

part ways and leave the formation because they believed they would never get paid for their service. This is where Washington showed that he understood priorities. Thinking like Maxwell, “[Washington’s] desire was to get each person to play to his potential and to put the best possible team on the floor” [CITATION Joh98 \p 181 \t \l 1033 ]. It was Washington’s goal to have his soldiers in tip-top shape, even if others disagreed with the way he went about it. Some officers believed Washington was too moderate with pressing these issues of payment to Continental Congress, and they began to come against him in what’s now known as the Newburgh Conspiracy.<sup>ii</sup> They came up with a plan to replace Washington and marched towards Philadelphia to demand more aggressive action from Congress. When Washington caught wind of this, he knew he had to take action. He gathered his officers and gave a speech about their collective sacrifices. While giving this speech to his men, he famously searched his pocket for some spectacles and said, "Gentlemen, you must pardon me. I have grown old in the service of my country and now find that I am growing blind." [ CITATION For65 \l 1033 ] After this speech many of his men were moved to tears. Washington reiterated his promises of the troops’ interests and needs within the republican system. After this the Newburgh Conspiracy collapsed, and the men renewed their faith in Washington. Washington knew at this time in the war he had to prioritize the needs of his men, and he led by the Law of Priorities.

The Law of Magnetism. John Marshall is said by many to be one of the greatest judges in American History. In 1802 Marshall served as Chief Justice for 35 years in the Supreme Court during a time when the job lacked integrity and was the weakest branch of the federal government. He showed true character and was known to be charismatic

and transformed an institution which the Founding Fathers had given relatively little thought to into the pillar of the nation. Marshall states his most informative years were when he served in battle alongside George Washington, whom he called “The greatest man on earth”[ CITATION Do19 \l 1033 ]. Washington’s example of leadership would inspire and guide Marshall for the rest of his life. Marshall believed Washington was judicious, brave, and a leader of men. Washington was the man who commanded then struck where he could and stood firm when he had to. In 1798 after Washington had left his post-war retirement and presided over the Constitution Convention of Philadelphia, he had summoned Marshall to Mount Vernon to tell him to run for Congress. Marshall obeyed Washington and in 1799 after Washington died it was Marshall who eulogized him on the floor of the house, as “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen”[ CITATION Hen00 \l 1033 ]. After Washington’s death Marshall wanted to defend the handywork of his former friend because he knew Washington was a man of principle. In 1790, Marshall joined the Federalists to support the policies of Washington. Marshall believed in Washington and wanted to defend his legacy. According to John C. Maxwell Law of Magnetism, people do what people see. Marshall witnessed firsthand Washington’s leadership, and he took those principles and applied them in his life.<sup>iii</sup>

The Law of Respect. After the victory of Yorktown and the Revolutionary war appeared to be over, George Washington was still concerned that some of the British troops occupied parts of the newly independent country. Washington wanted to keep the Continental army together but knew the troops had their own priorities. They were tired of the army life and never receiving the wages that were due for their service. The rise of talk of a new ruler began to escalate. Colonel Nicola sent Washington a letter

expressing his feelings of needing a ruler to lead and have Washington become their King. Washington replied immediately expressing justice for his troops and rejecting the idea of a monarchy in America with himself as king, stating “Banish these thoughts from your mind.” When Washington became president, it was not because he was the best political leader of his time, such as Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, or James Madison. He had very little education and had not even traveled to Europe. He would take no part in political disputes and would often calm people down to get them back to their main job. The people respected him for this. He led by having the respect of the people.

The Law of Sacrifice. Before Washington was inaugurated, he wrote: “My movement to the chair of government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of execution.” He knew the position he was about to take would be difficult and was dreading it. Washington could have retired after the role but chose to sacrifice and take on the role of national leader. He knew during this time a great leader needed to step up and take on the role for the newly independent country, so he did just that. He put the country’s needs before his own. In doing so, Washington showed his leadership by the Law of Sacrifice.

The Law of Timing. After the Revolutionary War America gained their independence and were now in desperate need of a leader. There was controversy whether the colonies would become one country or several and how it would be governed. America was governed according to the Articles of Confederation following the war. Because of this the government was left weak and unstable. There was tension rising among farmers and those lending them money. They were desperately in need of

a leader. Washington was asked to attend the Constitutional Convention to help draw up the new constitution. Washington knew it was a time in the nation where they needed a great leader. Although he wanted to return to his quiet home and leave governing the nation to others he rose to the position.

Law of Navigation. While George Washington was attending school at a young age he was exposed to teachings of how to survey and land measure. He was a rigorous outdoorsman and learned how to lay lines and chart tracks throughout Virginia. In 1748 he was asked to join a surveying party lead by William Fairfax. This is where he was recognized for his skills as a surveyor and got more experience while he was living in the west. In 1749 he started his career as a professional surveyor and was commissioned from the College of William and Mary. He was 17 when he completed his first survey and was on his way to a respectable career. Washington went on for two more years as a professional surveyor and was able to acquire new land for himself. At one time Washington owned close to 70,000 acres between Potomac and Ohio Rivers. By the end of his life, Washington only surveyed 200 of them, but that experience as a surveyor still greatly benefited him while serving during the war. He served as lieutenant colonel and was placed in this position because of his knowledge of map-making. Washington was able to lead by navigation because of his knowledge of surveying.

In conclusion Washington had many leadership skills according to John C. Maxwell's *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. He was able to use these skills throughout his career as a surveyor and while in command during the Revolutionary War. Ultimately, with his experience, knowledge, and capability, he still to this day is known as one of America's greatest leaders. He has left a legacy to be remembered.

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