
THE WAY AHEAD

We are a free people because a man named Winston Churchill lived.

The Spectator, London, 1965

The epic battles of the Second World War have long faded from the memories of many, but the story of sacrifice made by millions of young men and women must never leave the minds of free people everywhere. When call of country came, ordinary young men willingly left the comfort and security of family and home to fight and die on foreign fields. It was the phenomenon of an age, the definition of an era. When homelands were viciously attacked, Allied armies and navies, comprised mostly of civilians, raised themselves up to defeat one of the greatest professional armies in history. Ordinary young men and women suspended their lives to serve their nations and the world—teachers, salesmen, engineers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, long-shoremen, truck drivers, farmers, secretaries, bankers, professors, telephone operators, miners, railroad workers, firemen, and policemen—all declared as one voice: *“We are determined no one and no country will take our freedom away! It is ours—the blood of our forefathers earned it. It is our heritage, our birthright, and we are going to fight to the death if need be to preserve it!”*

The history of those days reminds the present world what is worth living for, fighting for, and dying for. The saga, still unfinished, is of survival of life, legacy, and liberty. The never-ending story will live as long as courage, duty, honor, and faith. It will never become old or outdated. Ordinary, yet unique, men and women from every culture and creed will forever rise and rise again to fight against all who seek to destroy civilization. The kind of men and women who will forever *guard the way ahead.*¹

Because memory is to an individual as history is to a civilization, the historical memory of a nation and its people are essential to its continuance. Faded from the collective memory of many are the

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major battles of the American War for Independence. Still, who can forget the Minutemen? Colonial farmers, merchants, blacksmiths, and teachers who, never trained to fight, picked up muskets, fired shots heard 'round the world, and changed all of history. Protecting the memory of heroes is a prime duty. Guardians of the past speak with careful admonition: "*Be careful. Do not forget. Remember.*"

One of those guardians was Abraham Lincoln. Custodian of an immortal presidency spent in the shadow of war, he was seldom far from the sound of cannon or the fury of gunfire. In ghostly imagery, he reminded a country that forgetfulness is fostered by "the silent artillery of time." As if removed by a distanced bombardment muffled from the conscience of a people, the passing of years too often leaves ingratitude for those who protected the blessings and made possible the benefits of liberty. Mr. Lincoln's unforgettable phrase proclaims the past indispensable, the present meaningful, and the future hopeful. In the 21st century and beyond, guardians of the past are needed to defend against the silent artillery of time.

It has been well said that great men and great nations supply the themes for great history.² Winston Spencer Churchill was legend in his own time. With the passing of years, his legacy grows only greater.

His long-view of history and his realistic understanding of the true nature of mankind became part of the strength of his leadership and secret to his greatness. By countering force and fear with faith and freedom, his time of tyrants and darkness became a season of trust and light. Winston Churchill built a permanent bridge between those days—and the present.³ We know him. Or at least we think we know him. Certainly, we would very much like to have known him! Seen now only in portraits, he is as familiar as a family photograph. There shall never be another like him. He shall never be forgotten. He is history with a human face.

In a remarkable sense, Winston Churchill occupies the present day, the present hour, the present moment. He is relevant and real in the 21st century. His spirit of courage still calls. His spirit of resolve still reverberates. Time cannot dim it. History cannot obscure it. He imparts lessons of leadership because the Free World will always need men and women of conviction and courage.

The Spirit of Churchill

At the opening of the Churchill Museum in London, Allen Packwood, Director of the Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge University, reminded those in the present how those from the past point the way ahead:

As we entered a new century, we inevitably looked back to the last century for defining moments and defining characters. In the aftermath of September 11, leaders on both sides of the Atlantic looked for examples of strong leadership, they looked back to the last great moments of world crisis, and they used Churchill as role model and example.⁵

Men and women who are giants of the past, the ordinary who became extraordinary, were confronted with all of life's ups and downs, highs and lows, victories and defeats. In times of great pressure and difficulty the true character of these individuals was revealed by their response to the crises in their lives. When Winston Churchill was squeezed by difficult circumstances, out came determination. When confronted with defeat, he countered with doggedness. He would not leave his post—his beloved country—in its hour of greatest need, for he knew he had to stand up to a bully and a tyrant. When tested to the fullest, he had the defiance and will to not only endure, but to win.

