

On Leadership Styles

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Good morning everyone. As you just heard, I have been asked to share some thoughts with you on the state of our democracy, based on my experience as Government House Leader in a minority Parliament. Perhaps the right place to start is by telling you about an article that I read a few years ago that had quite an impact on me. I came across it in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* and it kept me thinking for days. It was about the changing skills that leaders of multinational corporations need to succeed in the New Economy and what it might mean for Canadians. The article said, and I quote:

“...the traditional [leadership] style of leading the troops over the hill to conquer is out of favour in an economy increasingly marked by mergers, joint ventures and co-operative networking. Being able to work collaboratively—delegating responsibility and appreciating diversity—is becoming the way of the New Economy...Canadian senior executives are in the enviable position of being leaders in this approach.”¹

In effect, the news here is that business leaders now think that the traditional, tough-as-nails, take-no-prisoners kind of leadership belongs in the past. It is part of an old paradigm that should be abandoned.

By contrast, today’s corporate leader is expected to excel at teamwork, relationship building, negotiation and communications. The article goes on to say that, in the New Economy, those countries whose culture and values encourage collaboration are more likely to succeed in leadership positions. Canada, it concludes, is such a country.

There is a particular lesson that I want to draw from this because it is directly related to the points that I want to make this morning. Let me sum it up this way: In an increasingly diverse and complex world, the best way to succeed is not by trying to steamroll the competition. Working together is often a better way to get results.

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¹ “Canadian team builders turn U.S. heads” *Globe and Mail* (28 August 2000), B8.

The article puts before us two competing views of leadership. One emphasizes the power to issue commands and rules, usually from a remote location. It regards involvement with others—especially competitors—as interference that only diminishes the power of the leader. The other emphasizes collaboration. In this view, far from being diminished by working with the competition, leadership can be enhanced and strengthened by it.

Over the last decade, I have been involved in many debates about leadership. Now, as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons—in a minority Parliament—I find myself in a unique position to test some of the ideas and see where theory meets practice, where the rubber hits the road.

Here is the question I want to pose for you: **What kind of leadership do we want in Parliament?** The answer, it seems, depends on who you ask—or, perhaps, on how you look at democracy. Let me explain with an example based on personal experience.

As you know, our government recently tabled its Speech from the Throne, followed by the Prime Minister's Address in Reply to it. Two opposition parties, the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois, proposed amendments. As a minority government, we had some hard choices to make. There were some tense moments. At one point we were poised to hold a confidence vote on the amendments. But we worked hard with the other parties. We all met, talked and, in the end, found agreement on wording that satisfied them and met the government's objectives without compromising its core principles.

Today, there is a sense among the parties that together we were able to demonstrate that we can make this Parliament work. Nevertheless, there is an alternate view, which says that we should have pushed ahead with the confidence vote and that working together with the opposition only serves to weaken the government. As House Leader it has been my job to lead many of these negotiations. So I think I'd like to take this occasion to comment on how I see them.

Let me begin with some thoughts on democracy. In my view, the genius of democracy lies in its ability to help us live with our differences—and to do so **respectfully**. It is a way of making decisions on issues of the highest importance, when others around us—our family members, friends and neighbours—may disagree with our views.

Democracy does this through a two-step process: **debate** and **decision making**. First, we discuss and debate our views. Ideally, we propose options and alternatives, we provide arguments and evidence and, in the process, we all listen and learn. Then we decide.

In Parliament, of course, this happens by a vote. In a Westminster system such as our own, a political party with a majority can gain control of this second step. When it does, it effectively controls

Parliament. What questions does this pose for our two views of leadership? If you believe that leadership is defined by who controls the most votes then the answer is clear. All that really matters is whether or not I have the **power** to decide. If I do, you do not. If I share some of it with you, my power as a leader is diminished. Looked at this way, the logic of power is brutally simple—as is the kind of leadership that follows from it.

Let me shift your attention back to the first stage of democracy: deliberation and debate. Suppose that I have more power than you. Suppose that I am part of a majority government that has the votes to ensure the final decision. If the debate and discussion between us is meaningful—if I really **listen** to you—it may change how I think. It may even change how I use the power that I have. So, while you may not have the power to decide, you can still have some **influence** over me. That is possible only if I am willing to listen to you and seriously consider what you say.

It is this basic belief that democracy is about listening to one another—even when the number of votes is in someone’s favour—that makes it so appealing. It allows us to accept the final decision as legitimate, even when it goes against our views. It allows us to live with our differences—and to do so respectfully.

There is nothing in democracy, however, that forces us to talk and listen to one another. It is a choice and a commitment that each party and each individual must make, if democracy is to be anything more than the quest for power. Even in countries with a long history of democracy, this does not come easily. It must be cultivated, practiced, learned and reinforced. We are all very much part of a tradition in which leadership has been practiced as a game of control. We all need to contribute, if we are going to change that.

This brings me to the subject of minority governments—one on which, I must acknowledge with some regret, I am fast becoming an expert. Canadians have decided that this Parliament will be governed by a minority. Although I might have preferred otherwise, I fully accept that judgment. But what lesson should we learn from it?

