



**Remarkable
Leadership
and
American
Presidents**

by Kevin Eikenberry

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Remarkable Leadership & American Presidents

Dear Friend,

This special report is being published just a few weeks before the 2008 presidential election.

This race between Senators John McCain and Barack Obama has been an interesting journey.

Beyond my interest in policies and ideas *as a voter*, I've been closely following this race from a leadership and learning perspective. Specifically, I've been watching, researching and commenting on three things:

- The leadership lessons we all can learn from this very public event.
- The leadership qualities people think are most important for U.S. Presidents.
- The leadership skills exhibited by the candidates themselves.

What follows in this report is some of what my team and I have learned through this campaign cycle.

We're sharing – for the first time – results from two different presidential leadership surveys. Both were based on twelve leadership competencies from my book [Remarkable Leadership](#). One asked which leadership characteristics are most important for American Presidents and which previous American Presidents were most effective in each of those competencies. The other asked (more recently) which of the final two candidates is more skilled in each of those twelve leadership competencies.

Results for both of those surveys follow.

Plus, we've consolidated some of my writing about the leadership lessons you can learn from the campaign trail.

Whether you are a political junkie or rarely read the paper, there are things you can learn from the political process that you can apply in your organization. Regardless of your political beliefs, I hope you will use these findings and ideas to improve your leadership results.

You are Remarkable!



Kevin Eikenberry
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Remarkable Leadership & American Presidents

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Leadership and the Candidates

Who's the Better Leader?

We asked which presidential candidate — John McCain or Barack Obama — is the *best leader* based on 12 leadership competencies identified in Kevin's book, *Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time* (www.RemarkableLeadershipBook.com).

750 people took our survey and the overwhelming response is that Senator Barack Obama is the more skilled leader.

As you can see from the two graphs on the next page, Senator Obama took 10 of the 12 leadership competencies and was within 1.5% points on the other two.

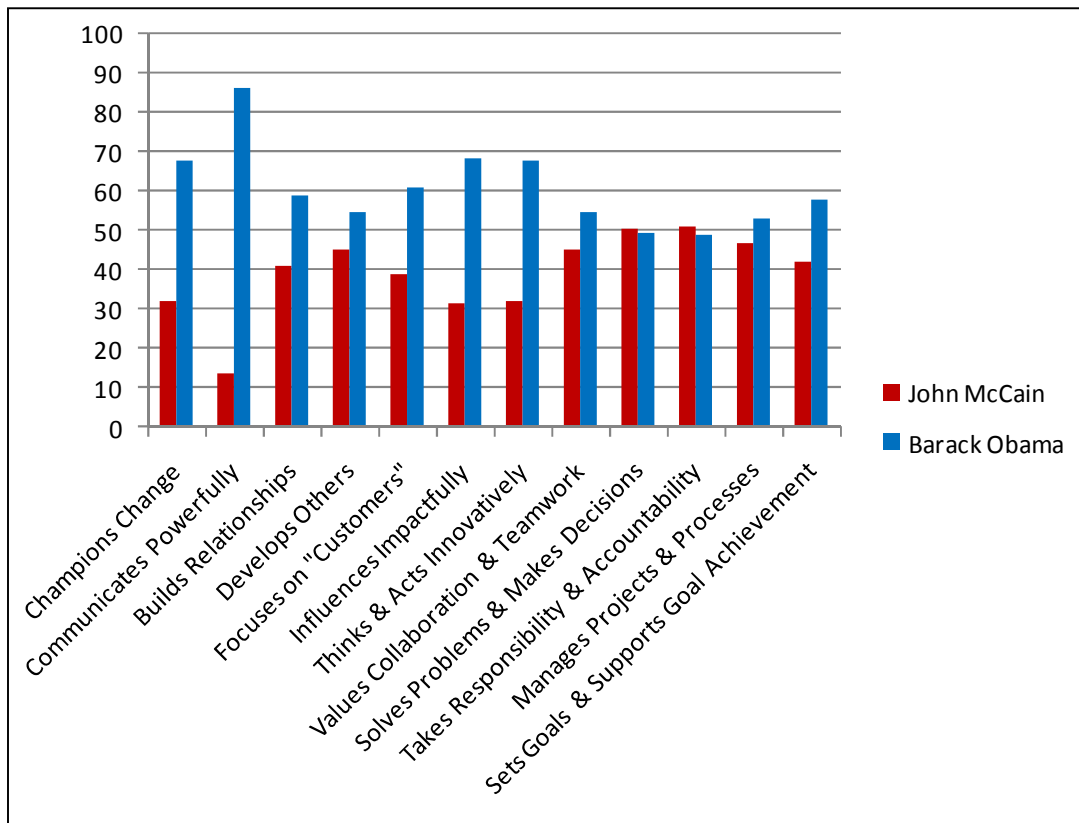
Comments from Voters

“ I had a hard time completing this survey. I know who I am voting for and I know why based on my values and why I love this great country. However, it pointed out to me how I do not think hardly any of the politicians I know have strong leadership qualities. ”

“ Perhaps surprisingly, these votes would have been reversed three or four months ago and my positive responses would have been (for the other candidate). How much this is due to media perception is a question I debate internally. ”

“ This was difficult as it illustrates how little we know about the candidates' leadership. In particular, even though I actively follow the campaigns, I know very little about the teams that surround the candidates. ”

Who's the Better Leader?



	John McCain	Barack Obama
Champions Change	32.0%	68.0%
Communicates Powerfully	14.0%	86.0%
Builds Relationships	41.2%	58.8%
Develops Others	45.3%	54.7%
Focuses on "Customers"	39.0%	61.0%
Influences Impactfully	31.5%	68.5%
Thinks & Acts Innovatively	32.0%	68.0%
Values Collaboration & Teamwork	45.2%	54.8%
Solves Problems & Makes Decisions	50.7%	49.3%
Takes Responsibility & Accountability	51.4%	48.6%
Manages Projects & Processes	47.1%	52.9%
Sets Goals & Supports Goal Achievement	42.2%	57.8%



Leadership Competencies of American Presidents

Remarkable Leadership and Past Presidents

The second survey we conducted asked two primary questions:

- What is the most important leadership competency for American presidents?
- Which former president best represented each competency?

238 people responded to the survey and their answers are represented on the graphs that follow.

Comments from Voters

“ While all of the leadership skills are important to a successful presidency, I think it is imperative that the president can see beyond his/her ideas. Decisions affecting many must be made with a global un-selfish basis, with help from many peers with differing points of view to arrive at the most optimal conclusion for the majority and keep in mind the mandates of the constitution.

”

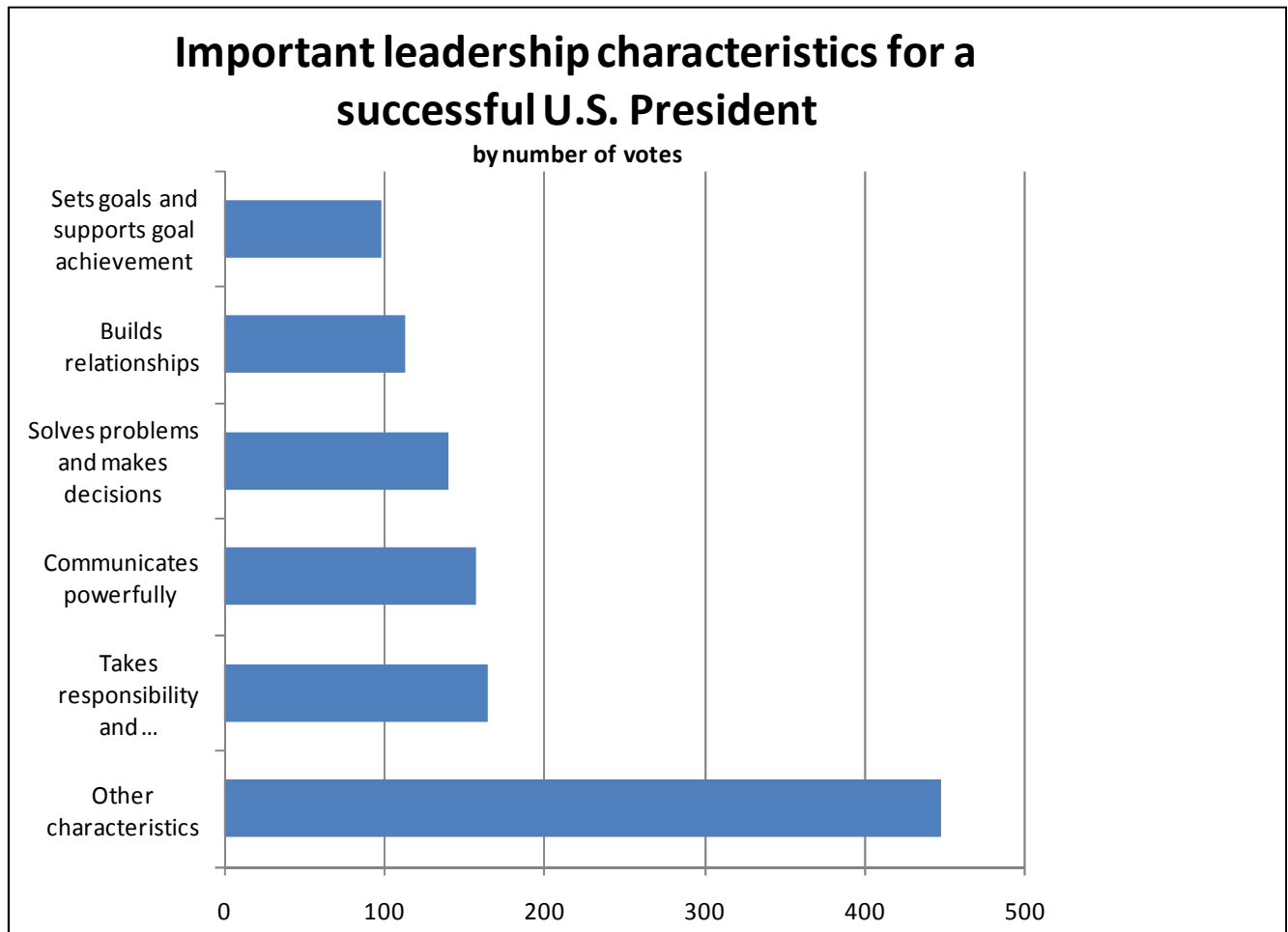
“ They were all remarkable men and I don't know of the achievements of most. Many I admired; a few I did not. It's a tough job, heavily criticized by a partisan system and reporting and most people in the few form opinions with but a few actual facts.

