

## Determination and Persistence

Richard H. Ryder, 2017

When the pressure is on to deliver, and you feel you are not qualified to handle a task, to what do you turn to get the job done? When the odds are against you, when you are exhausted or when everyone is telling you to give up, what provides you the motivation to carry on? When others seem to pick things up like a sponge, but you just can't seem to grasp what is going on, what provides you the extra punch to compensate for perceived incompetence. Well, I would argue determination and persistence can trump skill and intelligence more often than you think.

Let's face it, we can't all be experts in everything. Some are better with their hands, some are more cerebral, and some have not benefited from advanced, formal education. And yet, we all find ourselves in situations that test our abilities and our mettle. The easy route might be to exit stage left, get out of the pressure cooker, and move on to something within your comfort zone. Sometimes this may be the best course of action, but leaders need to dig deeper and find the best within themselves.

In my 35 years in high tech I was fortunate to work with many talented, driven, intelligent, and capable people. There were times when I was intimidated by their abilities, oftentimes overwhelmed by their productivity, and sometimes upset that I was not able to pick things up as easily or as broadly as they could. Sometimes it seemed they were coasting, and I was peddling as fast as I could just to keep up. But, it was those very moments that strengthened me and allowed me to grow, professionally and personally. What I may have lacked in experience and education, I made up for with determination and persistence.

Determination is the quality of being resolute or firm in purpose; while persistence means you hold firmly and steadfastly to a purpose, state, or undertaking, despite obstacles, warnings, or setbacks<sup>1</sup>. This means there may be a higher influence acting upon the individual when confronted by a seemingly immovable object. Maybe it is a cause greater than oneself or a personal goal that is deeply imbedded within you. Maybe it is a fear of failure – a powerful motivator. Maybe there are team members or a staff of people who depend on you and who are looking for the best in you. Or, maybe it is any one of a host of things that causes you to feel the pressure to deliver.

According to Fred A. Manske, Jr, in his book, *Secrets of Effective Leadership*, "*High-performing leaders exhibit exceptional determination in pursuing their objectives. They never let up until they succeed.*" History is rich with examples of personal persistence: Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain and World War II, Helen Keller and her struggle to overcome blindness, Martin Luther King and the struggle against racism and for civil rights. Our struggles are less consequential, but in the heat of the moment they can be powerful and daunting.

One of my favorite quotes is from Calvin Coolidge, 30<sup>th</sup> President of the United States – "*Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men*

*with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”*

Masonic leaders should find Calvin Coolidge’s words inspirational and encouraging. We are a diverse group of men, each with unique talents, but all striving for what is best for the fraternity. There will be times when the responsibilities of the position you hold will require you to act in ways that are foreign to your experience and skills. But, escape may be impossible.

Maybe you must lead the lodge out of a very difficult situation. Maybe you were “volunteered” to organize the next open house. Or, maybe you were asked to do the impossible without proper funding, resources, or time. Whatever it is, you may be tested more than ever before. But, if you are resolute and firm in purpose with respect to the greater goals of Freemasonry, then this greater calling can drive you through all kinds of obstacles. If you believe in the undertaking, whatever the task, then this too will motivate you to persist through obstacles and setbacks. Challenges that force you out of your comfort zone can be watershed moments in your personal growth, making you more confident when the next challenge approaches. When this happens, just remember the words of Thomas Fuller, the 17<sup>th</sup> century English clergyman - *“an invincible determination can accomplish almost anything”*.

1) The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985