

# 3 Leadership Principles from the Revolutionary War That Still Apply Today



On Sunday, January 21, 1776, in a small New England church, Pastor Peter Muhlenberg delivered one of the most dramatic sermons of his career.

Coming to the end, Peter Muhlenberg turned to his congregation and said, “In the language of the holy writ, there was a time for all things, a time to preach and a time to pray, but those times have passed away.” As his congregation looked on, Muhlenberg stepped from behind the pulpit and removed his black robe to reveal the uniform of a military officer. He declared, “There is a time to fight, and that time has now come!”

Outside the church on that chilly New England Sunday morning, drums began to beat, while inside 162 men followed Muhlenberg to the back of the church to enlist in the Continental Army. The following day, 300 men from Muhlenberg’s church followed him off to war. They eventually became the 8th Virginia Brigade fighting for liberty.

After the war, Muhlenberg continued to serve his country. He was a member of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives not once, but three times. He was also elected to the Senate in 1801.

Peter Muhlenberg’s example helps us to understand 3 essential leadership principles that still apply today.

## Good Leaders Inspire Others

At times, leaders use brute force in attempting to inspire their teams by declaring, “We *must* do this now, so let’s get moving.” This approach does not tap into anyone’s intrinsic or extrinsic motivating stimuli that would cause them to enthusiastically join the effort. They may do what the leaders says, not because they *want* to, but because they *have* to.

Sales people also attempt to describe what their product is and how well it works without motivating a buyer. Sometimes a different message is needed in order to motivate others. Martin Luther King inspired a movement by describing a dream, and President John F. Kennedy rallied the nation to put a man on the moon and return him home safely by casting an inspiring vision.

Peter Muhlenberg didn't declare what needed to be done, he explained *why* it had to be done, and 300 men in his congregation were so moved by why they should join the Revolutionary cause, they were willing to leave their families to fight the War of Independence.

People don't buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it.

## **Good Leaders Are Willing to Get Out of Their Comfort Zones**

Eighty per cent of people live in their comfort zone afraid to step outside the imaginary walls that limit learning and leadership. In their 1908 study, psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson discovered that too little anxiety (comfort zone) results in poor performance.

Interestingly enough, increased anxiety causes an increase in performance. There is, however, a balance between increased anxiety and extreme anxiety. Much like our comfort zones, extreme anxiety can reduce one's performance. Comfort zone leadership stifles potential, limits growth, and nurtures regret.

Max Depree once said, "We cannot become what we want to be by remaining what we are."

## **Good Leaders Lead by Example**

Credibility is one of the most important traits a leader needs to have. People who say one thing and do another fail to earn the credibility necessary to lead others. As a leader, your team, associates, family, and friends are watching everything you do. A leader's values should align with their actions in every area of his or her life whether at home, at the office in the boardroom, or on the field coaching Little League. A leader's reputation is determined not by what he says, but by what he does.

Peter Muhlenberg was a great soldier. He became a Major General under Commander-in-Chief George Washington. He passed away in 1807 at the age of 61. He was a great patriot as can be seen on his tombstone which reads, "He was Brave in the field, Faithful in the Cabinet, Honorable in all his transactions, a Sincere Friend and an Honest Man."

Strive to inspire others, reach for great success by stepping out of your comfort zone, and lead by example!