”

“ Remarkable leadership is leadership where conviction outweighs the general noise of the media. p

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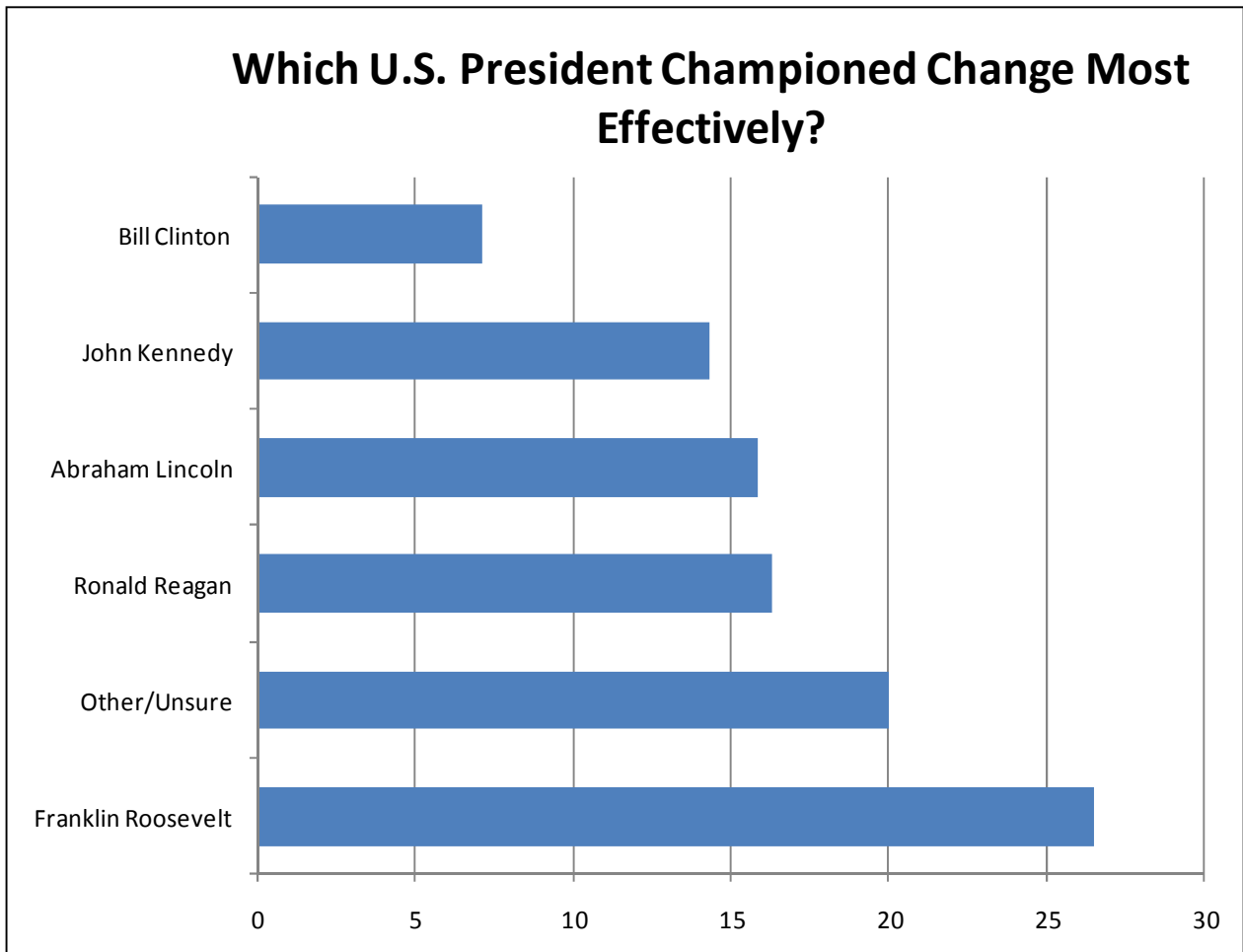
Most Important Leadership Characteristics



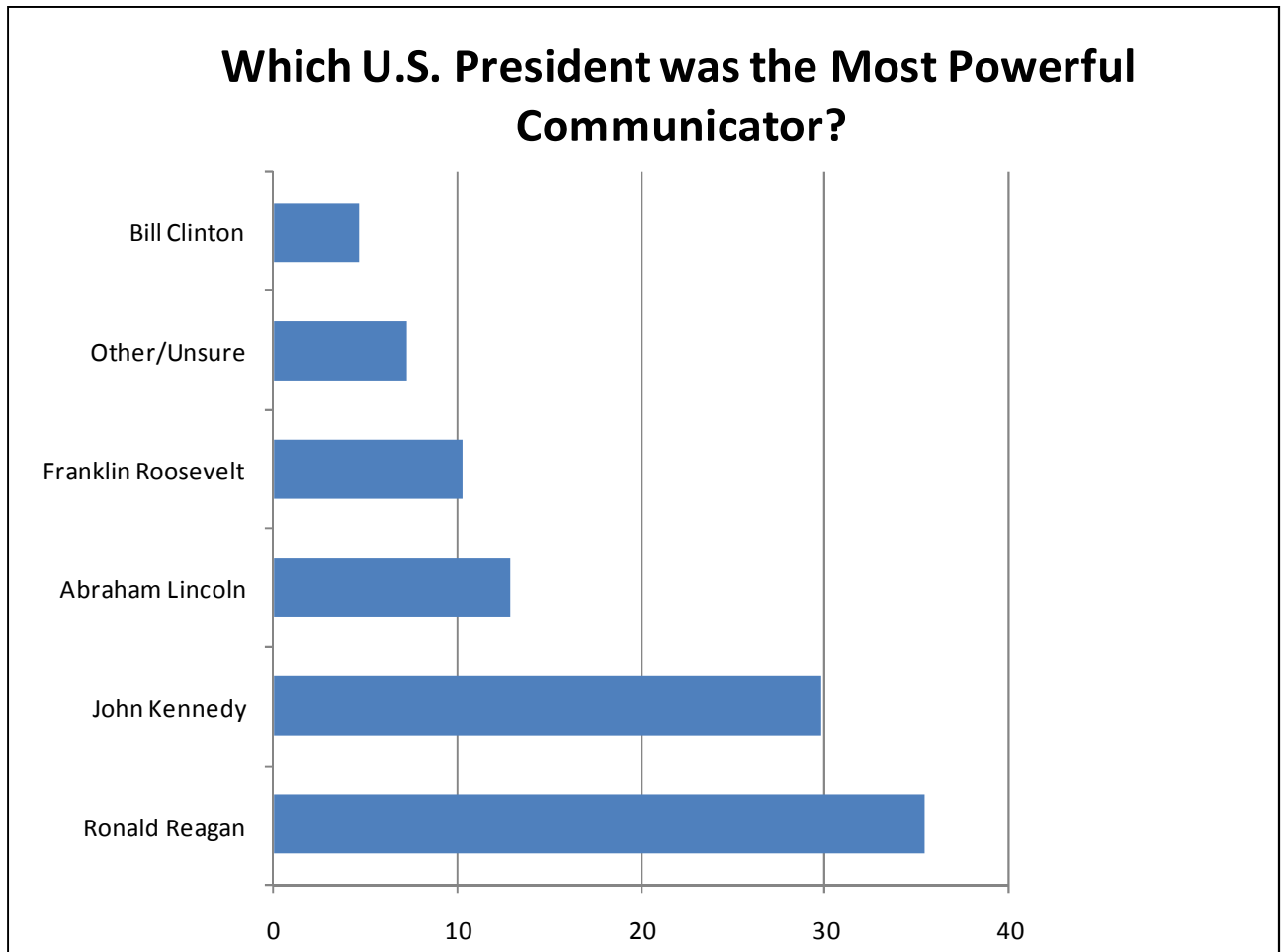
Past Presidents who meet four of those top five characteristics:

Abraham Lincoln
Franklin Roosevelt
John Kennedy
Ronald Reagan

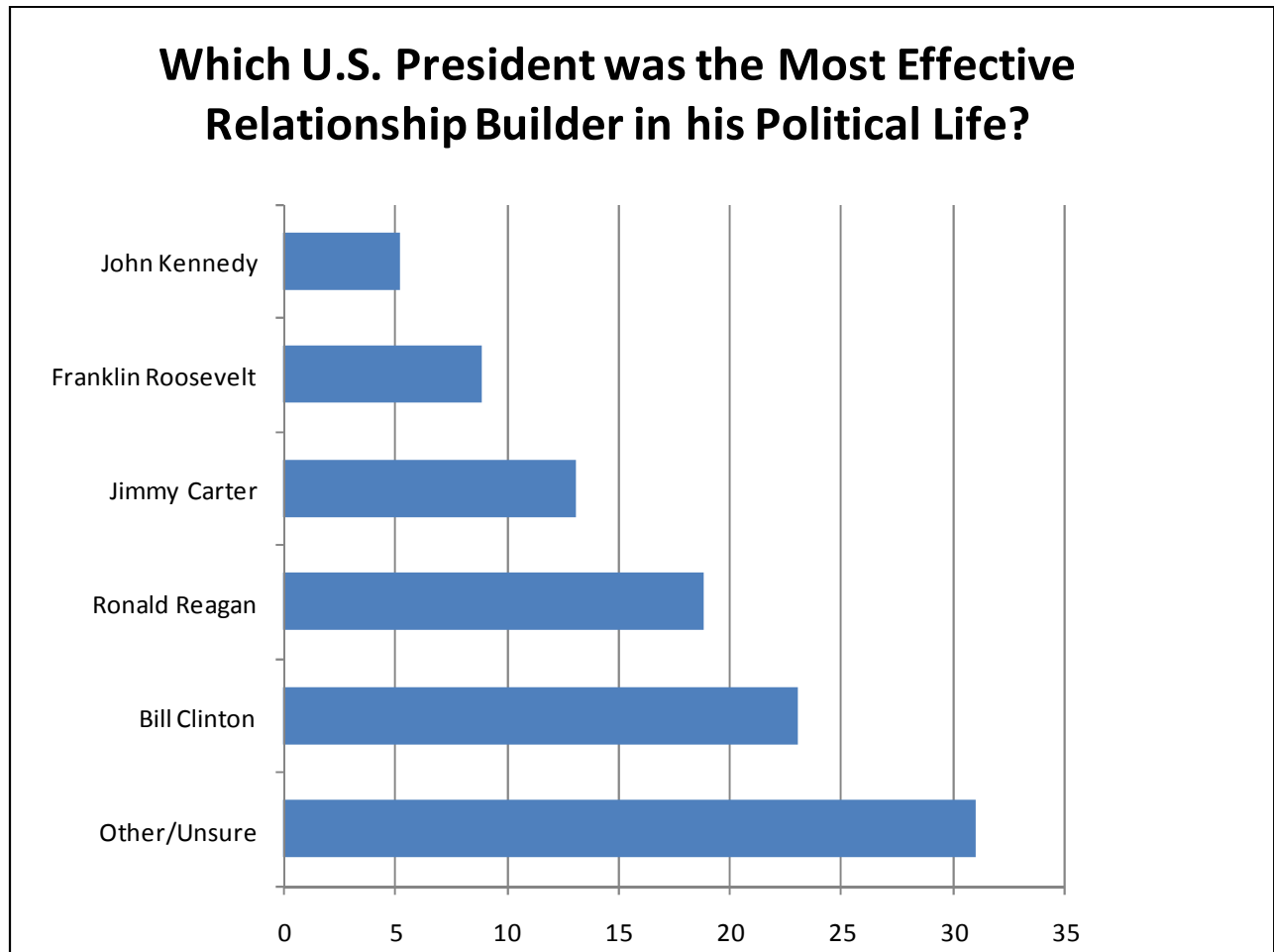
Past Presidents and Change



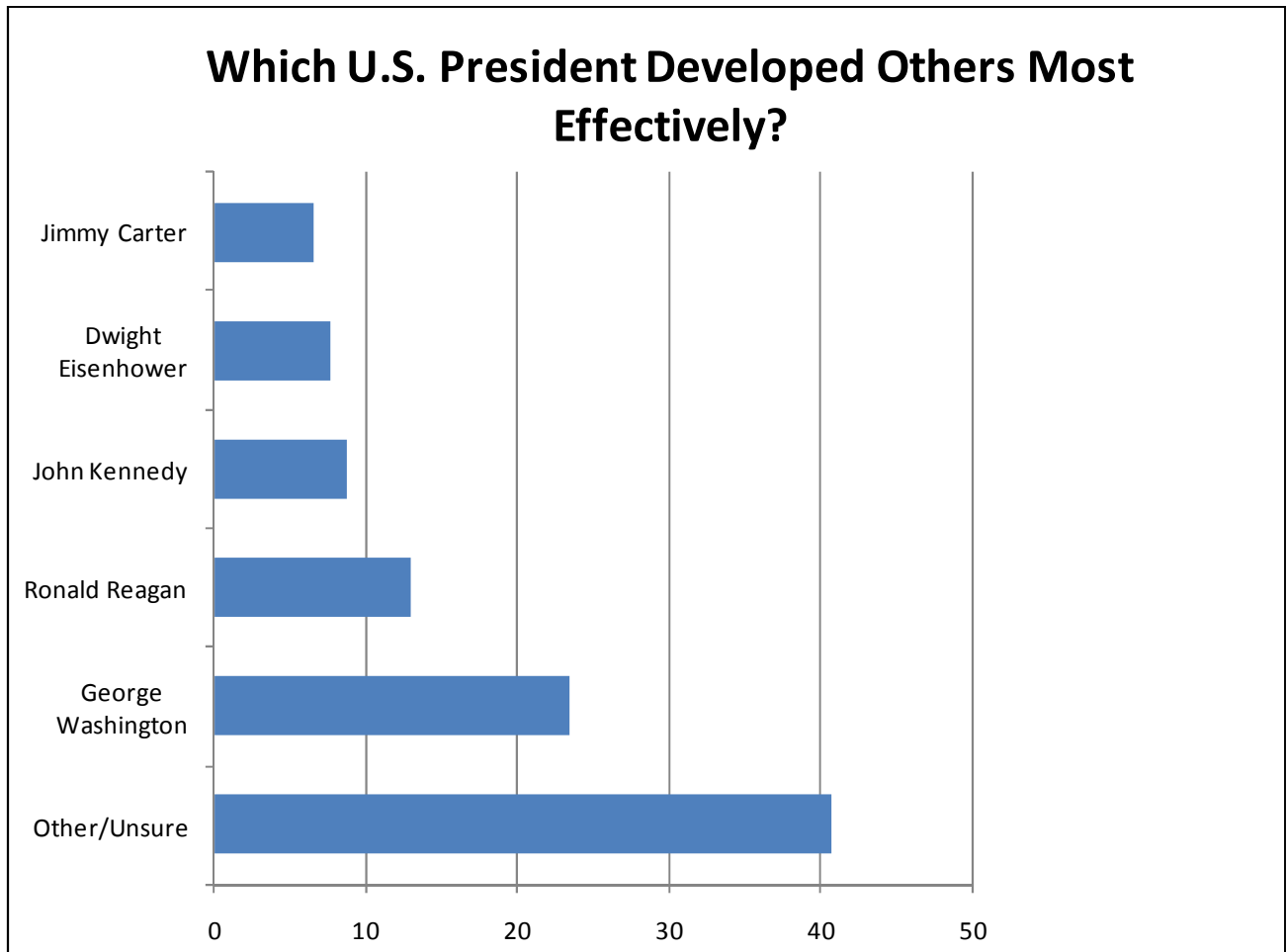
Past Presidents and Communication



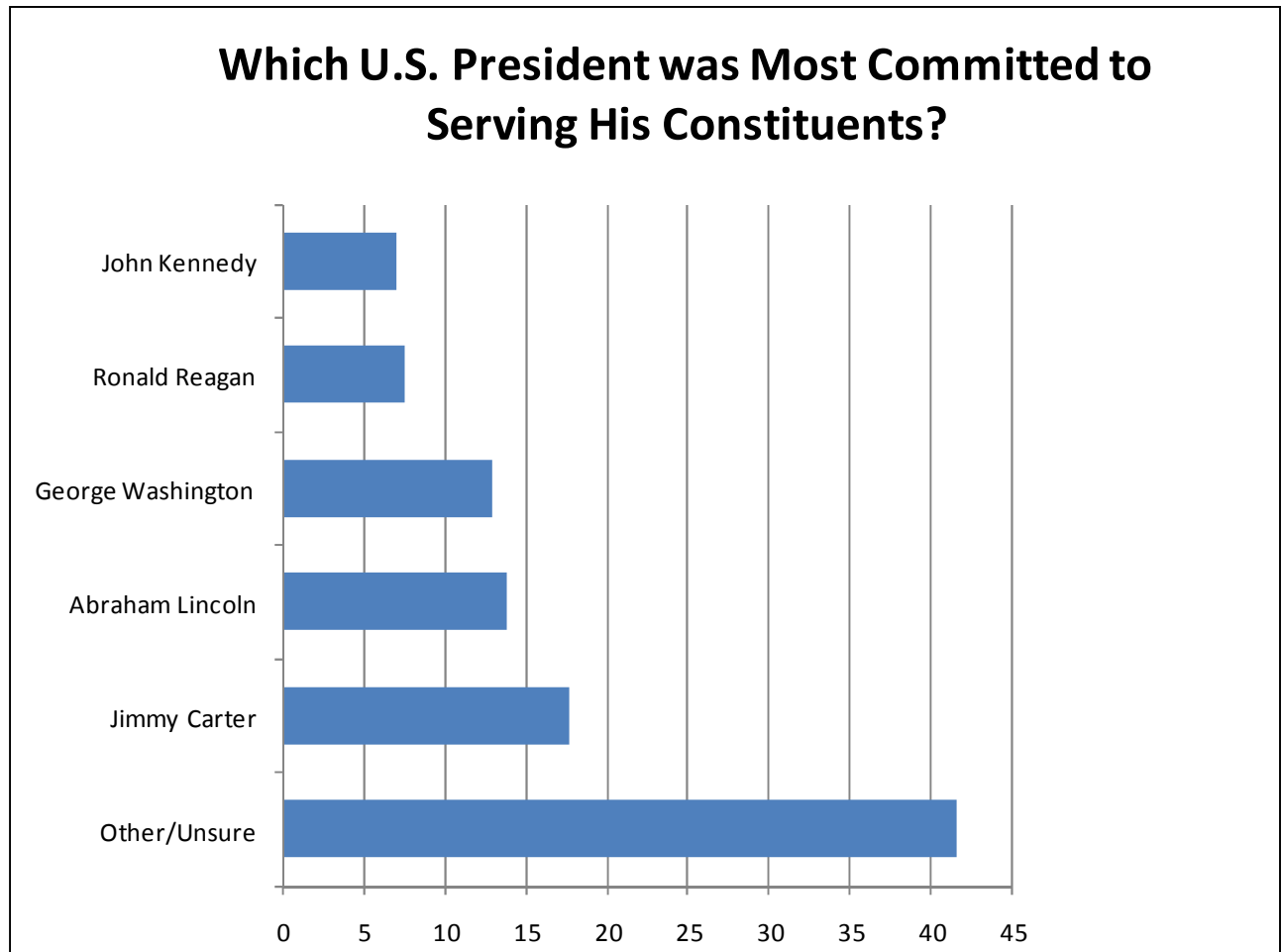
Past Presidents and Building Relationships



