

Community Comment – January 18th, 2016
By Jon Sapper
Leadership Lessons from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Today, we honor the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There are few individuals who have had a greater impact on challenging this nation to live up to its' stated ideals, principles and values. Yes, Dr. King was a revered civil rights leader, a passionate religious leader and a beloved leader for those who believed that African-Americans should have the same rights and opportunities afforded every other American. There are some in this country who would not allow themselves to agree with Dr. King in any way, shape or form. What kind of leadership did it require of Dr. King to be steadfast and true to his beliefs while facing adversity and hatred on a daily basis?

Dr. King was not afraid to tell the truth as he saw it. Political correctness was for those who were too weak to stand up and be counted for their beliefs. During his I Have a Dream speech, he referenced the Emancipation Proclamation saying and I quote, "One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination". End quote.

Dr. King was an inspirational storyteller who moved the heart and challenged the mind of every American while putting a stake in the ground that all should be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Dr. King would not accept the status quo. As he said, the riches of freedom and the security of justice are within reach. Dr. King was patiently impatient. Now before you say that's an oxymoron, let me explain. His eye was on the Promised Land. Sometimes you have to run, sometimes you have to walk and sometimes you have to crawl; but keep going and don't rest. Dr. King inspired others to take the high road of non-violence. Yes, he was a follower of Gandhi in this respect and demonstrated that the pathway forward would progress more quickly and with greater discipline and dignity than allowing physical violence to interrupt the message. Dr. King did not compromise his values or beliefs. He stuck to them whether jailed or beaten. He encouraged his followers and those who believed in his work and vision. And he continually described that vision in clear and concrete ways.

The leadership lessons of Dr. King are just as valid today. Inspirational leaders always tell the truth as they see it. They don't accept the status quo. They are storytellers and are patiently impatient. They always take the high road and never compromise their values or beliefs. They encourage and support those who work with them and are clear and concrete in describing their vision.

Adhering to these leadership lessons can also work in our community today.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.