

Intelligence

But character, skill and morality are not enough for leaders. Intelligence is necessary. It does us no good having a clutch of well intentioned clods fouling up the process. Intelligence can only really be measured by verbal capacity and skill. IQ measures and tests are inaccurate. Churchill owned the English language and he owned the skill of persuasion. As such he commanded the heights of leadership. He could communicate the moment, the mission, and the energy. Churchill was one of the few politicians who had a beautiful, lucid communication and vocabulary. Emboldening this was his common sense, technical skill and creativity. Above all the dynamism of his verbal adroitness lied in the desire for action and not drift.

A baser form of intelligence is what can be termed 'political antennae'. In most political circles this skill is usually too overdeveloped. In the case of Churchill it was surprisingly weak and poorly unused. Churchill's rhetoric was maybe too developed and at times not flexible enough for his audience or plainly inappropriate. But this weakness is still overshadowed by his capacity at conciliation and political problem solving and more vitally by his verbal capability. Churchill engineered delicate dispute resolutions over South Africa, Ireland, and social reform in England to name but a few, quickly striding across political boundaries and ideologies and involving himself intimately with those who had the greatest grievance in order to solve the conflict. Coupled with his strong array of communication skills he achieved a political pre-eminence that darkly shadowed his companions.

His oratory and conciliatory skills were allowed to flourish due to the mastery of technical details. Churchill was one of those rare politicians that actually knew what he was talking about. This dedication to lucidity ties in with persuasion and compromise and the knowledge of details leads to flexibility because plans can be made for each situation. Churchill always had three or four contingency plans for every situation. Strategy and vision thus sprung from intelligence and from being able to see the whole picture and from the confidence that one way or another, the vision would be achieved.

This vision coupled with creativity gave Churchill adequate resources to enact change and innovation. In political spheres Churchill was light years ahead of his companions in collecting, analysing, and synthesising information at the micro level and relating it to the big picture. His innovation stemmed from patient practicality and discipline and not inspired genius as romantic novels about great change would like us to believe. This vision included fair economic trade and economic liberalism, adequate welfare for the population, peace and democratic governance, classical and scientifically or technically based education, and a powerful security apparatus to combat evil and aggression.

In achieving his aims and in using his native and educated intelligence Churchill consciously chose to be nobody's knave. He flaunted his independence, not only in action, but also in flamboyant dress and style. Yet his romantic urges were touched

by the humbleness of most people's lives, but to those at the summit where power corrupts, contracts are broken, lies are purveyed as half-truths, the issue of spirit and mores takes on a different colour. Basically Churchill trusted his own counsel and that of a half-dozen friends. To the rest of the world he looked like a recluse. To those who knew him well, he was defending himself against the often wicked and spiteful attacks of political banditos. Hence sympathy for the mass and trust for the few.

In this regard Churchill was exceptionally callous and rough to friend and foe alike in his early years. But as time tempered and beat down the baser impulses of searing rhetoric, Churchill acquired another skill—that of informal networking and interpersonal persuasion. He became as he aged refreshingly human. However, it was not until the 1930's when he was in his late 50s and early 60s that strident verbal missives were shelved for moderate expositions (with some notable exceptions) of the situation at hand, and fair treatment was meted out to friend and foe alike.

As Churchill matured so did his attention to friendship. "If F.E. (Smith), was strong meat and stronger drink, then Churchill in contrast to his public reputation as a 'domineering', even 'rude', figure, had in the intimacy of personal friendship a quality which is almost feminine in its caressing charm" As F.E. wrote, Churchill had a 'simplicity which no other public man of the highest distinction possesses.'⁵³ He also endeavoured to perform many deeds of goodwill to aid friends and family. It can be summarised by Philip Snowden a long-time Churchill opponent and liberal critic, "Your generosity to a political opponent marks you for ever in my eyes the 'great gentleman' I have always thought you. Had I been in trouble which I could not control myself, there is none to whom I should have felt I could come with more confidence that I should be gently treated."⁵⁴

A budget of good humour, tact and some considered patience fund the other necessary resources and tools to achieve success. Alone they are un-substantive. It is better to be dour and effective, than gay and incompetent. Allied to well-developed skills and principles, sensitivity, embedded in the formidable array of humour and tact, provides a potent and efficient tool. About Churchill it is fair to say that he was ambitious and calculating; but not cold and that saved him. As a colleague stated, "His ambition is sanguine, runs in a torrent, and the calculation is hardly more than the rocks or the stump which the torrent strikes for a second . . . queer, shrewd power of introspection, which tells him his gifts and character are such as will make him boom . . . He was born a demagogue, and he happens to know it."⁵⁵ Yet ambition without a defining purpose can not only corrupt, but it can also destroy.

