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Subject: Week 148 learnings

A divided narrative needs a Unifying leader

Dear All

The US election is 48 hours away and we will know the results this week. I have never in all my years of following the USA and its politics seen a more divided narrative. I am following both CNN and Fox News and they are two different world views. This led me to think about what type of a leader is needed when you have a divided narrative.

I looked at three examples from politics and one from business.

My learning is that when the narrative is divided, you need a unifying leader.

So here goes:

Unifying leader No 1: Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln was a Republican President. He was opposed to slavery which was the hot topic of debate at that time and divided the nation. His father in law was a slave owner and Lincoln never approved of that. Lincoln worked tirelessly to get slavery abolished and used the US forces going through the country to liberate slaves. Every state where the US army won was deemed to be a free state, free of slavery. He used this tactic smartly to ensure total abolition. The last frontier was Texas in 1865. Lincoln was grossly misunderstood for his stance on slavery but he united the nation with his persistence. He used a famous expression which many American Presidents have spun around "Freedom was national".

I am sure a lot of you have read about Lincoln so I will skip the other details

Unifying leader No 2 : Shigeru Yoshida of Japan

Japan was ravaged by World War 2. It was under control of the allied forces led by General Mac Arthur. The General was the final say in all matters relating to Japan even though Russia, China and UK were involved. Shigeru started as a diplomat and he was well versed with the US, UK, Russia and China. He was appointed prime Minister between 1946 and 1947 and then again between 1948 and 1954.

Japanese pride was severely dented after WW 2 and there were different narratives on what the country should have done and should do now.

Shigeru's big focus was on rebuilding the Japanese economy with focus on domestic market and quality. He deliberately kept away from foreign policy to start with as he believed that Japan needed to be united as there were different views on Japan's stance and role in World War 2. Shigeru was always opposed to the war, he opposed the Pacific War even before it started. Article 9 of the allied forces edict prevented Japan from building up an army, however with the threat of communism and the Korean war, Japan was allowed to build its army once again. This helped Japanese manufacturing.

Shigeru had rare humility. In 1951, he went to San Francisco to sign the handover of Japan from Allied forces. On the way back he visited Pearl Harbor, the trigger of the US - Japan conflict. His action put an end to the issue on both sides and united the country.

Unifying leader no 3 : Lou Gerstner IBM

Gerstner worked with American express and RJR Nabisco before joining IBM in 1993. The IBM board decided to change John Akers and shopped around for a CEO. John Sculley of Apple, Bill gates of Microsoft, George Fisher of Motorola and Eckhard Pfeiffer of Compaq rejected the job. Gerstner was one of the last candidates and he took the job despite zero knowledge of the technology sector.

Before Gerstner joined IBM, there was a plan to break up IBM into many parts and this was a divided narrative in the company. Gerstner recognized from his time as Amex CEO and Nabisco CEO that a company needed integration of hardware and services and technology companies were not offering that. He stopped all the debate about disintegration and focused the company on integrating a full service option for its customers. He believed in e commerce and started the B2B e commerce in that period.

Gerstner left IBM in 2002 and is currently on a few boards. His unifying narrative took IBM down a value creation model.

Unifying leader No 4 : Nelson Mandela

Mandela is one of my role models. Imagine the narrative when Mandela took over :

- The whites and colored people were dead against each other.
- The whites felt that the colored people will now hurt and harm them and many were planning to leave South Africa
- Mandela pardoned all the people who put him in jail
- Mandela went about uniting south Africa with the Rugby world cup as the trigger.
- He completed his 5 year term and retired from politics

Here's the ultimate tribute to the man. After his presidency, a number of whites and colored people named their children after him. He had a unifying narrative.

I am not a political pundit or have a leaning towards a party.

I think the democrats are set to win the white House from the polls data that I see on all channels. The democrat leadership needs a unifying narrative at the earliest, they need a narrative that makes America look better in the eyes of the world and also a narrative that unites the country. Without unifying leadership, America will never be a great nation again. And, that will be sad, since America has given us so many gifted unifying leaders in politics, sports, entertainment and business.

Feedback welcome

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