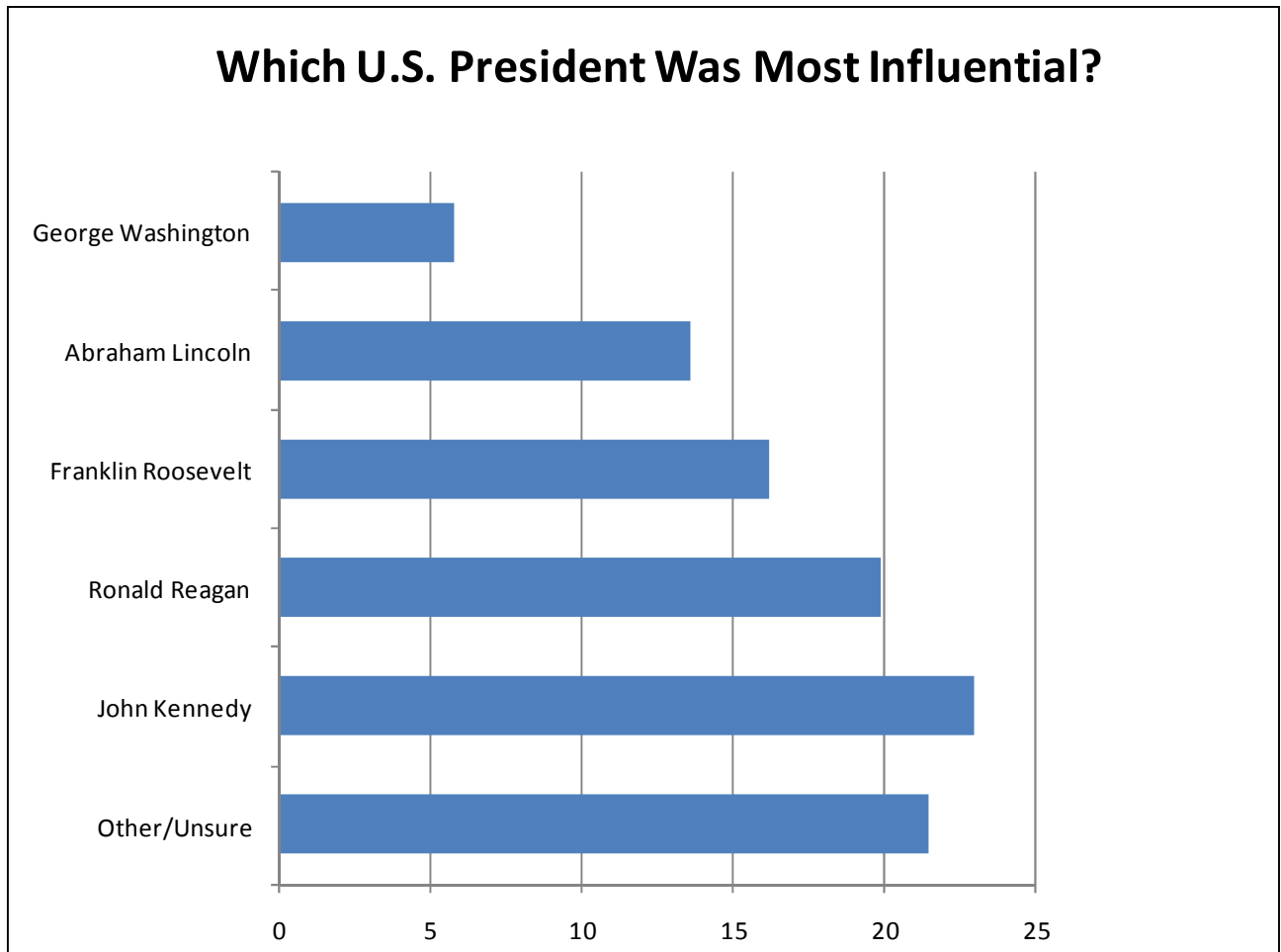
Past Presidents and Developing Others



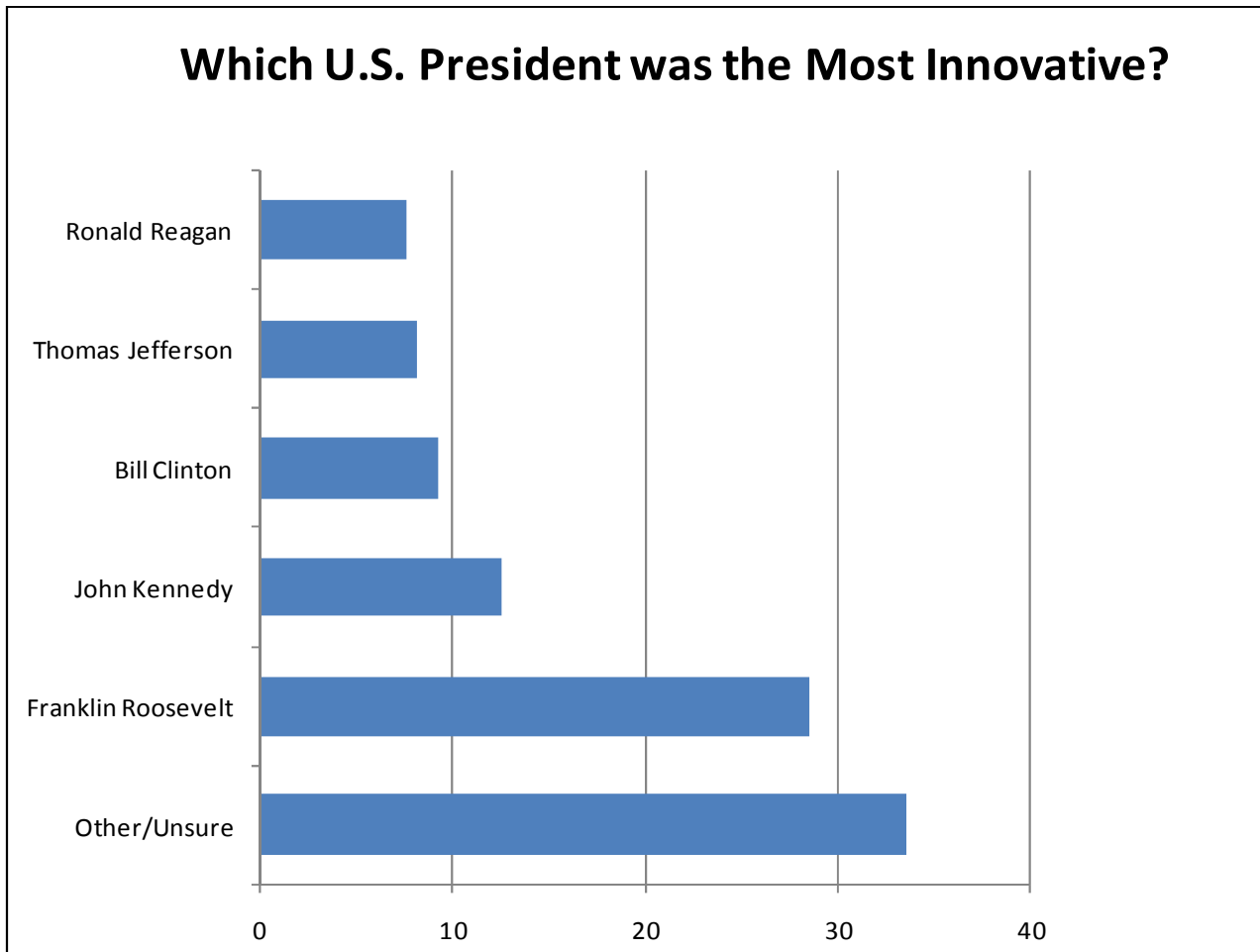
Past Presidents and Serving Constituents