Building blocks of character shaped Winston Churchill into a statesman of vision and principle. Application of character shaped him into a lion-hearted leader. His life provides lessons for success for all who desire to be ready when circumstances confront and destiny calls. His character qualities provide a model for all who desire to lead: vision, conviction, courage, determination, optimism, endurance, and responsibility.

Vision—Ability to See and Understand What is Ahead

Winston Churchill could see beyond the ordinary sight of his contemporaries. He did not only look, he saw. Because he knew he had

a purpose and a destiny, he saw beyond difficulty, disaster, and defeat. Because he knew history, he visualized victory. In the era in which he lived, Winston Churchill recognized danger and opportunity earlier than other statesmen. He had farsightedness—a unique ability to foresee what could and did happen. He understood evil and evil people while many of his contemporaries were foolish and naïve. He saw this at an early age when he wrote of his encounters with radical Islam in the Sudan War of 1898. He knew this during the time when much of Europe did not see the evil of Adolf Hitler, and his contemporaries tried to work out differences with a malevolent tyrant. He was sure of this before the end of the Second World War when he warned the world of the goals of communism. Winston Churchill anticipated what lay ahead. His reward for such invaluable service to his nation and the world was to be shunned and dismissed again and again. In these moments of discouragement his attitude was, “*Never give up!*” He hoped time would reveal the larger picture to the world. He was a true visionary—sometimes impractical, frequently idealistic, but always quixotic. This visionary history-maker is not unreachable, dusty or dead; he is important to the 21st century and beyond:

Vision, in most politicians, is a plan to cope with yesterday's headlines. Churchill, with the knowledge of the historian and the valor of a soldier, not only dared to predict what people did not want to bear—the advent of two World Wars as well as the Cold War—but also offered the plans to prevent them. That foresight and the courage to act on it distinguish Churchill.⁵

Conviction—Steadfast Belief in a Cause or a Goal

Whatever may be said of Winston Churchill, there is no doubt he was a man of conviction. Stout-hearted and strong-minded, he often stood alone for what he believed was right. And right or wrong, he knew what he believed. Exasperating? Often. Off-putting? Frequently. Admirable? Always. More often than not, his convictions went against

the rest of the world. Many thought he was wrong, but in the end he was right. It is hard enough for one man to stand against the conventional wisdom of his own country, but to stand against that of a continent takes unwavering conviction. The English word *believe* is derived from two words, *by-live*. And *believe* is Winston Churchill in purest form, for what he believed, he lived by. A solid, unyielding boulder, he could be pushed and pulled but nothing was going to move him. He is a model for those who succeed in life. He is a model for those who take the risk of standing by their convictions. It is as if he can be heard to say, *"I will make my own way. When I know I am right, I will go against my own peers if I must. I will stick to my principles no matter what!"*

With apposite imagery, historian and author Mark Helprin described the essence of statesmen who hold fast unchangeable principles. His words capture the essence of Churchill:

Principles are eternal. They stem not from our resolution or lack of it, but from elsewhere, where in patient and infinite ranks they simply wait to be called... Things such as courage and honor are the moral equivalent of certain laws written throughout the universe. They can be neglected but they can not be lost. They can be thrown down but they cannot be broken... No matter what people may say in times of prosperity and peace, all men and women hunger for acts of integrity and courage. They hunger for a statesman magnetized by the truth—unable to put his interests before that of his nation.⁶

Courage—Boldness to Act on What One Believes

The name *Churchill* has almost become synonymous with the word *courage*. There is little doubt Winston Churchill possessed boldness to act on what he believed, audacity to confront an opponent with the confidence of ultimate success, and defiance to respond to danger without thought of retreat. He was a man of action. In that dangerous summer of 1940, Britain's pugnacious Prime Minister called upon perhaps his most important character

quality—his resolve to not fear. He was not afraid of people who wanted to destroy him, his country, and his way of life. When told to give in by Hitler, he looked him square in the eye and did not back down. He transferred his courage to the British people. He stood and they stood. He stepped out with valor, they marched into history.

