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7 Lessons From the Fourth of July

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The American Revolution was a gambit underpinned by iconoclastic ideas, unwavering principles, and tenacious effort. This July Fourth, let the example of the founding patriots inspire you to your own success. Kick off your holiday with this Horsesmouth Independence Day classic.

"Nothing important happened today."

—Diary entry by King George III on July 4, 1776

Ah, George. Little did he know what was brewing across the Atlantic on that fateful day. For most of us, the Fourth of July promises the opportunity to relax, a few days on which to do precisely "nothing important." It's a time for sizzling burgers on the grill, spiking volleyballs at the beach, and shouting our approval as fireworks blast colorful patterns in the night sky.

There's nothing wrong with taking advantage of a well-earned day off and relaxing with family and friends. But there are lessons to be learned from Independence Day, great lessons that underscore the courage and commitment upon which this country was founded—lessons about *success*.

When it comes to motivation and training, you'll often hear advice thrown about, such as "Be a leader," "Act decisively," and "Never give up." We've heard these ideas so often, they've become cliché that have lost some of their meaning. So let's use this July 4 as the perfect time to look at such advice operating in a revolutionary context. Here are just seven of the lessons the founding citizens of this country can still teach us today:

1. A lesson in boldness

"Gentlemen, I make the motion that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they be absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved."

The delegates of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia were stunned by these words from Richard Henry Lee. The war had commenced with the battles of Lexington and Concord the previous year, but since then events had progressed far beyond addressing colonial grievances. The delegates were now considering the mind-boggling audacity of pursuing complete independence from King George III. In the 18th century, that was the type of talk that led right up the creaky steps to the gallows.

But nevertheless, in full consciousness of the risk they were taking, in the summer of 1776, 56 prominent men from throughout the 13 colonies affixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence, which was adopted by the Congress on July 4. "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately," Ben Franklin famously said. The actions of these men—all of whom had much to lose—is the very definition of boldness.

We might ask of ourselves, "Where is our resolve, our boldness to dream and demand change? What do we believe in?"

2. A lesson in honor

Long before the image of Samuel Adams was pasted onto a bottle of beer, the man himself had failed as a brewer and dedicated himself instead to politics. A skilled writer and pamphleteer, he was responsible for stoking the fires of rebellion among the colonists. The crown was well aware of Adams's growing influence and attempted to neutralize the outspoken patriot with the methods that tend to break most men: intimidation and bribery.

Massachusetts Governor Gage dispatched Colonel Fenton to personally "persuade" Adams to cease his revolutionary activities. As you're sipping a Sam Adams Summer Ale over the holiday, consider this remarkable exchange, as set forth in *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill.

> **Colonel Fenton:** "It is the governor's advice to you, Sir, not to incur the further displeasure of His Majesty. Your conduct has been such as makes you liable to penalties for which persons can be sent to England for trial for treason. But, by changing your political course, you will not only receive great personal advantages, but you will make your peace with the King."
>
> **Samuel Adams:** "Then you may tell Governor Gage that I trust I have long since made my peace with the King of Kings. No personal consideration shall induce me to abandon the righteous cause of my country. And tell Governor Gage it is the advice of Samuel Adams to him, no longer to insult the feelings of an exasperated people."

OK, here we have Adams essentially telling the officer, the governor, and the King himself—the most powerful man on the planet—to take a royal hike.

How many of us have such unshakeable principles, and the inner strength to back them up?

3. A lesson in communicating

Many of us lament the daily interruptions to our work from e-mail, faxes, and phone calls. We sometimes see these means of connection as little more than roadblocks to productivity. In the 18th century there was no Internet, and no fax machines or cell phones, but the leaders of the rebellion placed a high priority on staying connected and spreading the word. ("The British are coming, the British are coming"—does that pithy jingle ring a bell?)

One of the keys to the revolutionaries' success against England's might was their "mastermind alliance." Patriots such as Ben Franklin tapped into the power and influence of collective creativity by networking with other progressive-minded thinkers. They didn't always agree on the details, but they did help one another toward their common goal: freedom from tyranny.

Adams organized the "committees of correspondence" along with John Hancock and Lee to pound the pavement and circulate news and information throughout the colonies via handwritten letters. The Boston Tea Party was such an effective publicity stunt–cum–political act that it inspired copycat events throughout the colonies. Paul Revere and two compatriots sped through the Massachusetts night to spread the alarm of British invasion. Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* was widely circulated

and turned the tide of public opinion toward independence: No more technology than a printing press to that, but talk about an effective communication strategy.