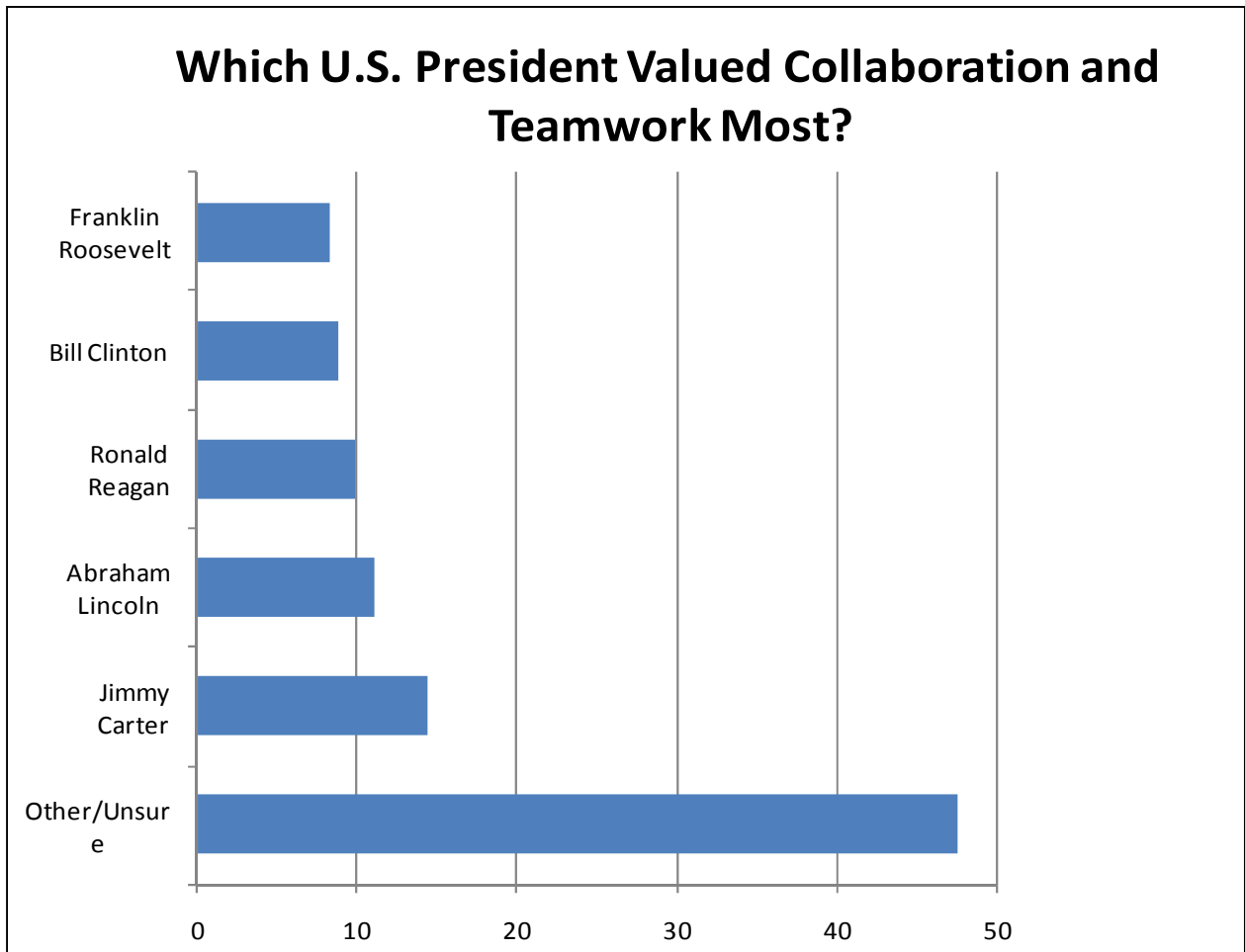
Past Presidents and Influence



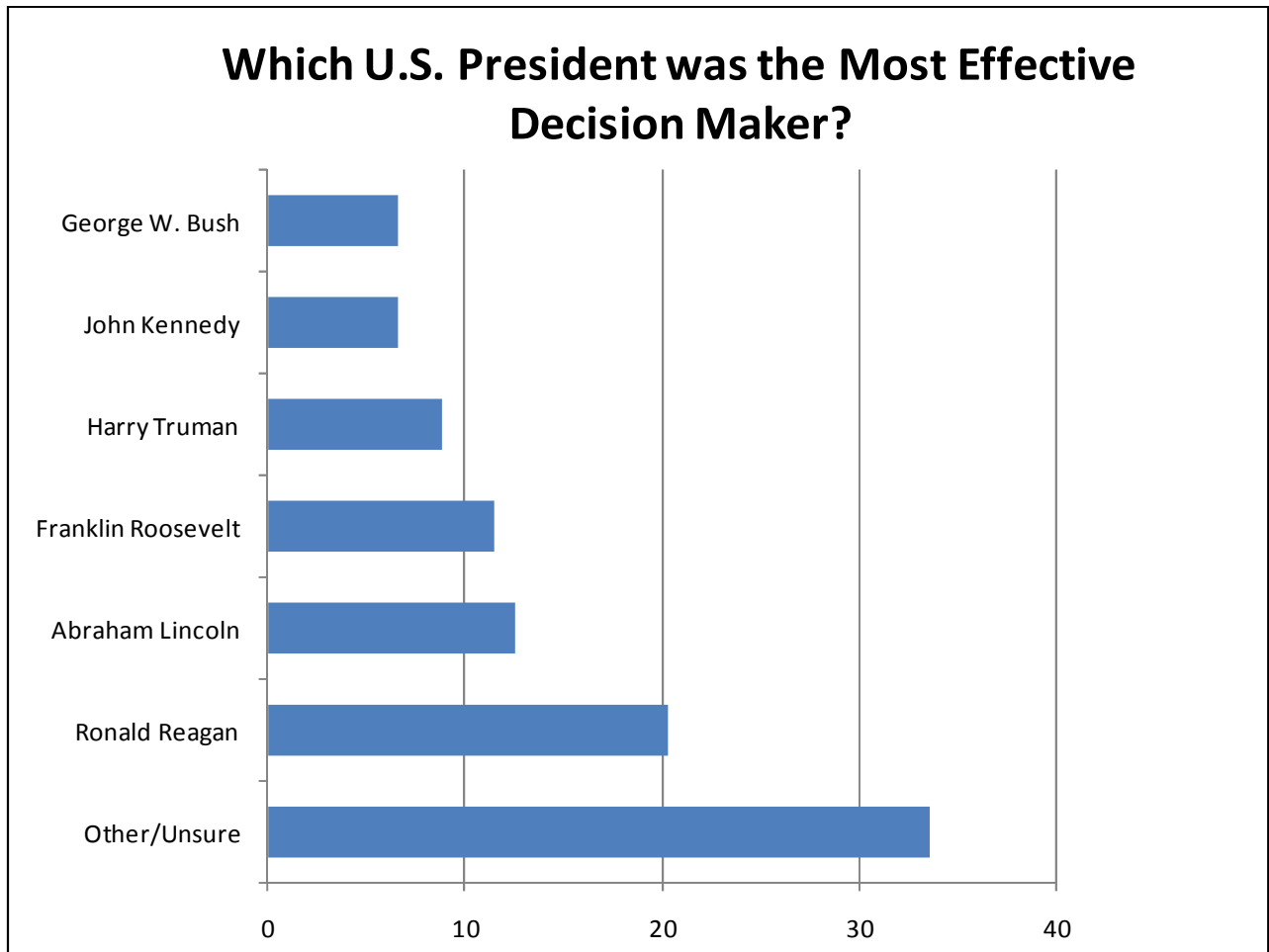
Past Presidents and Innovation



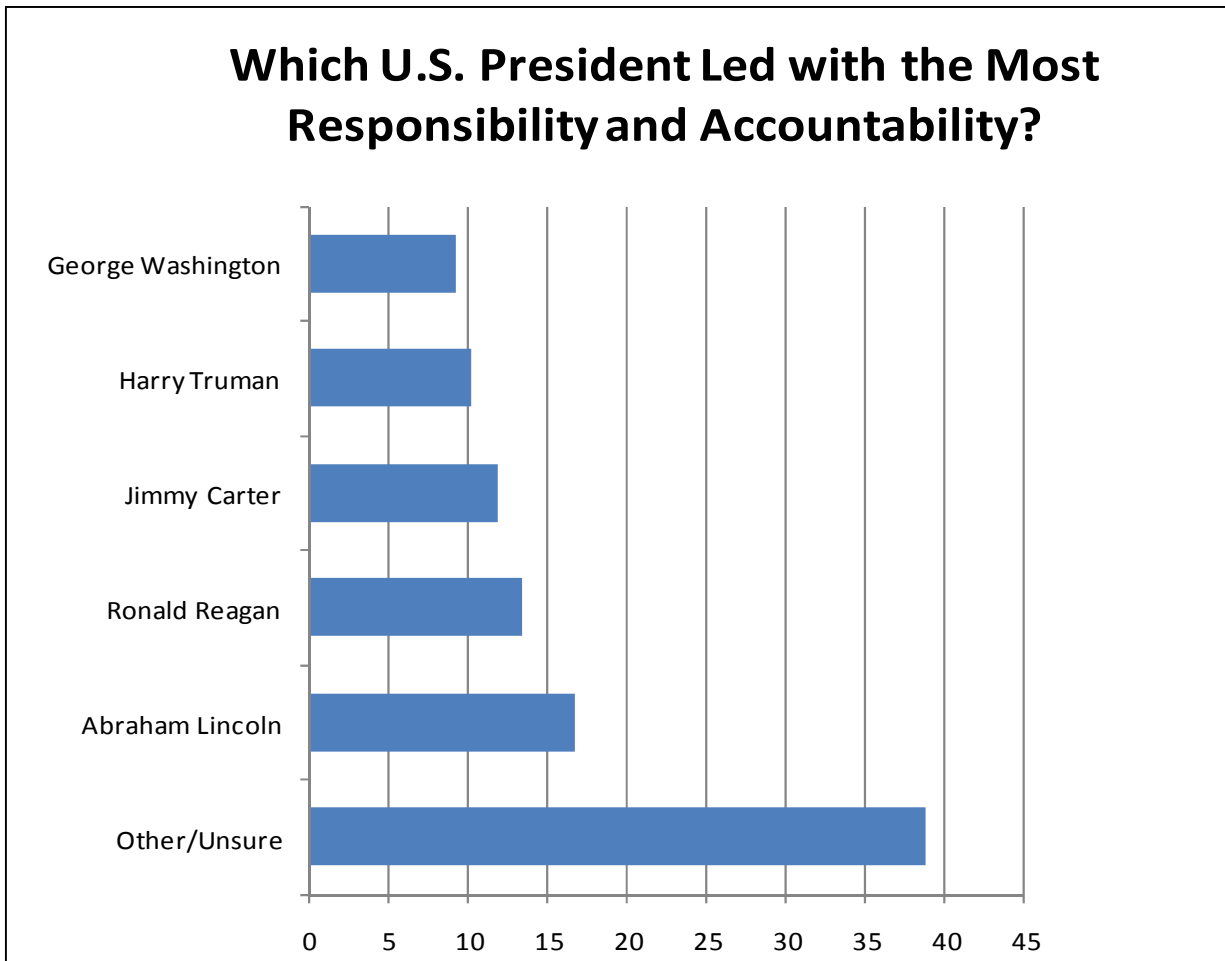
Past Presidents and Collaboration



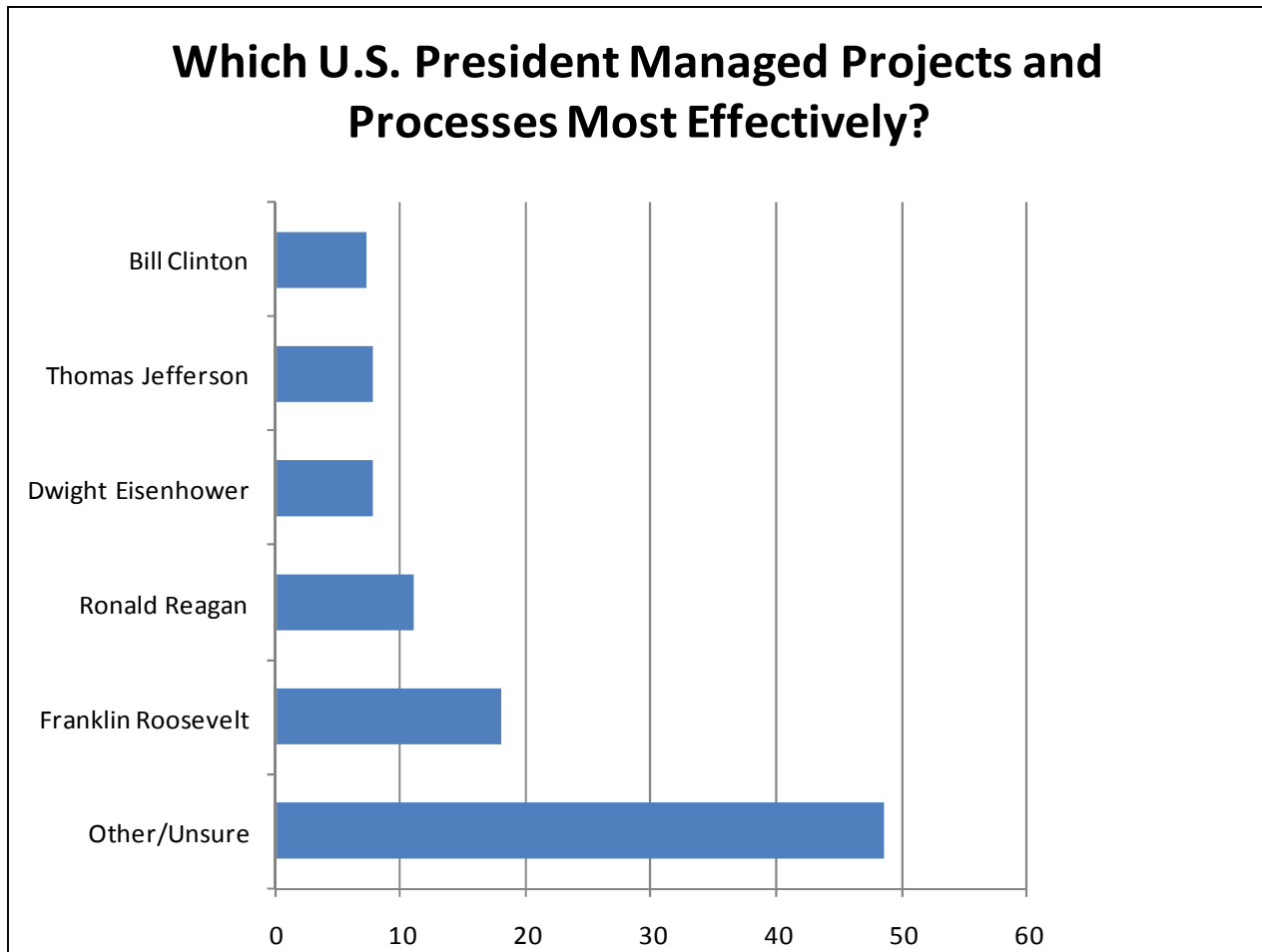
Past Presidents and Decision Making



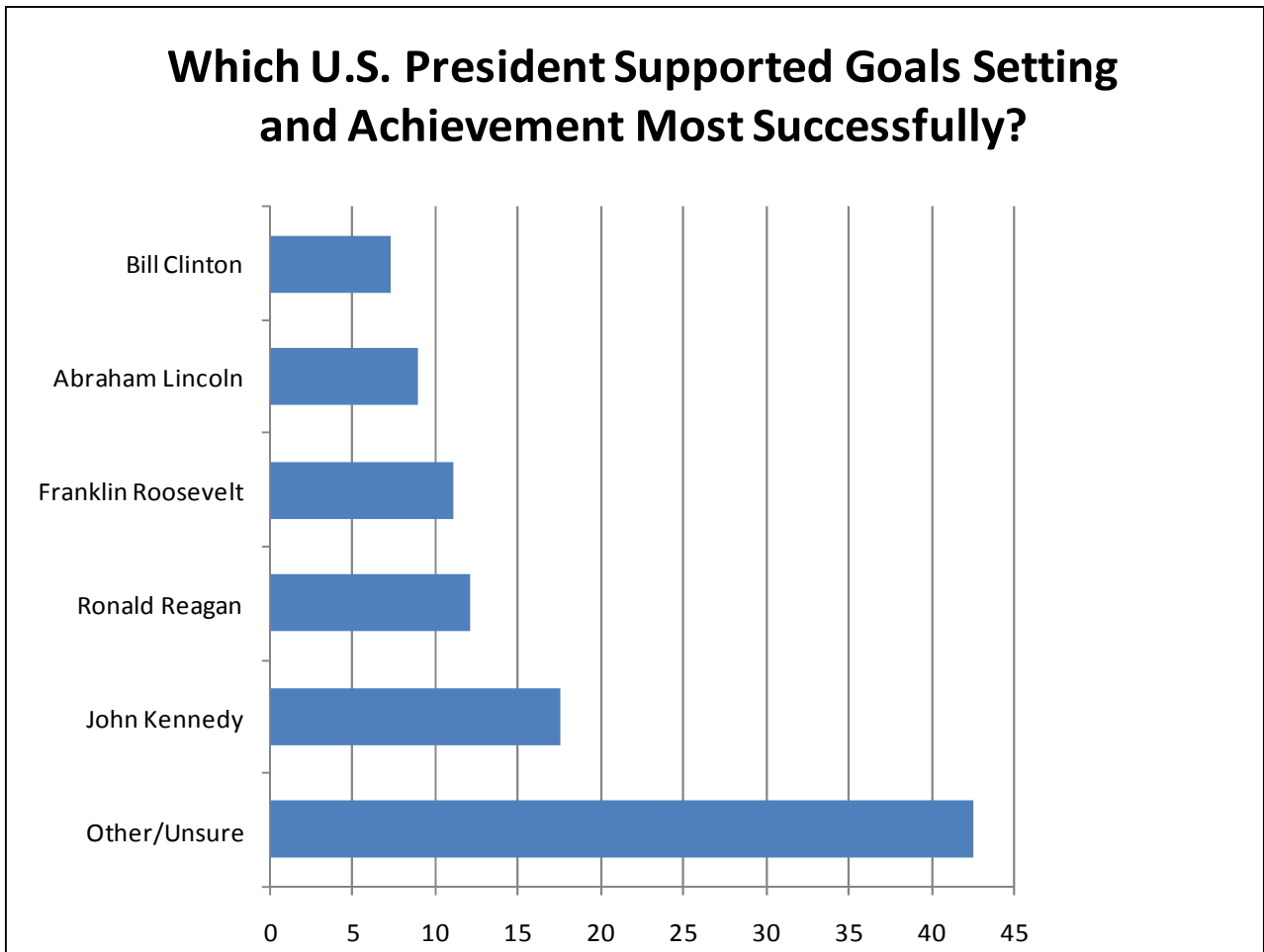
Past Presidents and Accountability



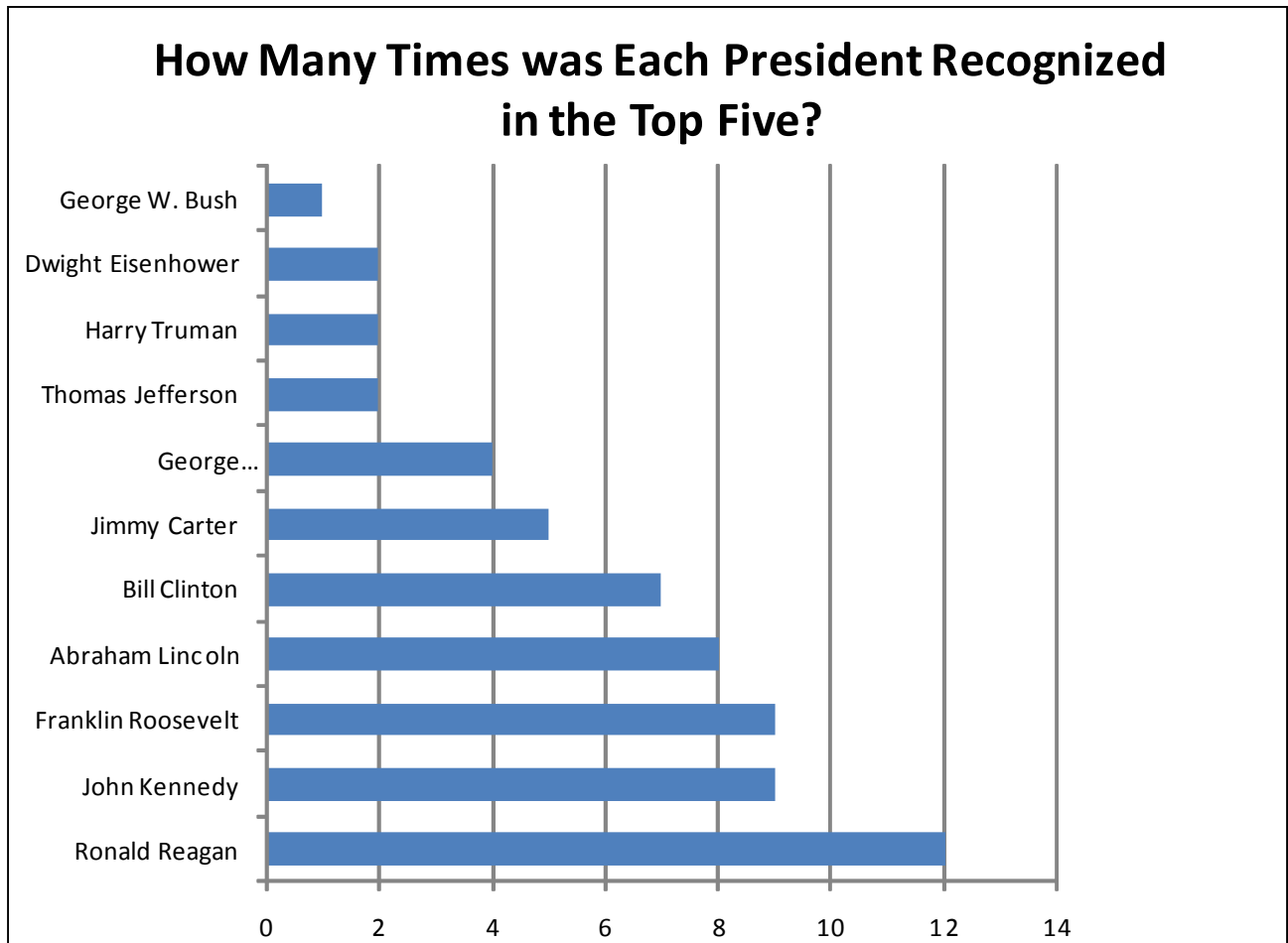
Past Presidents and Project Management



Past Presidents and Goal Achievement



Which Past President was the Best Leader?





Making Politics Work For You

Business Lessons from Presidential Politics

originally published September 17, 2007

The most influential CEO in the world (George W. Bush) is facing mandatory retirement in 16 months and already there are 20 men and women vying for the job – very publicly.

They are talking about how they will do things differently if they are chosen, and they are doing everything they can to prove how all the other candidates are wrong for the job.

When President Bush leaves office, many across the country will be thankful when the 24+ month campaign cycle ends. But before you write this off to "just politics," there are lessons to be learned from all the political maneuvering.

Build enthusiasm early.

In politics the next campaign cycle begins the day after the next person is elected (sometimes sooner). It can make for an incredibly long campaign, but it certainly builds momentum.

Some of it may be misguided (see below), but you can't deny the enthusiasm already evident for the campaign – especially among those on the teams for the candidates. What are you doing to build the enthusiasm for a pending change in your organization?

The key to organizational change is communication – whether that's changing the CEO or changing who covers the phones during lunch. You have to help people understand why making the change – whatever it is – will matter to them.

Make it personal for your employees and they will make the change work.

Embrace technology and innovation.

YouTube debates, podcasts, blogs ... these candidates are embracing technology and tapping into new forms of communication like never before.

They are taking creative risks, and they are connecting with a new generation of voters who don't remember life without the Internet.

What are you doing to bring Web 2.0 to your company? Does your leadership team have a blog? When's the last time you rewarded creative achievements in your organization?

Whether it's internal or external communications, use the technology and the resources you have – and try something new. Take calculated risks.

Remember, status quo requires no leadership.

Cultivate a farm team.

There's always someone waiting in the wings in politics – sometimes more publicly than others. But from the general public's perspective, it does not often look like political parties cultivate their future leaders very well.

