If we really study Machiavelli, we find him to be the author of one of the first leadership books in the world, and a very practical leader with a profound worldview.

**Always Be Present and Make Yourself Available**

“...one of the spot, disorders are seen as they spring up, and one can quickly remedy them; but if one is not at hand, they are heard of only when they are great, and then one can no longer remedy them.”

This is great advice for all leaders. We oftentimes tend to get excited about visions of the future and possibilities but all of us need to manage the present. Being present and available enables us to manage today.

If we don’t manage today well, there will be no point in hoping for tomorrow as it will never become a reality.

Machiavelli reinforces this point with another quote: “There is such a gap between how one lives and how one should live that he who neglects what is being done for what should be done will learn his destruction rather than his preservation,” urging us to live for today not tomorrow.

**Learn from Others**

“...to exercise the intellect, the prince should read histories, and study there the actions of illustrious men, to see how they have borne themselves in war, to examine the causes of their victories and defeat, so as to avoid the latter and imitate the former.”

Almost 500 years later, Machiavelli’s advice is still sound. Leaders who constantly learn, especially from others, are bound to win.

Are you learning daily? Are you examining others who have tried and gone before you and learning from their mistakes?

If you aren’t, now is a good time to start doing so.

Machiavelli adds: “A prudent man should always follow in the path trodden by great men and imitate those who are most excellent, so that if he does not attain to their greatness, at any rate he will get some tinge of it.”

**Get Constant Feedback**

“There is no other way to guard yourself against flattery than by making men understand that telling you the truth will not offend you.”

Most leaders are so isolated from the truth as people are scared to tell it to them.

Machiavelli advocates finding ways to always get feedback and build structures to ensure we are hearing what is really happening on the ground.

The truth may hurt, but only by knowing it will we make the right long-term decisions. Have an inner circle of people who can be totally honest with you about everything.

**Love Those Around You**

“The first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the man he has around him.”

Easy to quote but hard to implement. We all say we like to hire people smarter than ourselves, but the reality is different.

Machiavelli advocates leaders ‘win’ and ‘retain’ smart people with love: “Therefore the best fortune is to be found in the love of the people, for although you may have fortresses, they will not save you if you are hated by the people.”

So, hire great people and surround them with love.

**Final Thoughts**

A final lesson Machiavelli provides me is to never assume someone is bad. I suspect most of us would have labelled Machiavelli an unscrupulous person based on the meaning of the word ‘Machiavellian’ today.

Yet, if we really study him, we find him to be the author of one of the first leadership books in the world, and a very practical leader with a profound worldview.

As we meet different people, although they may come with a bad ‘reputation’ and legacy, never conclude based on another person’s judgment. Make your own call and, just as I was with Machiavelli, you too may be pleasantly surprised.

Niccòlo Machiavelli’s impact remains a source of controversy to this day.

---

By ROSHAN THIRAN

ROSHAN@LEADERONOMICS.COM

---

The first Machiavellian

What I learnt from one of history’s most controversial writers

---

Copyright © 2021 Leaderonomics

The success of an organisation and its leaders typically rest upon how managers and staff understand the psychological influences and processes of thinking. Leaderonomics has suitable workshops for those in managerial roles to learn the right techniques for critical, analytical and creative thinking for self- and organisational improvement. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more details.