Winston Churchill had another kind of courage, the courage to go beyond the expectations of his parents and his peers. He had money, social position, an illustrious name, and a secure place in the hierarchy of the British classes. He had no need to take chances or to do or say anything controversial. He could coast through life safely. He did not. Throughout his life, he demonstrated a disregard for either his personal or political safety. There is something marvelous about someone who takes risks with life when he does not have to. It is courageous. It was Churchill:

Courage for some sudden act may be in the heat of battle, we all respect. But there is that still rarer courage which can sustain repeated disappointment, unexpected failure, and shattering defeat. Winston Churchill had that too, and had need of it, not for a day, but for weeks and months and years.⁷

Determination—Resolve to Persist in Spite of Challenges, Circumstances, Difficulties or Defeats

Every great war leader has dark moments, those critical moments in the heat of the conflict when many tell him the war may be lost because he is doing or would do the wrong thing. Great leaders stand firm in dark moments. They persevere when others speak harshly of them. They do not lose sight of the ultimate goal no matter who or what comes against them. They remain firmly committed to completing the task. They are steadfast and sturdy.

Because he realized present struggles were essential for future achievement, Winston Churchill willed to withstand prolonged hardship, difficulty, and strain. He stayed focused on the objective and expended the necessary resolve to see a crisis through. Passionately

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tenacious, he symbolized the determination of the British people. Through sheer rhetoric and force of personality, he exhorted a nation to believe that victory was attainable. He galvanized the mood of his country into fiery, dogged defiance: *“We shall not flag or fail!”*⁸

In that summer of all summers in 1940, German planes roared up the Thames and loudspeakers in Germany blared a triumphant message: *Bomben auf Engelland!* or “bombs on England!” Winston Churchill recounted, *“The odds were great, our margins small, the stakes infinite.”* Yet he was determined to prevail. An RAF captain remembered, *“Above all, it was an exhilarating period. We had purpose and pride, and Churchill gave them to us. We all waited for his voice on the radio. Everybody in the air as well as on the ground relied on this one man.”*⁹ The young soldier and sailor had full confidence in him. They knew he would make sure they would have what they needed to fight to victory. They knew England would never waver. They knew because of Churchill.

A silhouette style photograph taken July of 1940 captures the uncompromising resolve of Britain's wartime Prime Minister. Standing on the rocky southern coast of England is Winston Churchill. Atop a bunker, leaning on a cane with cigar firmly clenched in his teeth, he looks out across the Channel toward Nazi-occupied Europe. A row of helmeted British soldiers stands in the trench just below him. They are looking up and smiling, all grateful and proud to have him there. Determination in the face of destruction. Defiance in the face of defeat. Resolute, ready, regardless:

*He kept England in the war. He exemplified her resourcefulness. He kept her fighting after defeats, impervious to anything but persistence. It was heroic. But, it was not bravado, for Churchill's knowledge of history fortified his confidence. He was leading a nation committed to its sense of the past. And in this, he preserved its future.*¹⁰

Optimism—Confident and Cheerful Belief for the Best Possible Outcome

General Eisenhower once observed the power of outlook by noting optimism and pessimism were equally infectious. The conscious choice of either view affects people and circumstances in a given situation. Pessimism is a gutless choice. Optimism takes courage and will. How fortunate for England to have had an ebullient optimist for Prime Minister during her most critical days in a thousand years. He was infectious. May the world never be cured!

Winston Churchill had the ability to look at the negative and see positive. He had unshakable optimism. He chose to act with assurance of a good outcome and never failed to encourage others along the way. He cheered the people as much as the people cheered him.¹¹ His moments of pessimism were rare, and during the war never public. He once left the residence in haste without his trademark cigar. Keenly aware of how he affected the British public, an aide was dispatched to bring one with the order: “they expect to see it.”¹²

Unrelenting optimism served Winston Churchill well, for who better to lead his nation from the absolute hopelessness of a Dunkirk or the certain doom of a Battle of Britain? Only a man who knew how to rise from the depths of despair! Who better to stir the heart of a people in time of national peril? Only a leader who was everywhere! Old Winny in the shelters, on the ships, and in the streets. Old Winny with the armies, in the air, and on the airwaves. At a time when the world expected Britain to surrender, Old Winny expected to win. He refused to give up, give out, or give in! His spirit brought to the present a hope for the future:

*If the human race wishes to have a prolonged and indefinite period of material prosperity, they have only got to behave in a peaceful and helpful way towards one another... Thus we may by patience, courage, and in orderly progression reach the shelter of a calmer and kindlier age... Withhold no sacrifice, grudge no toil, seek no sordid gain, fear no foe. All will be well.*¹³

