

Leading With Influence and Impact

What does it mean to be “all in?”

By Chitra Ragavan

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Key points

- **The key to great leadership is going all in.**
 - **It’s about making a pact with yourself, a commitment.**
 - **In leadership, three defining traits are commitment, consistency, and persistence.**
 - **People from all walks of life become leaders when they follow those rules.**
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When Maryland Governor Wes Moore stepped in front of microphones to speak to a gaggle of reporters gathered for a press conference about the tragic bridge collapse in Baltimore this week, a reporter threw him a softball question that another politician might have answered bureaucratically.

Instead, in a few poignant moments, Moore gave viewers a window into the pain he was feeling not only as a politician but as a Marylander. His face lit up with a broad smile as he talked about the importance of the bridge to him and tens of thousands of Maryland commuters and residents he described as “Maryland tough...and Baltimore strong...who come together in the face of heartbreak.

“We know the Key Bridge. I’ve ridden over the Key Bridge countless times...,” Moore said, his smile not breaking. This is a bridge that is a normal commuter route for 30,000

Marylanders every single day. And so, to hear the words that the Key Bridge has collapsed, it's shocking," he said, gently putting his hand on his heart, still with a reflective smile.

"And heartbreaking. And immediately, the first thought and first idea was, 'What happened to the people? What was the impact on human life? But for every single one of us who are Marylanders, the words that the Key Bridge is gone, it still shakes us because, for 47 years, that's all we've known. And so this is not just unprecedented from what we are seeing and what we're looking at today. It's heartbreaking."

Moore's emotional, nuanced, and sympathetic response allowed him to emerge as an effective leader.

Since I launched this column, "All In," three weeks ago, the news about prosecutor Fani Willis and dissident Alexei Navalny allowed me to share how leaders can most effectively communicate to be all in – as Moore illustrated this week.

As a journalist and executive coach to CEOs and startup entrepreneurs, I've studied scores of case studies, and I've identified the key to great leadership: going all in. It's transformative when you risk everything and consistently and persistently commit your time, energy, and convictions to a mission and vision instead of sitting on the fence. It seems obvious, but in reality, it's incredibly hard to do over a long period of time. It's a tremendous amount of work and exposes you to the world at your most vulnerable.

Leadership Troika

The legendary psychologist Robert Cialdini's work on the science of influence and persuasion in business and subsequent studies show that people who make commitments are more likely to consistently follow through on those commitments because it helps align them with their self-perceptions. In leadership, three defining

traits are commitment, consistency, and persistence.

“Consistency is the bridge that connects commitment to success,” according to Gilbert Ang’ana, a leadership coach based in Nairobi, Kenya, and founder of Accent Leadership Group, a consulting group. “It’s the ability to stay on course, day in and day out, making steady progress toward the goals you’ve set.”

And while commitment is the cornerstone of that powerful troika, Ang’ana says that the principle of being “consistently persistent” makes great leaders, with Elon Musk being a case in point (for his contributions to space).

The power of “all in” expresses itself in people from ordinary walks of life. They are leaders in their field after investing 100 percent of themselves in their work, no matter how humble or seemingly insignificant.

Landmines, War, and Drug Kingpins



Take Jerry White, who went from losing his right leg in a landmine accident as an American student hiking in Israel in 1984 to winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines for his commitment, consistency, and persistent battle to ban landmines worldwide.

The second half of the column's title — "Power, influence, and Impact" — is the natural outcome of going all in.



Consider the case of Lynsey Addario, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist who confronts her own mortality as she bears witness to the world's wars.

When Addario and three fellow journalists were documenting the Arab Spring uprising in Libya in March 2011, the unthinkable happened at a hostile checkpoint. The journalists had lingered too long to complete their reporting on the front lines and were cornered and taken hostage by Col. Muammar Gaddafi's troops. They were beaten repeatedly, tied up, blindfolded, and threatened with execution before being released nearly a week later. As a guest on my podcast, "When It Mattered," Addario described how just a month

later, she learned that two other journalist friends had been killed in Libya, leading to an existential crisis about the life-threatening nature of her work. But she understood that going all in on her photo reportage was core to her being and wouldn't have it any other way.



Take also the case of Francisco Santos Calderón, a noted Colombian journalist and later, two-term vice president of Colombia. On Sept. 19, 1990, Santos was kidnapped by notorious Colombian drug cartel leader Pablo Escobar, one of 10 journalists and elites held hostage by Escobar that year. Santos was chained to a bed and held for eight months before being released. He was lucky to be alive. Between 1980 and 2000, nearly 180 journalists were killed for speaking up against the drug cartels.

But Santos refused to give up. He launched a highly successful campaign to reduce the epidemic of kidnappings in Colombia. Voters elected him to serve two terms as Colombia's vice president under former President Álvaro Uribe. He later served as Colombia's ambassador to the U.S. from 2018 to 2020.

Santos is still all in. He now wears his journalist hat again, highlighting the precarious political situation in Venezuela and speaking out about the security threats of Russia, China, and Iran.

These are just a few stories and more to follow. I hope that over time, this column can help readers become skilled at their own craft of leadership and fearless about going all in.

And, that, just like Maryland Governor Moore, when they find themselves in the spotlight as a leader, they will be able to convey their most authentic self to the world.