In my view, it is that Canadians want Parliament to be about more than the quest for power. They want to see that debate is meaningful and that we are listening to one another when we engage in it. They want to see more collaboration and less confrontation.

Finding myself in the situation of managing a minority government is proving very instructive here. Most of the House’s activity must be negotiated beforehand. It is not always easy. There are times when I would prefer to say to my colleagues across the table: “Take it or leave it!” rather than “What do you think?” Believe me, “What do you think?” can be a lot harder. The opposition parties often have very different

views from those of our government. As a result, even at the best of times, governing with a minority can be a trying and messy business. But overall there are fewer surprises, procedural shenanigans, and games. People have to agree to make it work.

Still, let me be very clear: If anyone thinks that this means that we do not have a bottom line, they are wrong. As a government, we have an agenda based on a substantive policy direction. We have goals. We fought an election campaign on them. And we will stand by them. So, yes, I am listening to the opposition—and so is the government I represent. But I regard that as a gain for Canadians—and I think that they will too.

This brings me back to the question of working together with the opposition: Should it be seen as a sign of weakness? As you may have guessed, I disagree with that view. And here is why: It is based in a view of leadership that I reject—one that sees Parliament as little more than a game of power and who controls it. From this angle, our success as a government will be judged by whether we can get our agenda through without “blinking” or “caving in” or “backing down” or some other of a dozen tired metaphors.

From where I stand, this is just wrong. I have metaphors too—ones that I think do a much better job of explaining what we are trying to do, like “finding a balance,” “looking for middle ground” or just plain “working together.” So—from my perspective, what looks like an effort to make room for other voices may look to others like weakness or having no bottom line. As always, so much depends on how we choose to see things. Maybe it is worth introducing one final metaphor here: Is the Parliamentary glass half full or half empty?

Interestingly, some commentators have taken the opposite view from the one I just discussed. They think that Parliament is working remarkably well—so well, in fact, that they may wonder why we would ever want a majority government. My answer is this: While we are learning from this experience—and that is a good thing—the right lesson to draw here is not that a minority government is better than a majority government. It is rather that collaboration is better than confrontation.

Moreover, there is a cost that comes with minority governments and we should recognize it. Let me remind you that there are deep differences between the views of our government and those of the other parties. In a minority situation, we must be careful about how far we tread into this territory. That means that it is more difficult for us as a minority government to pursue some of the goals that I believe a majority of Canadians support.

For the moment, however, we must accept that they have a higher priority. They have signalled the parties in Parliament that they want them to learn to work together better. Our government accepts that

judgment. The challenge that it poses for us is to take steps that will help change the **culture**. Changing our views around leadership is a very important part of that.

Over the last 10 years, I have been a part of many discussions about how to make Parliament more democratic. My colleagues and I have debated procedures and rules, processes and practices of all sorts—sometimes late into the night. While I certainly would not want to say that the exercise has been unhelpful, I see now—every day—that it does not get to the heart of things.

In the first instance, democracy is not about rules and procedures. First and foremost, it is about **voice**. Democracy feels like it is working when people feel that their voice counts—that it is being listened to—in the political process, whether as a citizen or as parliamentarians. This brings me to the central point that I want to make today:

Far from being a weakness, in a democracy, collaboration should be recognized as a core value. It is one that I have made part of my bottom line in politics. I encourage others to do the same.

Indeed, I think the central message that Canadians sent in the last election is that all parties had better make it part of their bottom lines.

In summing up, let me say that I side with the new business leaders that I referred to at the beginning of this speech—those who believe that we need more collaboration and less confrontation; those who believe that the old paradigm of leadership based on the strong-man needs to change. Ordinary Canadians know this very well. They see everyday that their businesses, marriages, associations and friendships work better when they try to listen to, rather than control, one another.

If we are looking for a knockdown argument in favour of collaboration, this last point comes pretty close. So close, in fact, that I would like to draw my remarks to a close by testing it on you: Does anyone here really want to say that an effort to listen to others is a sign of weakness? And here—this is the acid test: How many of you would teach this principle to your children? With that, I thank you all for having taken the time to listen.

Q & A T O N Y V A L E R I

Minister, I assume that the two smaller parties would be interested in making changes to the standing orders so that the situation they're in now has some more permanence to it, let's say. The Conservatives may or may not see things that way—hoping to form a majority themselves one of these days. I wonder if you could tell us if you foresee any changes to the standing orders of Parliament?

There's actually been a lot of discussion about standing orders. In fact, I would say that if you recall right after the election and before Parliament resumed, we had the three leaders of the opposition essentially table a number of standing order changes that they all agreed on, and we've been working our way through that. One of them, if you recall, was a change in the standing order to define confidence, something which I was not able to support (I made that very clear right from the beginning).

But certainly there are a number of changes to the standing orders that we've already made. For instance, the deputy speaker was traditionally an appointment by the Prime Minister. It's now an opposition member, and the name was put forward by the opposition. The assistant deputy speakers were both put in place by the Prime Minister. But the opposition parties were given an opportunity to put forward names (and they did not—the smaller parties in particular did not). But those appointments were made in consultation with the opposition parties.

