

Defining a Moving Target

"Leadership is the ability to get good things done with the help of others."

This seemingly simplistic common sense definition of leadership from the Kellogg Foundation has considerable merit. Implicit in it is the notion of achieving *agreed upon goals*, a shared sense of *vision* and *values*, the willingness to *follow*, the importance of *communications*, and the merit of *teamwork*.

Effective public organizations and high quality leadership go hand in hand. While many leadership qualities are taken as a given, (e.g., dedication, charisma, engagement, communication), the public leader must also draw upon the tools and constraints afforded by being a part of a government. Thus, public leaders must also work within legislative and policy frameworks, the agenda of elected officials, the scrutiny of the media, and electoral and budget cycles which constrain both innovation and long-term strategy. Decision making occurs in a highly proscribed environment and decisions are enacted often with minimal to no new resources.

Public leadership is often a thankless role, fraught with public scrutiny and the condemnation of the press. Environmental pressures make it difficult to exert organizational or individual control. Given these constraints, you might expect that few leaders emerge in public organizations. This is not the case. As citizens we have seen stellar examples of leadership throughout the public sector, at all levels of organization, at all levels of government, and in all branches of government.

Many of these have been used countless times as exemplars of the public leader. The valiant leadership of Rudolph Giuliani as Mayor of New York after the terrorist attacks of September 11; Indianapolis Mayor Steven Goldsmith's innovative leadership in using technology to enhance public service; Lee Kuan Yew, a former Prime Minister of Singapore, and his visionary leadership which made possible the "Singapore Miracle"; the quiet heroic leadership of Jim Lovell during the fateful Apollo 13 mission to the moon; the persistent leadership of India's Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle for self leadership of the nation. A all of these leaders are well known - and every day, other examples are enacted through public organizations, sometimes quietly, sometimes with great fanfare.