

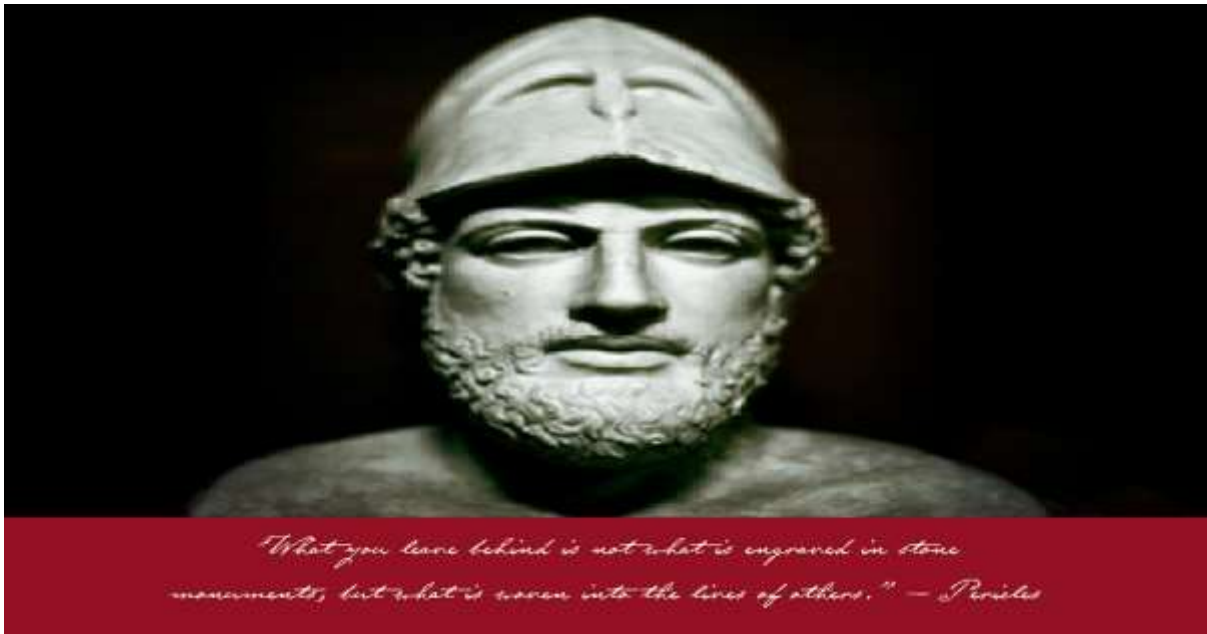


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7 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM PERICLES



Background:

The name Pericles in Greek means *'Surrounded by Glory'*, which became fitting for the leader he was to become and what he achieved during his lifetime. Pericles could be summarised as the following, innovative, bold, tough, intuitive, a risk taker and stoic. Pericles is credited for making Athens the cultural, religious, political and economic centre of Greece. He paved the way for the larger empire of Greece and his doctrines pertaining to majority elected governance system are among the earliest seeds of democracy as we know it.

Pericles lived between 495 – 429 BCE, and was the son of a wealthy aristocratic family in Athens. Two people had the greatest influence on Pericles' life, Damon the musician and Anaxagoras the philosopher. These men influenced Pericles' political style and taught him to be an effective orator.

In 462, Sparta requested military aid from Athens. The General at this time – Cimon, encouraged the Athenians to cooperate with the Spartans. However, the Spartans embarrassed the Athenians by rejecting their assistance when they arrived for battle. This was a turning point, Pericles won the people's support for his stance and opposition to assisting the Spartans. Pericles became the new leader of the democratic faction.

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When Pericles took the reins of Athens and established a democracy, Persia was a threat. Under his leadership the Persians were held at bay and peace between both the Greeks and the Persians was achieved. Also significant at this time, various states of Greece were in turmoil and fighting against one another. Pericles managed to bring peace by doing away with the hostilities and infighting through the Five Years' Truce of 451.

7 Lessons of Leadership from Pericles:

1. There will always be haters.

Famous words by Pericles were, *'All who have taken it upon themselves to rule over others have incurred hatred and unpopularity for a time; but if one has a great aim to pursue, this burden of envy must be accepted, and it is wise to accept it'*.