There are some changes with respect to debate and questions, that we have allowed more time for in the House of Commons. There are a number that are coming up with respect to how we deal with concurrence for committee reports when they come back to the house, and how we deal with that.

For instance, this probably is something that not a lot of people know, but opposition day motions, for instance, are unamendable except by the sponsor of the opposition day motion. Perhaps it made sense in a majority situation, but it no longer makes sense in a minority situation. In a majority situation, it was the one thing that the opposition party could put forward and know that they could see through the day unamended. In a minority situation that is no longer the case.

I foresee a number of changes to the standing orders, and certainly my objective in changing the standing orders would speak to the issue of voice: are members getting more opportunity for input? Is their voice in

the changes that we make? So I do see some changes in the standing orders. In fact, all three are looking for change.

There's some difference on the private members business, which is an interesting dynamic. If you recall in the last Parliament, all private members business became votable. It was a provisional change in the standing order, and I think that expires in the first 90 days of this parliament. So there is some discussion about how to deal with that, and there's a difference in the opposition parties on how to deal with it.

Some are concerned that every private member's bill is votable. I tried to understand at first, why there would be that concern, but I'm now understanding that some opposition parties or opposition members would like to put something on the floor of the House, perhaps worded in such a way that might engage debate, but would not want to see a vote on it, because people might not want to pronounce where they ultimately stand on something, and so it can be a little tricky, at times. So some of that is coming back in the dialogue between us.

Minister, I'd just like to state first I agree with your theory, and I'd just like to hear your comments about what you would plan to do when you run up against a guy like Premier Williams?

Keep talking—and lock the door.

But I do think, though, that's an interesting dynamic in the sense that, at the end of the day, people are looking for leaders to work things out. So I don't think that I would do anything different, except ensure that we get back to a table and hammer it out, and make sure that whatever we end up with is a win, and people understand the trade-offs and what the trade-offs might mean.

I am a firm believer that dialogue is what it's all about—it's all about collaboration. At the end of the day—and don't get me wrong—I have said some things that that other opposition House leaders may not have agreed with or liked. But we can continue the dialogue. I mean, it's my job to put forward a position, as it is their job, and we respect each other. I won't back away from saying what I need to say. But I also will not accept no dialogue, because I don't think that that serves anybody's purpose.

So if I can enter any type of relationship in the frame of collaboration, laying out my bottom lines, I think that we can bring people along. At the end of the day, that there has to be a goal and an objective that we all have. We might be wanting to reach it through different methods but we all have to buy into that one goal. I can tell you that at my first meeting with House leaders in this parliament, I chatted with them pretty well the way I'm speaking to you now.

The bottom line here is that there has to be an agreement to make parliament work, and that means a bunch of trade-offs on all sides. And if we're just saying that, and perhaps our actions might be different, this will be a very short lived parliament. I'm not prepared to just go along for the ride because we don't want to go to the Canadian people. I think people expect the parliament to work; it is our responsibility to make it work. So, actions and words need to be in lock step, and I think so far it's worked that way.

I'm not naive, I don't think it can work that way forever in this parliament because people will become entrenched in their positions along the way. But I think, so far is so good, and I think the approach is the right approach and I have to tell you that I think it's the right approach. People that have been in politics a lot longer than I have been in politics sometimes have trouble with the approach because they do think that you need to take the troops over the hill at any cost, because that's what it's about.

I think it's about Canadians. I think it's about voice, and I think it's about bringing people that have differing and opposing views together and coming out somewhere that is in the best interests of Canadians.

Deathbed conversions are often repudiated when the patient recovers. Should the government that is in semi-power today return to full power, do you think your initiatives will survive the recovery?

If I'm there, I would commit to yes, but there's no guarantee that I'll be there. I think the Prime Minister is very, very much committed to that type of approach. He talked about the approach prior to the election. During his leadership, the commitment to voice and the commitment to having parliament work.

It's interesting. I've been parliament since '93. Bob was there in '88. A lot of the members, and the opposition frankly, became very accustomed to Parliament working in the traditional way.

An interesting dynamic is in committees. You bring legislation to committees. In a majority situation, the opposition opposes because that's what the opposition does. You work through and amendment and at the end of the day, the government has the numbers—the government gets to decide. Even in instances where the opposition might agree, you would have an opposition member, in some cases a government member on a private members bill saying “you know what, I like the position. I think I could support that, but the party is not going to support it for the following reasons.”

The interesting dynamic in this minority government is that the opposition has the majority on committees. So the opposition can no

longer just take positions of opposing for the sake of opposing. When legislation comes out of committees, it comes out of committees as a result of the opposition party participating and voting in favour of this legislation.

So, the other point that I would just leave you with, is that in a minority situation, there is an enhanced responsibility on all members of Parliament, because we all have a greater role to play. Whether it's a majority or a minority situation, collaboration and responsibility—individual responsibility by Members of Parliament—I think, are greatly enhanced.

I think that majority governments returning to the House of Commons is a good thing. But I think majority governments need to be about collaboration. It's not just minority governments that need to be about collaboration.

I'd just like to leave you with that.