There probably is a strategy behind who runs when and which candidate ultimately ends up in the race, but that's not

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always very clear. To be most successful in business, you need to actively cultivate your future leaders.

Organizational leadership development often means going to a seminar or two and waiting your turn. Taking that approach does not prepare your organization for long-term success.

Have a succession plan and intentionally prepare for your company's future.

Communicate the succession plan.

Even if the political farm system is in place, there is no evidence that anyone is talking with the candidates about who has the most political strength right now, who's best prepared for the job, who can win the election, or any other equivalent of succession planning.

It looks like 20 individuals battling for the individual prize – above all else.

To succeed in business, once you have your farm team built, you must communicate with those players regularly about their goals, the organization's goals, what additional work each person needs to be doing to succeed, and so on.

Each person in your organization – or at the very least every senior and middle manager – should be able to tell you what his or her next position will be – and what it won't be.

Communicating the organizational plan and connecting it to individual goals al-

lows your people to see how they fit into the big picture, and helps you make sure your next senior executives have everything they need to succeed from the very beginning.

Focus competition in the right place.

The political in-fighting is really gearing up right now. And when the primary season is in full swing Democrats will be laying into other Democrats while Republicans try to pummel the other Republicans.

Of course it's important for voters to hear the differences in each of the candidates. And of course winning the primaries is the only major-party ticket into the general election. Even so, all the time spent bashing the people within the party detracts from the overall goal of bringing the candidate's party into office.

It's similar to when the sales people can't get along with the marketing people or the customer service reps think the shipping department people can't find their way home.

Competition is healthy when it's focused on achieving organizational or departmental goals rather than sub optimizing for the good of a group or department.

Imagine the bottom line implications of everyone working together to achieve organizational goals; instead of trying to one-up other departments or individuals to achieve strictly personal or team success.

Leadership Lessons from Presidential Politics

originally published February 18, 2008

The process to elect a new President isn't simple, and it isn't short. However, since the process plays out in the news media, and because it requires leadership both to gain the job and do the job, there are leadership lessons to be learned.

