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## SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL – PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP

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*"Continuous effort – not strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking our potential"* Sir Winston

Churchill

We have written on numerous occasions about Sir Winston Churchill and lessons we can acquire from his most impressive life.

Whilst we think of Sir Winston Churchill as one of the twentieth century's most courageous leaders, that was not always the shared thought and opinion of his contemporaries. In fact at the commencement of the 1930's, Churchill had found himself on the periphery of power, and most of his party colleagues, friends and pundits had written him off as a prospect for leadership. He had twice switched parties, was not trusted within the conservative party and was as a result becoming increasingly isolated.

It was during this time that Churchill openly warned of Hitler's militarism and rearmament of Germany, but the British political class thought of Churchill as a warmonger rather than Hitler. Churchill did not shy away from his beliefs and wrote articles and gave many speeches highlighting Hitler's growing menace and his military and potential European ambitions. He became known as an irritant. The then British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, tried unsuccessfully to remove Churchill from the parliament.

When Hitler and Germany invaded Poland the credibility of many of the British elite was shattered. Peace in our time and the policy of appeasement had utterly failed. Only one man had during this time consistently spoken out about Hitler, warning of probable danger to his own detriment. Churchill had felt tremendous resentment from those within his own party, now he was the person with the credibility to lead Britain in their darkest days.

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As noted by Churchill, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

Born in 1874 at Blenheim Palace, Churchill developed a keen interest in the military as a child and attended Harrow and later Sandhurst. He became a cavalry officer and taught in places including the North West Frontier, Sudan and South Africa. He also at the same time wrote for the major papers as a war correspondent.

Churchill's first attempt at entering politics in 1899 was unsuccessful. However, he was elected as a conservative Minister of Parliament in 1900. Noted as a political maverick throughout his career, Churchill joined the Liberal Party in 1904 and re-joined the Conservative Party twenty years later. In the 1930's he was in the so called political wilderness, his opinions had fallen out of favour with the conservative party and he lost his position in Government.

When war broke out in 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain recalled Churchill to London as First Lord of the Admiralty. When the Germans invaded Norway, then France, Chamberlain resigned and was replaced by Churchill to lead Britain.

After the war, the Conservatives were surprisingly defeated and Churchill became leader of the Opposition. He was again appointed Prime Minister in 1951 and four years later would leave Number 10 for the last time and retire to Chartwell, where he lived until his death in 1965.

Winston Churchill was not the perfect man. He had many vices and failings. The fact that he is so human makes him a great leader. Some of his lessons are below:

## 1. Churchill stood up for what he believed

During his parliamentary career Churchill was often viewed as a political pariah. By the 1930's, his career was considered over and he was seen as the sad, old man of the House of Commons. He was one of the few voices that warned of the rise of Hitler and a newly ascendant Germany. No one wanted to listen to the truth, but he persisted and spoke about it anyway against torrid criticism.

## 2. Perseverance

Churchill wasn't one to give up easily. He was a person that was always working. His family was not particularly rich, so he had to rely on his skills and knowledge to make a living. He could not take the easy options. He was a man who could sit down and write, and he wrote a prodigious amount, something in the order of 10 million published words. He would write volumes at a time, not pausing, focused on its completion. When he was defeated in 1945 at the election after taking the nation to victory, did he quit? No, he simply became leader of the opposition and secured the appointment of Prime Minister again in 1951.

## 3. Belief in the greater good

As a wartime leader, Churchill had many tough decisions to make. This included the sinking of the French Fleet at Oran, the bombing of Dresden and, if true, suppressing the knowledge of the impending bombing of Coventry. Historians and academics will continue to debate his decisions, but they will not debate if he believed he was doing the right thing and making the best choice for Britain and allies.

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## 4. Risk taker

Churchill was an adventurer and travelled the world many times before such things were commonplace. He joined the military and saw action over the British Empire. This led to his publications for the newspapers in Britain and it started his writing career which he would use to keep him financially secure throughout his life.

## 5. Hunger for knowledge

He was well read, and could memorise works of literature, even though he was not a particularly great student. However he wrote books of history and many masterful speeches.

## 6. Broad mindset

Whilst he had a reputation as a warmonger and formidable leader, he loved bricklaying and was also an avid painter. The painting for him kept the Black Dog, what he called depression, at bay. His work was respected and he painted over five-hundred canvasses and even wrote a book on painting called "Painting as a Pastime". His paintings are sought after in the art world.

## 7. Confidence

Churchill believed he was destined for greatness. He believed his life had to have purpose. This belief guided his actions and decisions in life. Confidence is needed if you are to be a leader or if you wish to achieve. His lesson is you are the source of all your success and if you do not believe that you can achieve great deeds, then you simply will not. Why should others believe in you if you do not?

## 8. Communication

Churchill inspired others through his communication and the language that he used. As a writer, he excelled and he firmly believed in the written word as a tool for leadership. He wrote his speeches, creating the flow and structure to maximise the effect. He later wrote "A History of the English Speaking Peoples" and his own six volume account of World War II.

## 9. Oratory

Churchill believed not only in the written word but also the spoken word. His speeches were with feeling, confidence and steadfastness, and many are renowned as the greatest speeches in history. He said "it was my ambition, all my life to be a master of the spoken word. That was my only ambition."

## 10. Productive

Churchill needed to be kept busy, whether working, painting, reading or writing. He liked a routine, consisting of rising late and working from bed until the early afternoon before he got up and worked into the night, often until 4am.

## 11. Willingness to fight

Sir Winston Churchill was a man who fought hard for what he believed in. He was prepared to take on his own party and aggressors to his country and to the world. Throughout his life when faced with tremendous obstacles he displayed, a unique fighting character, that when confronted he came back and as he said, never surrendered.

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