

Authors Laud Bush Leadership Style

If you're one of the millions who likes to joke about President "Dumya," a world leader so dopey that he had to search far and wide for a Cabinet and top staff so smart he wouldn't look like an idiot, then get ready to be called a dope yourself.

Because while everybody else was focused on the politics of hiring practices, two renowned business consultants have been studying his leadership horse sense and the result is the unconventional book, "The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush."

"Most people think," says co-author Carolyn B. Thompson, "he hired smart people because he's not so smart." But, she explains after years of studying leadership traits, "That's the key to being a successful leader."

In their book, about to hit bookstores, the duo agree that the initial impression of Bush is the one the media and foes have fostered: A middling student whose success came from the family name.

"His style of leadership seems to contradict almost everything we thought we knew about leadership," say Thompson and James W. Ware, who are known for their leadership studies. However, upon further investigation and talks with top Bush friends and aides, they concluded that though his country-boy image, Bush employs classic leadership tricks that almost always work.

"He consistently employs," they write, "timeless principles of leadership. These principles have been used throughout the ages by leaders from Attila the Hun to Thomas Jefferson." And, later in the book, they add Moses and Patton.

"Just as important," they add, "Bush has what our grandfathers called horse sense. Bush knows this about himself."

Ware and Thompson know that their theory of Bush's leadership is bound to bring a few snickers by others who follow the president. But they add that Bush could care less. In fact, they explain that his desire to be sold short and underestimated is one of his best leadership trademarks. That is: his ability to make the right decision and shock everybody.

Inside the White House, of course, this isn't news. In fact, even aides who came from opposing political camps have quickly turned into loyal and aggressively defensive Bushies. Certainly they'll look upon this book as vindication of their views.

The authors conclude that Bush follows 10 key

BY PAUL BEDARD

leadership rules that they dub "10 Commandments from the Commander-In-Chief."

The first commandment is his ability to answer the question, "What do you stand for?" by identifying core values. For Bush, the values are simple: Family, faith and integrity. By comparison, the authors asked the same question for Bill Clinton and found it was unanswerable.

"Family is more important than a job," the authors

find, after offering several examples of when Bush has gone to bat to defend his family and friends.

They say that it's rare, however, for a business or political leader to live up to their core values. They note that former Enron boss Ken Lay also talked about values, but obviously didn't believe them. "This example is the rule rather than the exception," they write.

The second commandment is providing a vision to answer the question, "Where are you going?" Bush's vision was articulated in his phrase "compassionate conservatism." They say it provided a unifying them, was explained in the shared values of peace, free markets and freedom, offered a future picture of expanded freedom and had the high standard of fighting for freedom. And, they say, he's delivered, especially in the war on terror.

But unlike Jimmy Carter, Bush hasn't fallen victim to details. He's a big-picture guy who leaves the details to aides.

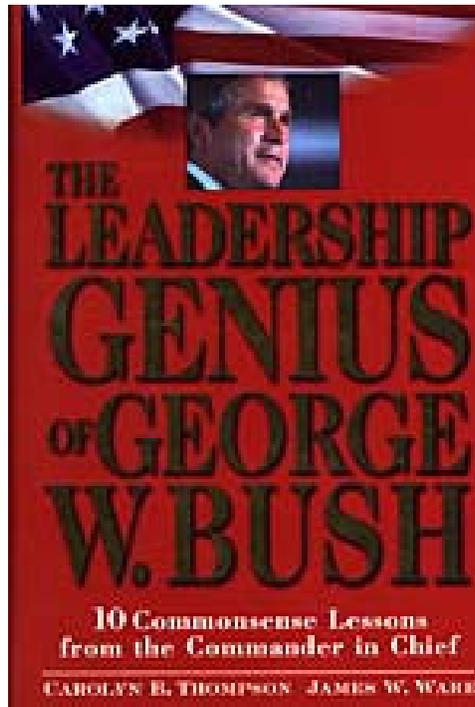
The third commandment is credibility and trust, results and empathy. They all showed up after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, say the authors, who focused on Bush's initially strong promises to retaliate, his eventual attack on al Qaeda and his Ground Zero bullhorn speech.

"Bush is one of those leaders who clearly excels at building trust. Even with a tough character like Russia's Vladimir Putin, Bush has built the level of trust to the point where Putin said, 'Over the last year and a half or two years, what we've experienced is a huge growth in confidence and trust manifested between our two countries.'"

