

# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 935 How Colin Powell Viewed Leadership

Colin Powell had a very distinct way of looking at the topic of leadership Leadership. We'll talk about that, next, on The Extra Point.

Colin Powell passed away a few days ago. In a distinguished career, he became the 12th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military post in America. Eight years later, he was appointed the 65th U.S. secretary of state. He likely would have been elected president, but he declined to run for office.

General Powell had a clear understanding of what leadership is about. When asked, he said: "Leadership is all about inspiring people with a sense of purpose."

He wanted to simplify his vision, in order to show each individual how their daily work fit into the big picture for the organization.

"Leadership is all about followership," Powell told Rice University students in a commencement speech. "Leaders put followers in the best possible environment to accomplish a mission. It works in any endeavor in the world where humans come together to achieve a purpose."

He said human beings need to have a purpose, not just missions and goals. Further, he strongly believed that only when a leader is clear on the purpose should they communicate it consistently to every level of the organization.

"Leadership is all about inspiring followers," Powell said. "When you make people feel like their work is part of something larger than themselves, you'll win their trust and respect."

In his book, *It Worked for Me*, Powell told a story about a documentary he had seen on the Empire State Building. The final scene took place in the building's subbasement where five men were taking out mountains of trash. The narrator asked the men, "What's your job here?"

Powell said one of the workers smiled and said, "Our job is to make sure that tomorrow morning when people from all over the world come to this wonderful building, it shines, it is clean, and it looks great."

The man's job was to take out the trash. His purpose was greater. His purpose was to make sure the masterpiece of a building left visitors in awe.

Powell recognized strong messages we all can learn from. He said: "The building management can only achieve their purpose if everyone on the team believes in it as strongly as the smiling guy in the subbasement."

In addition, he added: "Good leaders set vision, missions, and goals. Great leaders inspire every follower at every level to internalize their purpose, and to understand that their purpose goes far beyond the mere details of their job."

Colin Powell also possessed a keen knowledge of people. While he was an early riser and worked long hours, he rarely came into his office before seven a.m. He knew that if he did, his workers would be in at 6:30. During the 1991 Gulf War, he often slept in his office but it was a tightly kept secret, so other members of the team wouldn't follow his lead.

Here are 13 tidbits of advice he would give any prospective leader.

1. It ain't as bad as you think. It will look better in the morning.
  2. Get mad, then get over it.
  3. Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it.
  4. It can be done!
  5. Be careful what you choose.
  6. Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision.
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7. You can't make someone else's choices. Don't let someone else make yours.
8. Check small things.
9. Share credit.
10. Remain calm. Be kind.
11. Have a vision. Be demanding.
12. Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers.
13. Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

He told the New York Times, "Anybody who becomes a senior officer had better have some political instincts or you're going to get ground up. We are a political nation. It is not a dirty word."

In an interview with the same newspaper in 2007, he analyzed himself this way: "Powell is a problem-solver. He was taught as a soldier to solve problems. So he has views, but he's not an ideologue. He has passion, but he's not a fanatic. He's first and foremost a problem-solver."

That's a pretty good thing to be. Colin Powell was 84.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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