

# January 2006, Ben Franklin-A Legacy of Leadership

As we begin the New Year, America will be celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin on January 17. He has been called "the first great American" and as author Jack Uldrich points out in the latest issue of Leader to Leader [www.leadertoleader.org](http://www.leadertoleader.org), modern leaders can look to Franklin as a great example because of his unique and unparalleled leadership skills.

Franklin's accomplishments were many. The amazing thing is that he achieved greatness in not one, but many fields. He was a successful businessman, renowned scientist, well regarded author, respected politician and diplomat and Founding Father. While it is highly unlikely that there will ever be a person that can duplicate what Franklin did, Uldrich believes the following principles formed the basis of his leadership style and are as relevant today as they were in his time.

## **Continuous Education and Lifelong Learning**

Franklin was the consummate student and made a habit of seeking out people who knew more than he did on a wide range of subjects. He said, "More is to be learned with the ear than the tongue."

## **Focusing on Goals Beyond the Self**

Franklin put into practice the premise that "individual endeavor can change the course of history for the better" into every aspect of his life. Today, where many CEOs concentrate solely on their responsibility to their shareholders, Franklin's life is a testament to balancing and achieving a wide variety of business and social goals.

## **Accommodating Divergent Needs - Quietly**

Franklin's humility was a hallmark of his leadership style. He was always willing to give others credit in order to achieve success. In his book, Good to Great, Jim Collins writes that many of today's best performing CEOs have learned that a quiet, low key approach is often an integral factor for achieving long-term results.

## **Building Strategic Partnerships**

Franklin was a master at determining what was critical for success in negotiations and what was merely advisable. He never confused the two.

## **Embracing Change**

Franklin steadfastly refused to adhere to the status quo. He said "Declarations of a fixed opinion, and of determined resolution never to change, neither enlighten nor convince us."

## **Think for the Long Term**

Franklin had remarkable vision. Because of his long-term thinking, the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia and the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston exist today and thrive as centers for learning and discovery.

Uldrich concludes by pointing out that Franklin, by both his words and deeds demonstrated that leaders, through equal parts of risk-taking, open-mindedness and vision can create a better future. A valuable lesson indeed, as we remember his legacy.