Pericles did not let the thoughts of others get in the way of what he wanted to achieve. As a leader there will always be people who show a distasteful opinion towards you and try to put up road blocks. Pericles reminds us that it is important to keep focused and allow these challenges make you stronger.

2. Be innovative.

Before Pericles, men were not paid for their service to the State. One of Pericles' innovative democratic reforms were the payment of state officers. The poorer citizens of Athens would have been unable to afford to give up their time to provide service to the State, therefore the system would never have worked unless the officers were paid. Pericles created a policy where the officers would receive remuneration of an obol a day. This act awarded Pericles much popularity with the citizens of Athens. Albeit this policy would have caused a stir amongst other leaders and people in power. Pericles once said, *'Although only a few may originate a policy, we are all able to judge it'*. While only the brightest and bravest of leaders have the ability to create something new and make innovative decisions, only one can form an opinion about it.

3. Be different and own it!

Cimon was a General at the time the following Greco-Persian Wars. He had a friendship with Sparta and was a firm believer in conservatism, which was completely against the policy of Pericles. Pericles expressed his disgust of the Spartans and his thirst for change. Cimon tried to keep Athens the same, he began to lose influence over his people besides the well-to-do citizens who admired the conservative land power of Sparta. Athenians who were less disposed towards Sparta began to turn to Pericles who shared their distrust of Sparta. Pericles was an outspoken critic of Sparta and eventually severed ties, including exiling those in Athens who covertly or overtly supported Sparta. Pericles used his influencing skills to lead the people to decisions he thought were correct. Pericles stated, *'Having knowledge but lacking the power to express it clearly is no better than never having any ideas at all'*. If Pericles had chosen to keep quiet or had decided to follow the same leadership path as Cimon, then Pericles would not have gained the support of the Athenians and, in turn would have never been their leader.

4. Have the end prize in mind!

Pericles once said, *“The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it”*.

From the beginning of his leadership, Pericles knew what he wanted to achieve as a leader. To expand the Athenian Empire. This was never going to be an easy task and there were many setbacks and battles that had to be overcome, but Pericles had this aim in mind in all the actions he undertook.

The principle applies very much for today. All good leaders must have the will.

5. *“We do not imitate, but are a model to others”*.

Pericles was upright and extremely convincing as an orator. He was a smart politician who managed to sway opinions in his favour. Along with Ephialtes, Pericles succeeded in reforming the constitution governing Athens. He was re-elected every year for 15 years as a General, and Pericles did not lose his reign till his death. Pericles was not only a smart man he had the ability to motivate his people. He would never have been able to achieve his aim of increasing the Athenian empire without the support and hard work of his people.

While it is all well and good to be great at your role, as a leader you will never have real impact unless you have the ability to motivate your people and ask everything of them.

6. *“Better die standing than live kneeling”*.

Pericles believed that the greatest dangers pave the way for the greatest glories. He knew what he was undertaking was dangerous and he could be killed at any moment in his battles, but he would have rather died trying, than lived not knowing. Being a risk taker was one of Pericles strongest qualities and without it he would not have achieved half, if any of the great things he did in his life.

As a leader today, taking risks are necessary while it may not be risk of death, decisions a leader make could cause grave consequences but in turn could make all the difference between making a dream a reality.

7. Endure, endure, endure!

Pericles proved to be a master handler of crises over the years. He quashed many revolts within the Greek empire. He ensured that there was available and sanctioned land to accommodate the growing population of Athens and other provinces. He successfully managed the crisis of Boeotia and Euboea which he had lost control of and that threatened key supply routes to Athens and facilitated Athenian control of the sea. Being able to handle and push through tough situations and showing resilience is a core characteristic of a successful leader.

Conclusion:

Those who live in the democratic world owe a great deal to Pericles for having the vision, innovation, courage and the tenacity to stand firm against a tide of criticism and fear.

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Contact us

Sydney p +61 2 9253 0950

Melbourne p +61 3 9653 9510

w www.blenheimpartners.com