Create Opportunities for Communication

Political candidates excel at finding opportunities to communicate their messages. It is in this communication that they attempt to define themselves and their messages and to mobilize support for their vision of the future.

Leaders need to do the same things.

While your scope and topics will be different, you need to define your organization's future, to communicate your message, to mobilize your team for the organization's goals, and more.

Yet most all leaders fall short.

Consistently employee surveys show that communication is less than adequate in their organizations. This message seems to fall on deaf ears for too many leaders.

As a leader you must communicate more effectively, more consistently and more often. Learn from the candidates: never miss an opportunity to share your message with those you lead.

Hone Your Messages

Candidates work hard to hone their messages. They spend tremendous time craft-

ing and crystallizing their key messages, philosophies and beliefs; delivering those messages regularly (see the previous point about creating opportunities).

The best (and ultimately most successful) candidates not only hone their message, but they don't tire of that message; they stay on point consistently for the long haul.

They also have a team of handlers, strategists and speechwriters to help them and to give them the feedback they need to continue to improve. You may not have handlers, strategies and speechwriters. (You're not likely giving 6+ speeches most days either!) But, you need to do these things to have maximum impact.

Are your main organizational messages clear and unwavering? Do people know the principles that guide you as a leader and the organization overall? Do you work hard to stay on message, and not move on to something new when you are tired of talking about the same initiative or project?

And, are you getting, hearing and incorporating feedback from others to help you improve your communication skills?

Admitting Mistakes

Innovation will create mistakes. When you are trying new things, not everything is going to work the first time (or at all).

As a leader you must be willing to admit your mistakes. Why? Because if you

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don't neither will anyone else. Your silence will be interpreted as either: you don't make mistakes or mistakes are not tolerated in your workplace. If you want to allow mistakes and the lessons that come from them, you must make it clear that mistakes are OK.

The fastest way to do that is to admit your own. In addition, when you admit your mistakes you build your credibility and trust with others.

Whether it is raised by the media or their opponents, presidential candidates typically have to deal with mistakes and/or errors in judgment.