***Endurance—To Continue Under Pain and Hardship
without being Overcome***

The long life of Winston Churchill was characterized by the ebb and flow of positive and negative forces. Faced with impossible odds within and without himself, he refused to surrender. He often suffered. He always endured. Forced to deal with parental neglect and rejection by the father he worshiped, he never lost the ability to love. Fighting attacks of dark depression he called “the black dog,” he kept his spirits up with optimism and strength of will. Foundering many times as a student, he delighted in the beauty of the English language and ultimately elevated its written and spoken influence to heights seldom seen in history. Fated with a debilitating stutter and a lisp never fully lost, he became one of history's most eloquent orators once described as “the Demosthenes^A of the West.”¹⁴ In victories and defeats he conquered himself. By victories and defeats he conquered his times. An admiring young photographer once told the octogenarian of his desire to photograph the great man on his 100th birthday. Without reservation, Churchill replied, “I don't see why not, young man. You look reasonably fit.”¹⁵

Winston Churchill exemplified the quality ever associated with those who call themselves British—stamina. In times of extreme pressure, Mr. Churchill called upon this inward drive and power. He remained firm under suffering. He outlasted his challenges. He did not perish. He saw the race to the end. His fellow brave Britons endured with him. They did not worry, for through the darkest night they knew he would be there in the morning. To them Sir Winston spoke words of gratitude and pride, words which provide a fitting epitaph for the man himself: *You have drawn from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival, and of a victory won not only for ourselves, but for all.*¹⁶

***Responsibility—Will to Preserve the Trust and Guard
the Duty One has been Given***

The way ahead depends on the responsibility of leaders. In Mr. Churchill's words, “...*the moment when Honor points the path of Duty...*”¹⁷ Destiny handed Winston Churchill a great task. His respon-

sibility to that task was tested by time. His lasting achievement was revealed by history.

Winston Churchill lived out what has become the British standard for responsibility to obligation: *England Expects Every Man Will Do His Duty*. This call of duty was memorably commanded by Lord Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar^B where the odds were great, the margins small, and the stakes infinite. As one of history's greatest naval battles was about to commence, Britain's immortal Admiral ordered signal flags to flash a message of inspiration to every ship in the British fleet. Nelson's call from his flagship Victory typified patriotism and perseverance. It has become part of the British psyche and is remembered as simply, *England Expects...* As did Nelson, Churchill had the will to preserve the trust and guard the duty given him by those who had gone before. As was Nelson, Churchill was grateful to his countrymen for their obligation to it.^C

The indelible image evoked by mere mention of the name CHURCHILL served the consummate bearer of the name well time and again. Winston Churchill's unquestionable responsibility to the call of duty helped him see and foresee the peril posed to his world. His accountability to the charge he was given pointed toward the promise of its future. Lord Nelson's last words were, "Thank God I have done my duty." As Mr. Churchill reflected on Germany's surrender in 1945, Britain's greatest sailor could hardly have been far from the mind and heart of Britain's greatest wartime Prime Minister:

*We were weary and worn, impoverished but undaunted,
and now triumphant. We had a moment that was sublime.
We gave thanks to God for the noblest of all His blessings,
the sense that we had done our duty.¹⁸*

A genuine leader finds a way to overcome the impossible. With all its difficulties and dangers, he assures others as he takes them along the unseen course ahead. He is able to make decisions quickly and effectively with the self-confidence to shut the door and not return the way he came. A leader does not linger over a decision. He knows what to do and does it. He is decisive.

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A leader who lasts the passage of time possesses integrity. A great leader maintains honor and trust. He has an undivided loyalty to truth. No leader can be faultless, but he can be blameless. He will make mistakes, but his desire to do the right thing holds fast his purity of purpose: *“There is a helpful guide to nations facing difficult choices. This guide is called honor.”*¹⁹

A true leader never changes his core values. He is not driven by the opinions of others. He never woos a high percentage of the people and is most misunderstood during times of conflict and pressure. A genuine leader is often lonely, but seldom desolate. While his greatest disappointments come from those he is leading, he remains confident in who he is and what he is called to do. A true leader keeps coming at his challenges—coming and coming again.



The young member of Parliament, Mr. Winston Churchill, as he appeared at the time of his election in 1900, as Conservative member from Oldham, aged just 25.

