

# The Leadership Factor

When I think of recent effective leaders, two names top the list: Winston Churchill and Ronald Reagan. Using their sharp personalities, these guys motivated others to work effectively for a cause and, of course, that is what true leadership is all about.

Faced with a powerful German Wehrmacht that had rolled over Europe, Churchill showed iron resolve while other British leaders broke down. He simply told British subjects that there would be no surrender and they would fight to the finish. Churchill's crisis leadership defeated the dreaded Nazis as much as anything else.

President Reagan's leadership was of a different sort. He promoted an optimistic pride in America and convinced millions that the USA was a noble nation. It was Reagan's tough resolve, however, that fatally damaged the Soviet Union's evil empire. While Churchill was blunt and blustery, Reagan was charming and smooth. But both men accomplished great things by sheer willpower.

Today, President Barack Obama is in the leadership slot. Relatively young and untested, the president is facing tough situations in Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq as well as back home with the economy and health care. So far, Mr. Obama's leadership has been shaky. To be fair, he's only been in office eight months, but the polls show that many Americans are rapidly losing confidence in his ability to deal with vexing problems.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Fouad Ajami said this: "The Obama devotees were the victims of their own belief in political magic... in the newly minted U.S. Senator from Illinois, they saw the embodiment of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

“All this hero-worship before Mr. Obama met his first test of leadership.”

Now the president has been tested and it has not gone well. He tried but failed to explain his health care vision, giving his opponents an enormous opportunity to beat him down. Americans respond to clarity. Obama-care is so complicated Moses couldn't explain it.

When I interviewed Barack Obama nearly a year ago, I could not ascertain his leadership potential. The talk was intense and Obama showed a quick mind. But what about his resolve, his ability to stand firm on principle? It was impossible for me to tell while facing him.

But the Reverend Wright situation gave me pause. A true leader does not compromise on certain things. Wright is an America-hater. He believes the country is a deeply flawed, racist enterprise. Somehow, Barack Obama embraced Wright as a pastor and as a friend. What kind of leadership does that show?

I believe President Obama is a man who is brilliant at accommodation. His gifts lie in mass communication and acceptance of situations that might help him, even if those situations are dubious. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as accommodation can lead to great success. But leaders lead based on belief, not accommodation.

It is too early to tell whether Barack Obama is in over his head as the world's most powerful man. But his leadership profile is beginning to sag. We are living in complicated, perilous times and Americans know it. They want decisive, clear direction from their President.

Right now, it's not there.