

Leadership and Innovation

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Jameson W. Doig and Erwin C. Hargrove, *Leadership and Innovation: A Biographical Perspective on Entrepreneurs in Government*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 430 pp., \$55 cloth.

Great leaders are often influenced by one or two defining moments which set them in good stead for the remainder of their life and career. One such leader, former President Jimmy Carter experienced such a moment which was recalled by his wife Rosalynn in a retrospective on their life together. That moment came when the then future president was being personally interviewed by Admiral Hyman Rickover for admission to the U.S. Nuclear Submarine program. “After questioning him about his record at the Naval Academy, Rickover leaned forward in his chair, looked Jimmy full in the eye, and asked, “Did you always do your best?” Jimmy almost answered yes, but knowing in all honesty that he hadn’t, he was forced to say no.” The interview made a lasting impression on him, especially having to say no to the crucial question. And Rickover himself haunted him. “even after he was governor, when the telephone operator would announce that Admiral Rickover was on the line, Jimmy would break out in a cold sweat.”¹

Jimmy Carter may not have always done his best, but the innovative government entrepreneurs, Rickover among them, who are profiled in this compilation of biographies edited by Doig and Hargrove certainly seemed to have tried their best at least in directing the business of government in a dozen different U.S. agencies and bureaus. The editors of this collection take

the opportunity in the first chapter to point out that it may seem unusual to approach a study of government agencies from an entrepreneurial perspective. Doig and Hargrove set out to dispel some of the old approaches to organizational effectiveness that suggest that no one individual can make a difference in the administrative success of an agency or organization. They site the ruminations of Herbert Kaufman and James March who would like for us to think that it is not possible for one person to make an impact on government programs. The bureaucracy is too large they argue. Impact on policy is “marked in inches, not miles.”

In this book, Doig and Hargrove not only find one or two examples of government entrepreneurs whose accomplishments made a lasting change to the landscape of government service, but they have combined the biographies of a dozen entrepreneurs who in their estimation. “were linked to innovative ideas and to efforts to carry these ideas into effect, often attended by some risk to their organizations and to their own careers.” Those twelve entrepreneurs include: Robert Ball, Wibur Cohen, Mariner Eccles, James Forrestal, Nancy Hanks, David Lilienthal, Robert McNamara, Gifford Pinchot, Hyman Rickover, Elmer Staats, Austin Tobin and James Webb. These are all interesting and relevant individuals to include among the works biographies. Names like McNamara, Hanks and Rickover may stand out to readers interested in a historical perspective of politics and administration. Others such as Tobin and Pinchot may not be as well known, but have left a lasting legacy on our

¹Carter, Rosalynn. *First Lady From Plains*. (1984). Pp.35-35. Boston. Houghton-Mifflin Publishers.

every day lives because of their accomplishments.

Doig and Hargrove cluster the twelve subjects into two groups- those who made use of rhetorical leadership to make changes. It might be said this group, which includes Lilienthal, Pinchot and Rickover among others, had a gift for communication that proved effective in getting the resources and support that was needed to move their agencies ahead. An example would be Pinchot's ability to effectively use his social skills to attract a large workforce who wished to be trained a professional forest rangers. He was the embodiment of the Forest Service and had the ability to make others "become the Forest Service" as well. The other group described by the editors have extraordinary coalition building skills. They were able to convince individuals from varying political parties, social groups, and government agencies that what they intended to do was the right thing and that unilateral support for their given initiative was the only option. A good example is Nancy Hanks prodigious use of coalition building skill to bring millions of dollars into the coffers of the National Endowment for the Arts by eliciting the support of the republican president, Richard Nixon and enlisting the help of Democrats in Congress for increased funding year after year.

The book then goes on to provide twelve excellent biographies of the innovative leaders selected by the editors. The reader gets a flavor of the background of the lives and careers of each individual profiled and the events that lead up to their service to the United States government in a leadership capacity. The breadth of government agencies and bureaus that are included helps to broaden the intended point of the editors which is, "how a society and its leaders search for and identify new opportunities for social action, allocate funds and talent to pursue these novel paths,

and in time set firmly in place new programs and new strategies through which still further social invention may take place."

In looking at this definition of entrepreneurial leadership, Doig and Hargrove ask the authors of each biography to consider in profiling their subject. They asked, "To what extent and how did our executives: identify new missions and programs, develop external constituencies, internal constituencies, enhance technical expertise, motivate and provide training for members of the organization and identify areas of vulnerability in the organization. The biographers do a credible job at answering these questions in their profiles and truly illuminate the accomplishments of each executive.

The only real criticism that I as a reviewer could put forth regarding this work would be the seeming lack of attention to a common thread that runs through all of the biographies included in the book. That is the thread of politics. It seems as though pure politics plays as much of a role in the development of agency goals as the entrepreneurial skills of the profiled leader of that agency. I would have liked to have had more feedback from the authors on this idea. However, to their credit, that is a major part of what coalition building and rhetorical leadership are all about. Perhaps it is the fact that the profiled entrepreneurs are able to work with any success within the highly politicized bureaucracy of Washington, that makes them good leaders and worth of the title "entrepreneurs."