

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

*Practical Lessons in Leadership and Communication*

## ***Patriotic Grace* by Peggy Noonan: A Book That Made Me Think**

I read a lot... or try to, at least. I enjoy reading many different types of writing, from history (my wife, Emily's, professional calling) to communication and business (my own professional calling) to politics and current issues (just good stuff to be aware of in our world). I simply like to read. Sometimes late at night when I can't sleep, I sit in the comfortable red leather chair in the little reading nook on the second floor of our home, look at the shelves and pull out something I've never read before.

The other night I settled down with a little book by Peggy Noonan called *Patriotic Grace*. It had been tucked in a corner on one of the top shelves, its purchase likely the result of one of those Amazon.com "readers-who-bought-this-book-also-bought" add-on promotions that the company has absolutely mastered. They've sold me a lot of stuff that way over the years, and in this case I say, "Thank you, Amazon."

From the moment I opened this little book (about 180 small pages with rather large type-face... a very quick read), I was taken. In fact, I sat there that night and read it straight through, cover to cover.

The basic premise of the book is that political discourse in our country has reached something much worse than just an all-time low. Rather, the book posits, our political discourse has reached a low that has become incredibly damaging to who we are as a nation. Written during the 2008 Presidential election, long before we knew Barack Obama would be our next President, the book essentially asks readers to stop thinking and acting as if we are subsets of America, and rather to start thinking and acting simply as Americans again. The book asks readers to stop the labeling and the judging and the slinging of accusations at the other side. The author, Peggy Noonan, is a former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, but believe me when I say there is not a

bit of political bias in this book. Noonan blames both sides of the political aisle, and both sides are fairly and equitably called out by her.

Why am I writing about this book and recommending it to you? Quite simply, I believe that there comes a time when even the greatest debates can become thoroughly unproductive, and when, no matter how strong your communication may be, you're not going to persuade the other side that you are right and they are wrong. There comes a time in every debate when the *nature* of the debate becomes the problem, even more so than the problems being debated. And when a debate that carries great importance is dysfunctional, the risk is too great to ignore.

Few will disagree that we are at a mission-critical point in the history of the United States. The way we are perceived at home and abroad and every manifestation of our power and influence are at risk at this moment in time. And at such critical moments, unproductive internal debates are more destructive than what any enemy could do. There comes a time when the focus must become the things that bind us together rather than the things that pull us apart.

This notion is about more than national goals, issues and pride. Think about how it applies to any internal debates in your workplace or your home that have become self-destructive. In these cases, at some point, someone needs to say, "Stop," and guide the discussion to a more productive place.

Every once in a while I stumble across a book that makes me think in the simplest and most profound way. This one did, and I recommend it highly. Here's the link: [\*Patriotic Grace\* by Peggy Noonan](#).

• *Dean Brenner*

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