

Hard Calls in History: The Mahatma and the Eternal Spirit of 42

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Based on a Leadership example in the book **Hard Call: Great Decisions and the Extraordinary People Who Made Them**, by John McCain with Mark Salter, 2007



What cause is so precious that intelligent risk is worth taking? What characteristics are represented again and again in the greatest decisions? In American history, whether making a decision that would fundamentally change major league baseball or proceeding through the daily evolution of Texas County government, the characteristics of great decisions and the best qualities of the decision-makers come together to yield a significant product. This presentation focuses on a Leadership decision that was right, just and visionary despite the perils of incredible risk. It will examine the key qualities in the best decisions, the mutual characteristics shared by the decision-makers and the unique yet counterintuitive mindsets which set aside personality, personal feeling and personal gain to suffer a cause greater than one's self.

“I want a ballplayer with the guts *not* to fight back.” - Branch Rickey to Jackie Robinson,
August 28, 1945

The spirit of collaboration is “egolessness”

- **Voice, Values and Vision.**
 - It's congruence, not unison.
 - Collaboration is beautiful harmony – a chord made up of different pitches.
 - The spirit of collaboration is impeded by feeling like we must all see things the same.
- **Trust is what happens when values and behaviors match up.**

There is a great truth as well as many great myths about how real collaboration works. As mentioned earlier, collaboration requires the commitment of all who participate to suffer a cause greater than themselves. Somehow, one must be able to forget himself in view of the greater good of one's community. Here's a great example: who were the founding fathers? What kind of people were they and what of their backgrounds enabled their powerful spirit of cooperation?

The Founding Fathers of the United States were the [political leaders](#) who signed the [Declaration of Independence](#) in 1776 or otherwise took part in the [American Revolution](#) in winning American independence from Great Britain, or who participated in framing and adopting the [United States Constitution](#) in 1787-1788, or in putting the new government under the Constitution into effect. Within the large group known as "the founding fathers," there are two key subsets, the Signers (who signed the [Declaration of Independence](#) in 1776) and the Framers (who were delegates to the [Federal Convention](#) and took part in framing or drafting the proposed Constitution of the United States). Most historians define the "founding fathers" to mean a larger group, including not only the Signers and the Framers but also all those who, whether as politicians or jurists or statesmen or soldiers or diplomats or ordinary citizens, took part in winning American independence and creating the United States of America.^[2] American historian [Richard B. Morris](#), in his 1973 book *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny: The Founding Fathers as Revolutionaries*, identified the following seven figures as the key founding fathers: [Benjamin Franklin](#), [George Washington](#), [John Adams](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), [John Jay](#), [James Madison](#), and [Alexander Hamilton](#). The framers of the Constitution had extensive political experience. By 1787, four-fifths (41 individuals), were or had been members of the [Continental Congress](#). Nearly all of the 55 delegates had experience in colonial and state government, and the majority had held county and local offices. Various legends about the signing of the Declaration emerged years later, when the document had become an important national symbol. In one famous story, John Hancock supposedly said that Congress, having signed the Declaration, must now "all hang together", and Benjamin Franklin replied: "Yes, we must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

It is important to note some key definitions: the adjective congruous comes from the Latin *congruus*, from *congruere* to come together, agree:

In other words, collaboration is beautiful harmony – a chord made up of different pitches. The spirit of collaboration is impeded by feeling like we must all see things the same.

Qualities of great decisions (and the people who made them)

Timing is placement or occurrence in time (“the timing of the sale couldn't have been better”)

- The ability to select the precise moment for doing something for optimum effect (example: a boxer with impeccable timing *or*, as late-night pioneer icon Johnny Carson used to joke: “You know what makes a joke funny? Timing.)
 - What is the effect of great (or poor) timing?

Foresight is *the ability to predict, or the action of predicting, what will happen or what is needed in the future.*

- An act of looking forward; *also*: a view forward.
 - “I believe that this Nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.”
— John F. Kennedy Address to Joint Session of Congress, on Urgent National Needs (25 May 1961).
- What is your vision?

Confidence is a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances.

- Being certain either that a hypothesis or prediction is correct or that a chosen course of action is the best or most effective.
- “Be always sure you are right - then go ahead.” – Davy Crockett

Humility is the quality of being modest, reverential, even politely submissive, and never being arrogant, contemptuous, rude or even self-abasing.

- “Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.” - Saint Augustine

Inspiration is a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him or her to receive and communicate sacred revelation.

- The action or power of moving the intellect or emotions.
- The act of influencing or suggesting opinions.
 - *"Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."* --Thomas Jefferson: Declaration of Independence, 1776.

Awareness (including self-awareness) is having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge. *Conscious, alert and oriented* to time, person and place. (An old EMT protocol)

- The ancient Samurai say you must understand yourself **and** your opponent, to win 100% of the time.
- What is “situational awareness” in: Flying? Driving? Leading?

A great leader once said never your personal choices determine the parameters of your tolerance.