(Churchill Archives Centre; Baroness Spencer-Churchill Papers)

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A leader who lives throughout history has the imperishable spark of inspiration. The passion in his life draws others like a flame. When he catches fire, people come to watch him burn. The root of the English word passion is “suffering.” A great leader is willing to suffer for his calling and his cause. His dedication and devotion are awe-inspiring. The English word inspire means literally “to breathe.”

In history, a leader who inspires is an undying ember which needs only the breath of challenge and opportunity to bring the fire alive again in the hearts and minds of those who discover him. An inspirational leader has characteristics others desire in themselves. He has the ability to motivate others to identify with him. He moves them to become more than they are at that moment. They seem to believe: *“If it's possible for him, it's possible for me!”* An inspirational leader fills others with the power and energy of his example. He causes others to see the mission of his life. He influences others to reach heights they never believed they could reach.

The image of Winston Churchill is *inspiration*. He passionately animated ideas and ideals. He inspired hope in a people who purposed to survive bomb upon bomb, horror upon horror. He gave life to a nation facing death. When his Island witnessed France fall in a matter of days, Paris in just hours, it's as if he inspired his country to say: *“If Old Winny can stand against insurmountable odds, we can hold out against anything! If Old Winny refuses to be defeated, we will be victorious!”*

For any individual, the chance for historic greatness is a combination of character and circumstance. Character demands each person answer his call to duty with responsibility for decisions and actions. Circumstances require each individual be prepared to take hold of every opportunity. When circumstances presented themselves, greatness seized Winston Churchill. In *Never Give In*, author Stephen Mansfield sums up his legacy:

It could be said that when the final chapter of human history is written and Churchill is remembered from that distance, his greatest gift to succeeding generations may be found to have been the very issue of teaching men the price of greatness.²⁰

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Winston Churchill bequeathed to history a bold spirit. He had the ability to see things others could not see. He knew where to go when others did not know and dared to take them there. He had vision to say it could be done, courage to make it happen, and determination to stick it out when the going was tough. Winston Churchill had the undivided heart of a leader of integrity and inspiration. A bona fide hero in his day, his spirit is vitally needed for tumultuous times.



Holding trademark cigar, Prime Minister Winston Churchill waves to well-wishers outside 10 Downing Street.
(Churchill Archives Centre; Baroness Spencer-Churchill Papers)

Mr. Churchill lives on. We hear his spirit in the voices of leaders who continue on his path. We see his spirit in individuals who live out integrity of character. We desire his spirit as a model of courage and conviction. We cherish his spirit in the lives of leaders who inspire passion for just causes. As the values of the Free World are

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once again challenged by great forces of darkness, Western civilization must stand now as it did then. Stand it must. Stand it shall. For it has great shoulders upon which to stand.

Sir Winston's father once reflected on the character of leaders. Lord Randolph Churchill could scarcely have known he was poignantly and prophetically describing his progeny:

Real leaders of men do not come forward offering to lead. They show the way. And when it has been found to lead to victory, they accept as a matter of course the allegiance of those who have followed.²¹

In the darkest days of 1940, the lights of liberty were all but extinguished. Across a continent, all hope of freedom seemed lost. The vision of victory was but a faint flicker until a voice traveled across the rugged and rocky coasts of the English Channel. “The Voice” promised blood, toil, tears, and sweat. The man gave leadership, inspiration, and hope. Winston Spencer Churchill marked for his time—and the world—the way ahead.

*He was a man. Take him for all in all.
We shall not look upon his like again.*

Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 2

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- ^A Demosthenes is considered the greatest orator of ancient Greece. According to Plutarch, ancient Greek historian and biographer, Demosthenes stuttered in his youth and improved his speech by practicing with pebbles in his mouth. Throughout his life he espoused the democratic principles upon which the immortal legacy of Greece would rest.
- ^B Lord Nelson twice stopped Napoleon in his ambition to bring England to her knees. After his subjugation of Western Europe, Bonaparte, in an effort to dominate the globe, conquered Egypt on his quest to take India. It was Nelson alone—with help from the British fleet—who stood in his way. After the Battle of the Nile, Napoleon escaped to the Continent to plot the invasion of the “Island just across that ditch which one can jump whenever one is bold enough to try.” The little Corporal and his ambition to subjugate the seas was finished on October 21, 1805, at the Battle of Trafalgar by the raw courage of just one man—Nelson.
- ^C After the war, as a gift in recognition of his victory, Churchill was given Nelson's Prayer Book by a descendant of the Admiral's daughter by Lady Hamilton.