

**Remarks by David Wilkins
Greenville Chamber Speech
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(CBC Clip)

That one 5 minute clip brought me so much good will in Canada and it was a great diplomatic lesson: Humor often does more – more quickly – to break barriers and bring folks together than anything else.

It is a universal language!

And because I never got much beyond: "Bonjour y'all!" in speaking French – a little bit of humor went a long way for me north of the border!

It also reinforces the fact that you should take your job seriously. Take your responsibilities seriously. But you should never take yourself too seriously!

Thanks Wil (Brasington) for that kind introduction.

Jokes....

I have actually been thinking a lot about what I could say this morning that would be meaningful to your lives and careers.

And, recognizing that many of you are the current and future leaders of the Upstate – I decided to tackle the daunting topic of leadership.

It is a subject that has always fascinated me.

I readily admit that I certainly don't have any secrets or claims of authority on it.

The Greenville Chamber is full of them and any of you could be up here right now.

Leadership – like beauty – is pretty much in the eye of the beholder.

That makes it difficult to quantify exactly what makes a "good" leader.

Ask a dozen people what it means to be a leader and you'll get a dozen different definitions: Leaders come in all forms with many different styles. But you always know one when you see one.

Now, I am just this ordinary guy from Greenville, South Carolina, who -- for whatever reason -- has been blessed with some extraordinary experiences, which in turn, have enabled me to meet and interact with some amazing people.

They've taught me a lot about leadership.

And so for the next few minutes, I'd like to share a few of their stories with you.

I hope they inspire you like they've inspired me.

Then we'll open it up for Q&A.

You know, all this focusing on leadership got Susan and me reminiscing about the people we've been privileged to call friends over the years -- from presidents to prime ministers...

Jokes...

And maybe taking out the garbage is a good place to start because I'm guessing most of us would say we value humility in our leaders.

Seems that's a characteristic often in short supply these days.

The Bible tells us in the 9th chapter of Mark, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

But for anyone who has ever held a leadership post, you know it's a pretty tall order to act with humility when you're in charge.

After all, when you're leading the way, success demands you project an image of strength -- of being worthy of that fancy title attached to your name.

Now, that's hard enough when you're in Congress or running a business or president of an organization. But think about the caliber of person it takes to be a humble warrior!

That's exactly what my friend General Rick Hillier is and why I admire him so much.

General Hillier was Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff (Canada's equivalent of Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

When it came to going after the terrorists in Afghanistan – immediately and without hesitation – Canada was with us every single step of the way.

In fact, in the fall of 2001 – only weeks after the terror attacks – Canadian commandos hunting al-Qaeda were some of the first boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

But back in the days when fighting the war on terror was most intense in Afghanistan, when Canadian heroes were coming home in body bags, a skeptical Canadian public that relished its image as global peacekeeper needed assurance.

And always there was General Rick Hillier.

He's credited almost singlehandedly with changing Canadians' opinion of their military...restoring morale...and a well-deserved pride in Canada's Forces.

Hillier's pervasive, unstoppable, can-do optimism and his relentless drive to make sure his troops got all the credit inspired an entire nation.

General Hillier never wasted a day blaming anyone for anything.

And he never met a challenge he wasn't prepared to tackle – personally – because Rick understood the best leaders are truly the most faithful servants.

Sometimes leadership is about finding compromise and common ground.

Sometimes it's about giving no ground at all and inspiring others to join you there.

But more than anything else I think, leadership is having the wisdom and the courage to know the difference.

Hillier was the ultimate soldiers' soldier: just a guy from Newfoundland who rose through the ranks and truly lived that ol' cliché: He never forgot where he came from.

In fact, it was his humble roots that gave him such mighty wings.

I saw this leader in action first hand.

The most memorable trip I will ever take was the week I spent in Afghanistan at Christmastime 2007 with General Hillier to thank the Canadian Forces for their service and sacrifice.

On that star filled Christmas Eve seven years ago, I walked with General Hillier to the outer perimeters of a Canadian forward operating base in the middle of the desert.

For two hours I witnessed Hillier inspire and encourage his troops.

He had each one convinced they were the most important of all the Canadian Forces.

There's an old proverb on leadership that says, "He who thinks he leads...but has no followers...is only taking a walk."

General Hillier would take it one step further and say, "You can only lead if you're willing to walk alongside your troops."

Sending troops into battle has got to be an agonizing decision for any leader.

I know it was for President George W. Bush.

Bush had been in office less than eight months when those planes were hijacked September 11, 2001 taking with them so many precious lives and the illusion that Americans were safe in our own country.

The events of that murderous day also altered the course of the Bush presidency.

Now, I will leave it to history and to each of you to judge for yourselves the Bush Administration's handling of the war on terror.

But certainly how a wartime president conducts himself always offers interesting perspectives on leadership.

And I did get the chance – along with our son Robert to visit with President Bush in the Oval Office six weeks after 9.11.

It was a conversation I'll never forget because what was so clear was that the President's heart was breaking.

Just like the rest of us.

The difference was the rest of us were counting on him to do something...to somehow right this terrible wrong.

In the Oval Office that day I found a man who was certainly not elected to be a wartime president but one who was prepared to shoulder it:

1. He told us about his day on 9/11. About visiting the families of the victims in New York....
2. He told me 9/11 was the defining moment of his presidency. He hoped the American people would stay with him but whether they did or not, his main mission was to protect and defend America and bring the terrorists to justice. And he would do just that.

Ernest Hemingway said that, "Courage is grace under pressure."