“Branch Rickey was both a cunning and a bottom-line man. He never attended Sunday games, out of deference to his devout mother and the strictures of his faith. But he listened to them on the radio, and as his critics never tired of pointing out, he didn’t object to the fact that the Sabbath was the most profitable day of the week at the ballparks. He was an outspoken advocate of prohibition who kept company with some of baseball’s hardest drinkers. He was devoted to his wife, and exemplary father to his six children, strict in his decorum and adverse to gambling; but when he was with the Brooklyn Dodgers, he retained as manager and protected the tempestuous and hard-drinking Leo Durocher, Leo the Lip, whose two favorite activities were cussing at umpires and shooting dice with some of the New York nightlife’s more unsavory characters. He preached the virtue of honesty but had few qualms about using deception in the service of a higher cause, especially winning ball games. He was a prominent Republican and quite conservative – when he was with the Cardinals, he has considered running for governor of Missouri. It was said that his enemies were (in no particular order) ‘Roosevelt, communism and welfare’. Yet, the great plan he was conceiving even in his years in St. Louis would put him in league with the most radical forces in the country, including the American Communist party.” (McCain and Salter, 2007)

Branch Rickey: The *Mahatma* or “Esteemed one”

He had a number of nicknames that the sports reporters of the day had given him: The Professor. The Brain, El Cheapo, The Deacon, were among the more colorful ones. But the one that fit the best and really stuck was “the Mahatma”, coined by sportswriter Tom Meany, to describe the man that was “a combination of God, your father and a Tammany Hall leader.” He was, for all his theatricality, imperiousness, guile and hard-nosed business practices, a man with

deep convictions. He believed in change, not just in the game he loved, but in the country. He often remarked in public that he wanted to use his talents for causes ‘that mattered outside the park.’

It is clear that the decision for which Branch Rickey will always be remembered, while certainly consistent with his bottom-line sensibility, had a moral component as well. In the beginning, he was careful to reveal his higher purpose to only a few people who would appreciate it, and to insist to everyone else that he had done it only to help the Dodgers win the pennant. He had used his guile to ensure a successful outcome, to make it acceptable to baseball and the public. But to make it work, he would need more than cunning and an adroit public-relations campaign.

[Rickey] was going to change things in baseball and America and he needed a man with the guts to help him do it, the guts to endure the unendurable for the sake of a good cause. He dispatched his scouts to scout the country for the man who could do it. They found him playing shortstop in the Negro Leagues for the Kansas City Monarchs: Jackie Roosevelt Robinson.

August 28, 1945

“The three-hour encounter between Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson at the Dodger’s front office at 215 Montague Street, Brooklyn, is one of the most cherished legends in baseball. Though the three eye-witness accounts vary in minor respects, all agreed the encounter as dramatic, exhausting and poignant. Rickey began by informing Jackie that he was not there to talk about his assignment to his newly formed Negro League, but in fact, for a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers, with a year playing for the Montreal Royals before they brought him up to the bigs. Rickey wanted to know if Jackie had the stuff to endure the inevitable torrent of abuse that would greet the first black man in the major leagues. Rickey imagined every possible scenario Robinson would encounter and playacted them. Swearing, cursing, panting, contorting himself, bringing his scowling, beefy face to within an inch of Jackie’s, Rickey mimicked surly waiters, bigoted train conductors, obnoxious hotel desk clerks, insulting fans, biased umpires, enraged opponents who assailed his dignity with spikes, fists, beanballs and bats, and anyone else whose abuse Jackie would have to endure without retaliation. Jackie recalled later that Rickey’s “acting was so convincing, I found myself chain-gripping my fingers behind my back.” Example:

“ You’re playing shortstop and I come down from first, stealing with my spikes high, and I cut you in the leg. As the blood trickles down your shin, I grin at you and say ‘now, how do you like that, nigger boy?’ Then in the World Series: so we play for keeps there, Jackie. We play it to win there, and almost everything under the sun goes. I want to win in the most desperate way, so I’m coming into second with my spikes flying. But you don’t give ground. You’re tricky. You feint, and as I hurl myself, you ease out of the way and jam that ball hard into my ribs. As I lie there in the swirling dust, my rib aching, I hear that umpire cry, ‘you’re out’, and I jump up, and all I can see is that black face of yours shining in front of my eyes. So I yell, ‘don’t hit me with a ball like that, you tar baby son-of-a-bitch’. So I haul off and sock you right in the cheek” . With that, Rickey swung his fist at Jackie’s head,

and he reacted with a plaintive ‘Mr. Rickey, do you want a ballplayer who’s afraid to fight back?’ This was the opportunity was Rickey was hoping for. He said, ‘I want a ballplayer with the guts *not* to fight back.’”

“For three years, Jackie, three years...”

“We can’t fight our way through this, Robinson. We’ve got no Army, there’s virtually no one on our side. And I’m afraid that many fans will be hostile. We’ll be in a tough position. We can win only if I can convince the world that I’m doing this because you’re a great ball player and a fine gentleman. If you’re a good enough man, we can make this a start in the right direction. But let me tell you, it’s going to take an awful lot of courage. Then an exhausted Rickey read from Giovanni Papini’s *Life of Christ*: ‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. Jackie understood. ‘What you want me to say is that I’ve got another cheek’, he responded. Rickey said ‘for three years, Jackie, three years, there could be no incidents, on or off the field. Several minutes passed before Robinson gave his assent. ‘Mr. Rickey, I think I can play ball in Montreal. I think I can play ball in Brooklyn. If you want to take this gamble, I promise you, there will be no incidents.’ And with that, it was done. Under a framed portrait of Abraham Lincoln that adorned Rickey’s office wall, Jackie Robinson signed an agreement to play for Montreal for a \$3,500.00 signing bonus and \$600.00 dollars a month. The following year, he would play for the Dodgers for a \$5,000.00 salary, the lowest a rookie could receive under league rules.

And the rest, is baseball and business history.

