

From the desk of David Simpson

January 2022

**“Part of the art of leadership is knowing what to overlook.”**

-William James MD (January 11, 1842 – August 26, 1910) Philosopher and Psychologist

William James was the first educator to offer a psychology course in the US and is considered to be the “father of American Psychology.” Various journals and publications have, for the most part, ranked him in the top ten most influential psychologists.

Over the last 40 years or so, I have heard many words used to define leadership. Some include: smart; analytical; driven; ambitious; good people skills; tough, etc. While these terms could assist in describing a good leader, I think there are others that may be closer to the real core of the issue. The reason I am making such a suggestion is that a person could possess all of the items listed above and still not succeed as a leader. For instance, it is well known that interpersonal skills are significantly down the list of attributes needed to be a successful leader. They are not off the list – just down the list. So what capabilities does a leader really need to be successful? Please consider the following.....

Leaders must be resilient. They must be able to recover quickly from adverse conditions and events. They must be able to adapt effectively in the face of adversity.

They need to be able to pivot. They must be able to adapt, modify and re-focus in order to improve a product or service. Pivoting to the right focus at the right time is vital.

A leader must be able to shift between guilt and enlightened selfishness. They need to be able to sort through the needs of the one versus the needs of the many. They need to have a “heart” at times but not let that heart get too much in the way.

And finally, as James points out, a good leader must be able to determine what to overlook. In any significant endeavor, there are countless events and circumstances one could focus on. A few are important. But most are just “noise.” And separating that which is significant from all the rest is vital to effective performance in a corner office role.

Born exactly 180 years ago this very month, William James was such a prolific writer that a partial bibliography of his works, compiled by John McDermott (Texas A&M) almost 100 years after James’ death, was 47 pages long.

Perform better!