What do we do to generate buzz and excitement about our ideas and beliefs? How willing are we to spread the word about the causes that we support?

4. A lesson in perseverance

Though independence was declared in 1776, it would take six trying years before the dream of freedom from English rule would be realized. During that time Washington would lose more battles than he'd win. His own men would border on desertion. His most valuable general and trusted friend, Benedict Arnold, would betray him and the cause. And of course, thousands of lives would be lost and untold property destroyed. There were many opportunities to give up. Arnold gave up. But Washington and his compatriots did not. Arnold took the path of less resistance. Washington and the others refused to be defeated by power and tradition. And it was they who changed the course of history.

How resilient are we in the face of obstacles? How do we deal with setbacks and hardship?

5. A lesson in sacrifice

Beyond the soldiers facing death on the battlefield, many other Americans helped bring the dream of July 4th to fruition, people who toiled behind the scenes, such as Abigail Adams.

While her husband, John, traveled and labored to build the fledgling state (as a circuit judge, delegate to the Continental Congress, envoy abroad, and elected officer under the Constitution), Mrs. Adams, like women throughout the colonies, oversaw the daily workings of the family farm, managed the finances, and raised and educated five children (including the future president John Quincy Adams).

Like most women of her time, Mrs. Adams had no formal schooling, so she educated herself. She became a prolific reader and letter writer, leaving behind a correspondence of some 2,000 letters that give us an interesting window into how she viewed politics and society, her contributions to the war effort—and her station in life.

On the eve of independence, Mrs. Adams wrote to her husband: "I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors."

How do we balance work, civic responsibilities, and family life? How do we redress the accepted infringements of liberty still present in our time?

6. A lesson in professionalism

While Thomas Jefferson has received the lion's share of accolades for the Declaration, John Adams also served on the writing committee and was instrumental in bringing the Declaration about. Jefferson called Adams "the Colossus of that Congress—the great pillar of support to the Declaration of Independence, and its ablest advocate and champion on the floor of the House. "After the war was won, political differences caused these patriots-in-arms to become adversaries for many years.

But finally Jefferson wrote a letter to Adams, and the two reembarked on a friendship and correspondence that lasted for the rest of their lives. Strangely enough, Jefferson and Adams both died on July 4. On July 3, 1826, Jefferson lay on his deathbed. Perhaps realizing the significance of passing

on the 50th anniversary of his magnum opus, he uttered his last words to the attendant "This is the Fourth?" To comfort him, the man replied that it was, whereupon Jefferson smiled and fell into a sleep from which he would never awaken.

Adams had resolved to live until the 50th anniversary of the Declaration; when his servant asked him that morning if he knew the date, the 90-year-old said, "Oh, yes, it is the glorious fourth of July. God bless it. God bless you all." Adams would die later that afternoon, with the final words "Jefferson still survives." He didn't know that Jefferson had died just a few hours earlier at Monticello.

How will each of us greet our last day? With the regret of unfinished business and unresolved conflict? Or with the pride of a life well led?

7. A lesson in legacy

One amazing aspect of the Declaration of Independence is that Jefferson's words capture an idea and a spirit that predate them.

"But what do we mean by the American Revolution?" asked John Adams. "Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people."

True, the notion of freedom lived in the hearts and minds of the colonists for a long time before it was finally committed to paper. But once written down, once codified in words, the idea gained clarity—and strength. Once written down, this touchstone of the democratic ideal could harness the power of the will of the people to be free.

Building on Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, the 33-year-old Jefferson drafted a document that became a powerful call to action, a blueprint that would not only inspire but support the hard work to come. He penned the ultimate mission statement of the country: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Do we know what we are working toward in life? Do we know what legacy our work will leave for those generations that follow us? Do we have our own personal mission statement?

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Which historical figures do you admire? Which people of action inspire you? Use the feedback form below to tell us about it.

Senior Editor Edward Klink specializes in helping financial advisors build a loyal client following. He has previously trained registered reps in the art of client service, relationship management, and team building at J.P. Morgan and the Lexington Funds. He holds a masters degree and is a graduate of the Securities Industry Institute at Wharton.

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