Vision

A crowning vision is really the linchpin that will attract followers. Most good and great individuals have displayed a pretty consistent approach to the world and a pretty stable world view. Some superficial analysis may suggest that because Churchill changed parties, challenged convention, criticised incompetence and

insipidity and usurped obedience he was a grasping, clawing, malevolent opportunist. If rigid conformity is the sign of good political standing, than Churchill was indeed recklessly unpredictable and unreliable. However, the picture of Churchill as a soldier of fortune, an adventurer and a troublemaker was and is incorrect.⁵⁶ Strong ethics, values and principles guided his actions. He had little of Lloyd George's cunning or the well-disguised craftiness of Stanley Baldwin. His decisions might have been unpredictable, but his motives were seldom hard to fathom.⁵⁷ Churchill rarely embroiled himself in the base pettiness of political intrigue in part from a distaste of such ignominy, combined as well with a guileless personality.

To the charge of unreliability Churchill retorted that, "To improve is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often." In actual fact the changes were due to some effort at self improvement, but to fidelity of what he already was. Churchill was most consistent with his own true north direction when he was the least supportive of his party's policy. Churchill never could swallow the party line always choosing and deciding for himself.⁵⁸ In assessing Churchill's skill base the following is a reasonable portrait: "Far from changing his views too often, Mr Churchill has scarcely, during a long and stormy career, altered them at all. If anyone wishes to discover his views on the large and lasting issues of our time, he need only set himself to discover what Mr Churchill has said or written on the subject at any period of his long and exceptionally articulate public life, in particular during the years before the First World War: The number of instances in which his views have in later years undergone any appreciable degree of change will be astoundingly small When biographers and historians come to describe his views . . . they will find that his opinions on all these topics are set in fixed patterns, set early in life and later only reinforced."⁵⁹

This historical reality is evidenced when studying Churchill. What drove Churchill in his personal intellectual and political journey's can also be said to mirror the advance of imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus not only did he possess grand skill, he was also a student but more importantly a conscious product of history. In this regard he closely resembles (consciously no doubt) British and world history. Even in his literary works this is reflected. For instance in Churchill's book, 'The Story of the Malakand Field Force', which depicts British soldiery in north-western India at the turn of the 20th century he questioned what motivated men and nations to face great hazards. The principal elements that Churchill discovered were preparation, discipline, vanity and sentiment and he remarked that sentiment was the most important of the group.⁶⁰ Churchill believed that civilisation can only march forward if it clings to a vision—a sentiment that ennobles its occupation and galvanises its spirit. Empires fall because the sword begins to dominate the sentiment and the people lose hold of the impulse and spirit that the sentiment contained and made the use of the sword in the first instance appropriate.

This spirit and vision was evident and mature. He commiserated with the poor, the downtrodden or the straggling. Some of his mightiest missions and political forays were instigated on behalf of those who lived lives beyond his comprehension

but not his beyond his compassion. Yet here lies a paradox. Within political circles and in the ring of friends and associates he could be extraordinarily blind, politically inept, insensitive and roguish. Or so it appears from a distance. Yet for the great mass of 'Poor England' or for the devotion of the Commonwealth nations, tears would be produced, sagas told, and emotion unleashed. The difference is dramatic but crucial.

If we examine for instance his stand on fair economic trade he was malleable to changing circumstance but rather solid in his underlying belief in market forces, with government succouring the unlucky. He left the Conservatives over Fair Trade in 1904, when they put forward a policy of protectionism, anathema to an orthodox Liberal like Churchill. He only returned to the Conservative party in 1924 when undue governmental interference in trade had been expunged from their agenda, and when the political costs of doing so were at a low threshold.⁶¹

Fair trade in the mind of Churchill did not preclude beneficial and justified government involvement to at times, stimulate employment and counteract nefarious foreign practice. For instance by 1908 Churchill had developed a respectable appreciation of contra-cyclical public works feeling that in useful but uncompetitive industries public departments should be constructed to allow the expansion or contraction of work according to the needs of the labour market, much like the utilisation of an accordion. He was also much taken by the notion of having a governmental body dedicated to intelligence gathering on market conditions and inputting clever designs regarding the balance of trade and the proper use of employment.⁶² These concepts were never tried.

Supportive of free or at least fair trade, Churchill throughout his career could never conceal his concern for the effects of unregulated and corrupt markets might have upon the poor man and women. Speaking in a lecture at Oxford in June of 1930 he posited quite wrongly that unencumbered free trade was not at that time working: "The growth of public opinion, and still more of voting opinion, violently and instinctively rejects many features of this massive creed. No one, for instance, will agree that wages should be settled only by the higgling of the market. No one would agree that modern world-dislocation of industry . . . should simply be met by preaching thrift and zeal to the displaced worker. Few would agree that private enterprise is the sole agency by which fruitful economic activities can be launched or conducted."⁶³

Churchill appended to this suspicion of market forces the idea of an economic council, chosen in proportion to parliamentary representation as an agent of economic advice. This concept of an objective economic watchdog was thankfully never pursued. Churchill's observation above was incorrect since it was government incompetence manifest in high tariffs, corruption, non-transparency, high taxation and restricted money supply that was causing economic dislocation. Churchill should have been advocating wholesale freer trade and reduced government mismanagement. Yet Churchill like many other politicians had fallen ill to the 'Keynesian flu' which