Generally speaking few candidates score well in this area. Each trying to deflect questions, change the subject or deny there was any mistake at all.

There is great peril for candidates with this approach. It appears they don't want to admit a mistake due to ego or a perceived lack of judgment.

However, in reality, not admitting a mistake is the mistake – costing credibility and trust (at the very least).

Unfortunately many leaders are afraid or reluctant to admit mistakes for the same reasons as the candidates, and they face the same pitfalls for doing so.

Build Networks

Candidates know they can't win a nomination alone. They must have endorse-

ments, contributions, support and more from a wide range of people.

The best politicians are typically great networkers.

The message is clear – to reach large goals we need help and support from many. All candidates – even those who don't win - know and act on this fact.

However, in many organizations, leaders become insular. They might have a network inside the organization, but seldom do they work to maintain and build their network – especially outside their function or organization.

The best leaders know they need to cultivate a wide assortment of friends, colleagues, supporters and more. This network will serve them in many ways, often in ways not seen as it is happening.

If you have a strong network, consider how you can tap it to support the efforts of those you lead.

Who do you know that might be a resource to your project team? Who might be able to help your star employee gain some new experiences? What opportunities can your network provide to your people? What can you do in return?

Take a tip from the candidates. While you may never ask for a financial donation from your network, your network will still be critical to your personal and your leadership success. Invest the time to build and nurture it.

Managing the Biggest Transition of All

originally published September 1, 2008

Imagine after four or more years of leadership your company was going to change its entire management team and philosophy.

Add to that image that the person coming in as the next CEO has never been a CEO nor managed a transition anywhere near this size (if at all).

If you have any organizational experience at all this thought scares you.

It leaves you wondering about the effectiveness of the organization both before and (long) after the transition, doesn't it? It also leaves everyone in the organization on pins and needles.

They know change is coming, but they don't know about the future direction and they aren't at all sure what the changes mean to them in their work.

It is human nature to wonder, talk about and worry a bit about these sorts of sweeping changes. Plus, when we are thinking about and talking about these sorts of issues our productivity dramatically drops.

Now imagine that the organization in question isn't producing and selling cars, cat food or clothes. That organization is leading the largest country and economy in the world.

All of what you just read is true for the United States in the coming months, regardless of who wins the election this fall.

Let me make it even more dire from an organizational development standpoint.

We won't even know who that new leader is until about 10 weeks before they take over - and many of their leadership team (read Cabinet members) won't be on board for weeks, even months, later!

When you add that into the initial story, the challenges become even greater and the impacts even more severe.

And yet, we go through this process every 4-8 years. And from what I can see as a layperson, we as a country don't have systems, processes and even expectations to improve this situation.

I write this on the morning Senator Obama will give his address in Denver at the DNC, and just a few days before Senator McCain will do the same in the Twin Cities at the RNC.

While I know they must both continue to focus on winning the election, I would hope they both believe they will win. And, given that belief, they should begin now planning the transition to make the first several months of their leadership successful and efficient.

Understand, this isn't about politics. It is about organizational change, leadership and a leader's ability to plan effective transitions.

Jamie Gorelick and Slade Gorton, two members of the 9/11 Commission, wrote an Op/Ed piece for the *New York Times*

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on July 16, 2008 that provided an overview about some of the key issues of this transition from a National Security perspective.

The list that follows borrows from and extends their suggestions, considering the full scope of a transition and highlighting the urgency that we should all feel about making this transition quicker and more effective.

The Transition Imperatives

Change the Focus. Yes, the candidates want to win, but they want to more than win - they want to make a difference in office. To best do that, they need to be able to begin with a team in place on January 20, 2009. To achieve this they must invest more time and resources, and create a trusted transition team, NOW.

Create a Sense of Urgency. This transition will be a huge job for either candidate. A complete transition team with the ability to command some of the candidate's time and focus must be in place now in order to create the momentum needed for success.

Determine the key interfaces and steps. To make this transition go faster, leaders need to be vetted and the process for confirmation in Congress needs to start much sooner. Wouldn't you want all of your management team on board the day you begin? The same should be true in politics. All Cabinet members and other top spots should be identified, filled and confirmed by Inauguration.

Start now. Senator Obama should make this a key job next week, while he will likely be laying low during the RNC. Senator McCain needs to be on this task now too. The work is massive and the time to start is now. Every day of delay will reduce the effectiveness of the team once either one takes office.

Build the right relationships. If not already identified, the transition team needs to be built, and the relationships required to identify all of the future leaders on the team should be in full swing now. Make no mistake - in this or any other transition, relationships will help create speed and identify the best people for the jobs needed to be filled.

Our Lessons?

The good news is the transitions you face won't ever be as daunting as the ones facing Senators Obama and McCain.

However, you still need to:

- Change the goal from "How will we get started?" to "How quickly can we be successful?"
- Create a sense of urgency.
- Determine the key interfaces and steps.
- Start sooner.
- Build the right relationships.

Watch the candidates, and our eventual President-elect, as they lead their transition plans. I hope there will be positives to learn from their example, but even if there isn't, you will find fertile learning from their mistakes or missteps.

How to Deny Distractions and Be More Productive

originally published October 6, 2008

The news blares about Wall Street and the latest corporate dramas. A celebrity's story or woe captures the attention of everyone in the 24-hour news cycle.

Coverage of floods or hurricanes dominates the airwaves. Your company is rumored to be merging or down-sizing, and you wonder about your job. Or good news – your local team advances in the playoffs or is preparing for the big game.

All of these stories can also crowd our minds and conversations. While not all are negative, all are, in the end, distractions from the goals you have for yourself and your organization.

Here are some ideas and suggestions to help you deny the allure of the distraction, both personally and as a leader, and move toward the results you truly want.

Your Sphere of Control

At the heart of this advice is that it makes no sense to spend too much time or effort on things outside of our control.

Concerned about Wall Street? Move your investments or call your Representative. Those things are in your control.

Feel for the victims of a flood or other natural disaster? Organize a fund drive, make a donation or go and lend a hand. Those things are in your control.

In both of these cases (and a hundred others) watching the coverage for hours

while fretting and worrying is of no value - to you or the situation.

The goal is to keep your focus on things that are inside of your control. When you operate within your sphere of control you will reduce your worry and stress and almost automatically re-focus yourself away from external distractions.

Things You Can Do

Beyond focusing on your sphere of control, there are a number of specific things you can do to help you deny the distraction. Not surprisingly, all of them are in your control . . .

Limit your exposure. You may love your home team, but do you really need to watch two hours of coverage and read every message board for days before the big game? Does your television really need to be on CNN, or CNBC or the Weather Channel all of the time (or on at all)?

Focus on a goal. Think about why you want to achieve the goal. Reminding yourself of your why is a great way to re-engage and re-ignite your passion for that goal. That passion and excitement is a great distraction-deterrent.

Remember your purpose. Above your goals is your purpose. What are you trying to accomplish? How do you want to make a difference? (And will watching the news for 30 more minutes, or standing around the water cooler for 10 more

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minutes, serve that purpose?)

Focus on serving others within your sphere. Even if you don't know your purpose, and haven't considered your goals, a fast track to denying distraction is to focus on others within your sphere of control. How can you help them be less distracted? How can you lend a hand? As a leader, how can you best help them?

Things You Can Do as a Leader

The last bullet point was a great lead in here. Being a good example of denying the distraction is a great start, but beyond that there is more you can specifically do as a leader, including:

Acknowledge the distraction. No need to be in denial - people care about the distraction and/or it has captured their attention. Let people know that you understand their concern or worry, but that you have resolved not to dwell on it – and you want to help them make the same choice.

Change the focus. Put the focus on the team or organizational goal or latest project. Their minds will focus on something. Give people an alternative to the latest distraction.

Change the conversation. Once you have acknowledged it, you can purposely tell people you won't be talking about the distraction. Pick a new topic - like your goals or anything more positive and in-

side the team's control.

Create development opportunities. Times of distraction are great times to help develop the skills of others. Delegate a task, process, or responsibility; provide people with a chance to try something new. Done well, they will grow and their focus will naturally shift to the new challenge.

Engage people in goal setting and goal achievement. Perhaps it's time for new goals or challenges. Don't just provide people with a goal; get them involved in the goal setting and goal achievement process.

This advice will help you and your team work through any type of distraction large or small.

External distractions will always exist, but you have control over how much they distract you. The next time you sense your mind and focus wandering, consider these approaches to get yourself - and your team - back on track and on your way to your goals.

When you re-focus your attention to what is in your control to change and re-adjust your gaze on your goals, the distractions will diminish, and your success will accelerate

Becoming the Leader You Were Born to Be

A postscript...

We know that presidential politics isn't business, but it can offer opportunities to learn and many lessons to apply to benefit you and your organization.

As you watch and read over the next few weeks, and in all elections from now on, I encourage you to think about more than just the sound bites.

Think about the sound business principles you can emulate – and the mistakes you can avoid – for the benefit of you and your organization.

You are Remarkable!

Kevin Eikenberry

The Remarkable Leadership Learning System



Do you have a proven plan in place to help you achieve remarkable success in every area of your life?

Remarkable success is possible - for you.

There's no secret, there's no magic formula and you don't need any more hours in the day.

All you need are tools and a plan.

A plan designed just for you.

Leadership and learning expert Kevin Eikenberry created the Remarkable Leadership Learning System to help you become the remarkable leader you were born to be. As a Remarkable Leadership Member you'll have access to:

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- Three custom-built learning tools to assist you every month.
- Live access to world renowned experts every month.
- Continual opportunities to apply what your learning on things that matter – to you!
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