



Article from

The Stepping Stone

July 2018

Issue 69

COMMUNICATION

Leadership Inspiration: An Admirable Leader

By Brian C. Hinkle

Editor's note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is the winning entry from the Admirable Leader category.

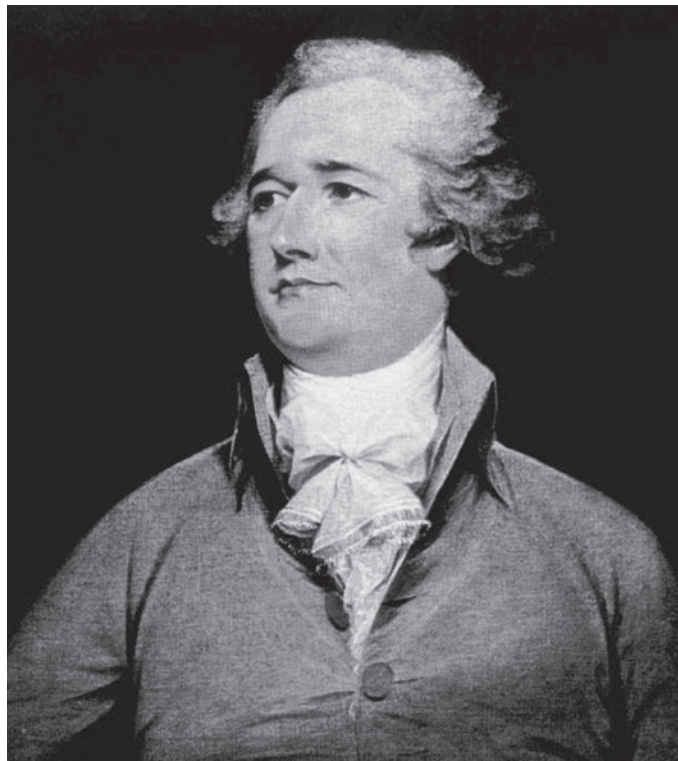
First, a confession. Everything I know about Alexander Hamilton, I learned from the Broadway play *Hamilton*, which I have never seen. I have listened to the soundtrack several times though, which paints the picture of a great, but flawed, leader.

Alexander Hamilton came from extremely humble beginnings, yet rose to be one of our nation's founding fathers. He did so through unmatched ambition, hard work, rare intellect and a propensity to always speak his mind. This led him to be brash, somewhat self-obsessed and arrogant, but also to accomplish great things through strong principles of what our nation could and should be.

The most valuable lesson I take from Alexander Hamilton is the importance of speaking up. In today's corporate culture, there can exist an almost reverential deference to the ideas and opinions of senior leaders. No doubt, these leaders have knowledge, experience and judgment that should be respected and highly regarded—but not so much that we diminish our own value by not speaking up.

To me, that's what it comes down to: a belief in my own personal value. If I hold back my ideas or opinions because they might contradict a more senior associate, I'm expressing a belief that I have less value as a person than they do. If I respectfully express my idea or opinion and, due to their higher level of knowledge, experience or responsibility, the senior leader chooses a different course, then I am able to support that decision. While I must defer because of the hierarchical corporate structure, I know that on a personal level, I have operated as an equal.

When we diminish our own *personal* value by silently deferring to associates with higher corporate value, we are harming all



involved. Personally, we lose out on the opportunity to discuss and talk through our ideas with wise counsel. We begin to lose confidence and initiative as nonthinking silence becomes the easier path. Senior leaders lose access to innovative or contrarian thinking that can either broaden their thinking or help refine their current position. And the organization loses out on the benefit of all associates bringing their best ideas and efforts.

I'm fortunate enough to work with senior leaders who have always welcomed, and often sought out, the input of those beneath them on the corporate ladder. My ideas have always been accepted; sometimes acted upon and sometimes overruled. Both outcomes have been wonderful learning experiences.

Aaron Burr, Hamilton's rival, is notorious throughout the play for never speaking his mind, in fear of it someday being used against him. This reticence to share his opinion ultimately stagnates his career and causes him to lose the presidency. I'll take the Hamiltonian approach, albeit less brashly, and I certainly won't be dueling anyone who disagrees with me. ■



Brian C. Hinkle, FSA, is an actuary at Securian Financial, where he primarily works on product development and pricing for institutional retirement plans. He can be reached at brian.hinkle@securian.com.