

On My Mind
4/27/07

What is leadership - that elusive quality we'd all like to see in our legislature and our executive branch - particularly in these dire times? There doesn't seem to be a definitive description, but for starters, here's a list of qualities, extracted from one of those articles that people tend to e-mail to all and sundry. It spells out 10 C's as components of leadership:

"A leader has to show CURIOSITY. He has to listen to people outside of the "Yes, sir" crowd in his inner circle. He has to read voraciously, because the world is a big, complicated place. A leader has to be CREATIVE, go out on a limb, be willing to try something different. You know, think outside the box. A leader has to COMMUNICATE. I'm not talking about running off at the mouth or spouting sound bites. I'm talking about facing reality and telling the truth. A leader has to be a person of CHARACTER. That means knowing the difference between right and wrong and having the guts to do the right thing. A leader must have COURAGE. I'm talking about [guts.] (Another word was used which I will leave to readers' imagination.).... Swagger isn't courage. Tough talk isn't courage. To be a leader you've got to have CONVICTION, a fire in your belly. You've got to have passion. You've got to really want to get something done. A leader should have CHARISMA. I'm not talking about being flashy. Charisma is the quality that makes people want to follow you. It's the ability to inspire. People follow a leader because they trust him. A leader has to be COMPETENT. That seems obvious, doesn't it? You've got to know what you're doing. More important than that, you've got to surround yourself with people who know what they're doing. You can't be a leader if you don't have COMMON SENSE. The biggest C is CRISIS. Leaders are made, not born. Leadership is forged in times of crisis. It's easy to sit there with your feet up on the desk and talk theory....It's another thing to lead when your world comes tumbling down.

Curiosity, creativity, ability to communicate, character, courage, conviction, charisma, competency, common sense, ability to handle crises. Grammatically a little unbalanced, since the terms aren't all the same part of speech, and missing the critical ingredient of integrity, but certainly a list worth pondering. (As reader, you might want to think about what other qualities such a list should include.)

The list comes from the book "Where Have All the Leaders Gone?" written by Lee Iacocco, an author, former president of Ford Motors, and probably best known for his "rescue" of Chrysler corporation. According to a review of the book on amazon.com, Iacocco, now 82, "has seen the U.S. overcome some of its worst crises, including the Great Depression and World War II, through great leadership. (emphasis added) As the CEO of Chrysler Corporation, he brought the company back from the brink of bankruptcy...."

The list is intended as criticism - and rather blunt at that - of the current U.S. president - by enumerating all the qualities the president lacks - the full text of the e-mailed excerpt makes for some fun reading. It is quoted here because so much of it could, just as easily, pertain to qualities lacking in the present CNMI administration.....

The excerpt can be found at < <http://depression2.tv/d2/node/261/> >, a web site which promises that "We will strive to bring you insightful news, information, and analysis as we observe the progress of this incredible time we are living through together." The web name comes from the belief by the "Depression2 team" that the world is entering into a depression that they view as "a period both of cleansing and rebirth."

The book's title was no doubt derived from Iacocco's query, "Where are the voices of leaders who can inspire us to action and make us stand taller? What happened to the strong and resolute party of Lincoln? What happened to the courageous, populist party of FDR and Truman? There was a time in this country when the voices of great leaders lifted us up and made us want to do better. Where have all the leaders gone?"

As may be obvious by now (or one could have expected it to be the first item in the column), I did not attend the Governor's State of the Union speech this morning, nor that of the Washington Rep - for two reasons: Fridays is when I write the column, and I like staying on schedule, and my daughter arrived from Jakarta this morning for an all-too-short 6-day stay. It will be interesting to see what his "surprise" announcement is, and what his proposed cure consists of. I know, though, that both speeches will be reprinted in the media - for which many thanks to both papers - so all I'll really miss is the pomp and ceremony.

Members of both houses of the Legislature have been working on putting together proposals to amend the CNMI Constitution in one form or another - proposing everything from abolishing the municipal councils, increasing the terms of the municipal councilors, reducing the budget of the legislature, and election of the attorney general, to requiring run-off elections for governor, mayor and Washington Rep. In fact, in the last four months alone the House has proposed twelve such initiatives. In the same period, the Senate has only proposed five - all on similar subjects.

One legislative initiative has passed both houses, and been forwarded to the Election Commission for inclusion on November's ballot: House Legislative Initiative 15-1, which would create a Higher Education Commission that would be given the responsibility, among others, to credential post-secondary educational institutions.

Fortunately, in this instance both houses seem willing to follow the law, which requires that funding to educate the general public be provided for each legislative initiative that reaches the ballot. With funding as tight as it is, looks like both houses will have to - or ought to, if they don't - prioritize the amendments on the table, and pare them down to a small enough number for which funding can, perhaps, be found.

My preferences for those on the table? Reduce the legislative budget, abolish the Municipal Councils, require run-off elections.

Short takes:

While it might look logical, on the surface, to shut down the services of the government's veterinary services, since a private veterinarian is available on island and government should not be duplicating services offered by the private sector, in this case that argument is not valid. Dr. Edgar Tudor, owner of Paradise Island Animal Clinic, has protested the "competition" from the Department of Public Lands' As Perdido clinic, which Tudor claims is causing him to lose business. The fact is that the fees charged by Tudor run far beyond what many boonie-dog owners can afford, and as a result, not only do boonie dogs proliferate, but they do so in poor health, suffering from mange, worms, and other afflictions. The government in this case is providing a

safety net - a long-standing and very legitimate function of government - to those who otherwise could not properly take care of their pets. Now if Tudor chose to lower his rates.....

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Speaking of pets, two fun events coming up are Saipan's "Best of worst" pet show on May 12, at the CPA football field, where pets will be judged on ugliest, fattest, most uneven ears and shortest legs, among other attributes - to be conducted by the Beautify CNMI! committee on animal welfare - and a car rally on May 26, sponsored by Beach Road magazine. The rally will actually be a cross between a scavenger hunt and an IQ test, according to the flyer distributed at the recent Chamber of Commerce meeting, and will be limited to the first 60 cars entered; details are available from Susan Marchitte at 234-6449 or 235-7645.

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While Guam and the CNMI businesses and agencies don't seem to work together all that often - seemingly wanting to maintain their independence from one another? - yet another instance where the CNMI might want to consider following Guam's example is in teaching students how to deal with money. In keeping with a National Teach Children to Save Day established by the American Bankers Association, bankers from three of Guam's banks went out into the schools to teach children from grades K-12 everything from recognizing the difference between needs and wants and how interest makes money grow to budgeting, saving and related skills they'll use throughout their lives. Sounds like something the CNMI's students could use as well.....

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I'm not sure of Dr. Thomas D. Arkle, Jr.'s background, but I must say his lengthy rebuttal to questions about Tinian's justification for an ISL system for its airport struck me as informed, reasonable, logical and informative - quite satisfactorily answering several of my questions, at least. His letter appears in both of today's local papers.

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Devotees will already know that the CNMI's only Indian restaurant, "Taste of India" is closing at the end of this month. Formerly located in Susupe, the restaurant did not do nearly so well when it moved to Garapan and was forced into months of near-idleness during the construction of the Garapan Paseo, nor had its traffic increased once the Paseo was completed. So it's been decided to move to Guam, where hopefully, the market is better. It's departure will be a major loss on the epicurean scene - while Saipan sports many Chinese, Japanese and Korean restaurants, this was the only Indian one.

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New Movies: one - a three-hour double-feature rated "R" for its hyper-violence. What's left? Three more R's, two PG's, one PG-13, one PG.

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