The fourth commandment is hiring people smarter than you are. This is the one trait Bush has been both belittled and praised for. Ware and Thompson, however, call it a brilliant ability especially because Bush doesn't just hire, he "recruits" people to his cause.

"Bush's leadership genius in bringing in the right

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“They did a really good thing with the Earth Simulator,” he said. “Its performance has been quite good. It is working on problems of great importance. So what’s the United States going to do in response to this very positive challenge?”

Several federal agencies are thinking about how to respond to the Earth Simulator, Nelson said.

“I see my role as helping to bring them together, and working with them to come up with how their individual roles fit together toward a coherent whole,” he said.

Nelson said he has not yet spoken with representatives of all of the interested agencies, so he does not yet know what will take shape, but it possibly could involve building an overall U.S. high-end computing research strategy.

Right now, there are “a lot more questions at this point than answers,” Nelson said.

Nelson said he has spoken with Raymond Orbach, the director of the Department of Energy Office of Science and an outspoken federal official on the need for the U.S. to bolster its supercomputing capability in the face of the Japanese challenge.

In addition to DOE, such research agencies as NASA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and the National Science Foundation could play roles in a high-end computing R&D program. Other agencies, such as the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, which do not do computing research, but are heavy users of supercomputers, also may be involved.

“One of the first questions to be answered is: What are the agency interests, so how would they wish it to take shape?” Nelson said.

It’s too late to formulate any supercomputing R&D plans for the fiscal year 2004 budget, due to be unveiled in a matter of weeks, so any high-end computing initiatives would come in FY 2005, he said.

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people lies not just in his research and persuasion abilities, but also in his willingness to hire people who are smarter than he is—no matter whose appointee they were. So check your ego at the door, and then get on with the recruiting.”

Of course, it takes work, and the authors say the Bush team really researches the backgrounds of job candidates. But once one is selected, Bush takes over and sells the candidate on his administration.

And they normally stay because Bush employs the fifth leadership commandment: He leaves them alone to do their job. The workers, in turn, are motivated by Bush’s trust in their actions and their eagerness to build that trust.

The sixth commandment is seen in Bush’s ability to build coalitions and inspire collaborations—his most notable being his recruiting of legendary Texas Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock. He’s done this with some domestic programs, such as education, and even by winning a resolution to take on terrorism and Iraq.

The seventh Bush commandment is talking straight. “Straight talk encourages straight talk,” they write. It also allows little wiggle room when it comes to carrying out Bush’s orders.

And it helps that he doesn’t speak like a Rhodes scholar. “Telling the truth is one important component of giving it to ‘em straight. Short sentences, positive words, strategic pauses, and storytelling round out the straight talker’s tool kit. Blunt, brash, or too direct? Not a chance,” say the authors.

The eighth commandment is sticking to a schedule, or, as they size Bush up, “If it’s noon, I must be jogging.” The point: be disciplined and focused. Everything is on a tight schedule in the White House, they report. Bush, for example, takes about two hours daily for exercise and likes to leave the Oval by 6 p.m. He likes speech drafts a week in advance. And he likes to keep appointments to five minutes.

It’s just work, after all, and it’ll drag on if a schedule isn’t set. Just recall Clinton’s practice of losing control of his schedule so badly he was still working past midnight for essentially the same—or worse—success rate.

And, Bush thinks being late is being rude. “You don’t get the Red Badge of Courage for working late,” say Ware and Thompson.

That commandment also requires keeping to a plan. They recall how Bush built the Texas Rangers, when fans wanted an instant winner. Eventually they had one, but only because he drew up a list and finished it.

The ninth commandment is trusting your instincts. Again, take the war on terrorism. Bush was no veteran with lots of war experience, but he trusted his intuition and aides. Or, as they quote Bush saying, “be in the moment.”

Finally, the 10th commandment requires Bush to get results and hold aides accountable because without victory and punishment for failures, the rest don’t count.

You can see it even in his budgeting. Office of Management and Budget Director Mitchell Daniels has required program managers to score the effectiveness of their projects. Those that don’t work well will be scrapped.

Ware and Thompson say that Bush should be a role model for leaders in business and politics, who feel they are being underestimated.

“He was an average student, a party guy, a mediocre athlete—and look what he did with that modest talent. Parlayed it into becoming president of the world’s most powerful nation. Not bad, eh?”

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