I know that's something I look for in a leader.

I remember telling Susan that I was struck by the President's lack of anxiety at that moment because if you recall how we all felt back then – we were all a bundle of nerves.

The President told Robert and me he felt the nation praying for him and felt sustained – buoyed – by those prayers.

I believed him.

And it was strange because I really wanted to just let him know that our family – like the rest of the nation at that time – was praying for him and Laura and for the entire leadership of the country – to make *him* feel better.

But I left the White House feeling better.

And it struck me then that's what leaders do.

They reassure you on difficult days.

They remain steady at the wheel during tough times.

Unfortunately, George W. Bush is just one of many leaders called to confront the evil of their time.

We are all watching history unfold right now in the Ukraine. Perhaps most disturbing are the reports of anti-Semitism on the rise there.

My friend David Shentow knows all about that.

I met Mr. Shentow and his wife Rose when I spoke at a synagogue in Ottawa. He rolled up his sleeve and revealed to me the horror that time could not erase: 7-2-5-8-5.

The number the Nazis had roughly tattooed into his arm as a teenager. Mr. Shentow was his family's lone survivor of Hitler's death camps.

For years he was enslaved and starved.

In April 1945 he lay unconscious...welcoming death.

But it was life that was delivered to him that day....in the form of an American GI.

Mr. Shentow told me all these decades later the memories of his horror are still fresh.

But always the face of that American GI shines through....like an angel.

In his mid 80's today, it would be so easy for him – so much less painful to leave those awful years behind him.

To bury the memories.

To move on.

But David and Rose Shentow have devoted their lives to the retelling of David's story.

Again. And again. To schoolchildren. And community and governmental groups.

Wherever there are sets of ears. He relives and retells.

Because you see, history has a nasty habit of repeating itself.

Mr. Shentow knows we build museums and we make vows to "never forget!"

But they're worried in Eastern Ukraine.

So Mr. Shentow tells his story.

Because if not him – who knows and has been there – then who?

And if not now, then when?

Mr. Shentow reminds me that leaders don't always come draped in flags or medals like presidents or generals.

Sometimes leaders are born of the deepest wounds, their scars – like Mr. Shentow's tattoo – a testament to their survival.

They become leaders in the hopes of helping others avoid the places they've been.

And so they shine a light in the darkness.

Other leaders rise to the top simply because there is a need.

And our community is abundantly blessed with those kinds of leaders: From school teachers to coaches and mentors.

Leadership is not about the position you hold.

It's not about the plaques on your walls.

It's about the people you touch.

Being the US Ambassador to Canada was truly the privilege of a lifetime.

I got to wake up every single day thinking, "Hey, Big Boy, today you get to represent the United States of America. Just don't screw this up."

For decades, the softwood lumber trade dispute between the US and Canada raged at a fever pitch. One lawsuit followed another...

Ad lib softwood lumber...

Relationships matter!!

It took two leaders at the top developing a relationship built on trust to get it done.

And I submit to you now that the foundation of trust between our two countries is being eroded as Canada continues to wait on the current US administration to make a decision on the Keystone XL pipeline.

After more than five long years, Canada deserves better from its best friend and trading partner!

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell once observed, "Trust is the essence of leadership."

And time and again over 25 year years in the legislature I found this to be true.

A not-so-good idea proposed by a respected, well-liked, trusted member went a lot further in the legislative process than a good idea proposed by someone not so well-liked or trusted.

How you treat people matters.

Whether you're at home or at work in the office of a diplomat or a doctor – folks are far more impressed by a kind word and a promise kept than by your credentials or titles.

But that's not to say substance doesn't matter. After all, someone who's "all hat and no cattle" doesn't accomplish much!

One of the most impressive people I think I will ever have the privilege of meeting – and working with – in my lifetime is Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

She was Secretary of State – and my boss – when I was ambassador to Canada – and though small in physical stature, Condoleezza Rice truly is larger than life.

She is an intellectual giant – a Russian scholar, an accomplished pianist -- not to mention a hard core NFL fan – but what is always most impressive about Condi Rice is that she is always – always – prepared.

I was probably in a dozen diplomatic meetings with Rice either in Canada or Washington during my time as ambassador meeting with the PM or her counterpart – the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

AD lib – meeting examples

In my experiences at the State Department, Dr. Rice was self-assured and always confident and could effectively engage on the most remote issues because she was familiar with them.

She put in the time.

Because that's what leaders with substance do.

So for me, when you put all of these stories together and boil everything down from what I have observed over the years it all comes down to this: To be an effective, impactful leader-you have to be a leader worth following.

Maybe it's because I have grandchildren now or that I'm privileged as chairman of Clemson's Board of Trustees to sit through a whole lot of graduation ceremonies and see thousands of hopeful young men and women champing at the bit to step on that first rung of the leadership ladder that I see leadership these days not so much as a talent one possesses – but rather as a gift one has to give.

In short, leaders worth following are making things better in a tangible way for the people around them – and you usually see the greatest impact at the local level.

So as we get ready to celebrate the upcoming birthday of our great nation – a land God so richly blessed with a bounty of smart and courageous leaders who painstakingly laid for us a bedrock of liberty, maybe each of us should be pondering for ourselves: "Am I making things better for the people who follow me?" Whether it be my family, my business or my community.

How each of us answers that question and then acts upon that answer could start a leadership legacy right here – right now – at the Greenville Chamber Friday Forum!

May it be so.

Thanks for inviting me to share this time with you.

May God richly bless each of you and God Bless America.

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