



**Alexander Hamilton and President George Washington
America's Most Important Consigliori and his Leader**

Every Leader Destined For Greatness Must Have His Consigliori

By Pasquale (Pat) Scopelliti

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DESTINY

A great man once said, *Each man has but one destiny*. As a leader have you found your *destiny*? Do you know how to correct when veering off course? Are you driven to attain your *destiny* with all you are? Is it possible that you carry hidden greatness, as yet untapped?

Who remembers *The Godfather*? You can't imagine Don Vito attempting to manage the complexities of the Corleone Family without the aid of his beloved and trusted Consigliori, can you? This is, and always has been the way real leadership works. Fulfilling a Leader's *destiny* calls for a dedicated professional whose sole charge is to serve just that mission.

All great leaders must find another mind to share the challenge of breaking assumptions and stripping ideas down to their bare minimum, a friend to help in the endeavor. Did Moses have a Consigliori? Of course he did, his brother Aaron. And Julius Caesar? Marc Antony. President George Washington? Alexander Hamilton. Jack Welch? Jeffrey Immelt. The list goes on and on.

In the Sicilian Tradition, a Consigliori's title simply comes from his role as counselor, which is precisely how the term is translated.

A Leader has need of three things that only a fully empowered Consigliori can provide. They are:

1. Direct Access to the Painful or Necessary Truth
2. An Unbiased and Experienced Eye to Threats and Opportunities, Problems, Challenges and Solutions
3. Creative, Out of the Box Thinking – to Convert Obstacles into Stepping Stones

CHALLENGE

The starting point is a searching assessment of personal strengths and weaknesses of the Leader himself. The art of *Challenge* is the most important element in working with a Consigliori over this initial task. *Challenge*, as a practice, is the act of questioning, even at times attacking the Leader's:

- logic,
- emotions,
- thinking,
- assumptions,
- decision making experiences and skills,
- and any other gaps of thought or ability.

This often also entails finding hidden strengths not fully understood or employed. Past failures and successes must be re-assessed with a respectful, sensitive, yet skeptical ear. The only way to build this knowledge and insight is through uncompromising, truth seeking conversation.

Executive strengths and weaknesses, however, do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, their context is the current situation at hand, with a view to the future. Who are the other players in the leadership circle, and what are their strengths and weaknesses? How do these individuals function relative to the mission? How well do they align in sharing the Leader's vision for the future and the path from here to there? What are the political challenges that impede the mission? What are the cultural challenges that impede the mission?

When the stakes are this high, we cannot avoid the difficult parts of these questions nor assume that darkness does not lurk within the slightest failure to embrace the harder path.

True Leadership knows better, but where can an executive turn to discuss such matters honestly, deeply, and penetratingly?

SITUATIONS

A Leader always faces *situations*. From board level scrutiny, to shifting power bases, to the impacts of acquisitions or mergers, to company morale, to changing market conditions, etc., etc. Each of these *situations* will most likely present first as an obstacle. Within every *situation*, however, there is the opportunity to convert the obstacle into a stepping stone. There is no more powerful or profound place for this to occur than in creative, conversational, step-by-step attack by Leader and Consigliori. Unraveling thorny, knotted ropes and converting them into life-saving lines is the specialty of this relationship.

One thing to especially search for in each *situation*, is the Leader's balance between inner drive and external pressure. No leader ever lives pressure free, it's not possible. But, great leadership rests upon the leader's ability to meet external pressures with his own vision and will.

I don't believe in the 'leaders are born, not made' school of thinking. I believe that every leader must face these dual forces and make his peace with both. He must find a way to strengthen his inner drive, integrating his values, dreams, and ability to get his job done; and all this in the face of pressures that would leave others folded over in surrender.

FRIENDSHIP

If any of that sounds cold, I've missed a key factor, and that is *friendship*. Perhaps more than anything else, a Consigliori is a true friend to his Leader. In the early stages, the new Consigliori must make his arguments as persuasively compelling as possible. He will often employ humor and other tools of entertainment to make his points without generating too much confrontation.

One of the most difficult tasks a newly hired Consigliori faces is demonstrating his loyalty. It must be solely to the Leader and the firm. Carefully, even in these early days, the Leader's decisions may be opposed by his Consigliori, who must withhold his agreement when he cannot conscientiously give it.

There are, however, no conditions under which support can be withheld. In fact, the more the Consigliori thinks his Leader is wrong in any decision, the more support he must provide. But that support comes with brutal honesty about the risks of the Leader's decisions. A true Consigliori knows that his position is always at stake, and if he can't take that kind of heat, he's not the right man for the job. Some decisions are so wrong that they must be opposed with the offer of resignation over the matter at hand. Rare as it is, when such testing occurs, and the team survives, it is being forged for coming greatness.

Over time, the dynamics of the relationship evolve. During the first stage, and even under less stressful conditions than those identified above, finding "the painful truth" is more than just difficult. Its stringent demands often test the Leader's patience and his Consigliori's nuanced skill set.

One of the joys that sugars the pill is the intellectual game of getting to know each other. This is especially true where values, skills, knowledge, and problem-solving methods match and counter-match. The game is on, and both know it, and both rise into the game. The phenomenally productive benefits are instantly felt by both parties. As an aging Consigliori, myself, I can attest that this great joy is still there at the beginning of every new encounter. There really is nothing quite like it.

As both come to know each other and their multifaceted process better, these difficulties slowly convert into a more normal, maybe even "merely professional" search for "just the truth." As the skill set of the team grows, the relationship deepens and the process normalizes. Once the team hits its stride, the work evolves forward, settling into a

profoundly rewarding pattern. The ability to always seek the truth becomes a functional power for good, and for good results, both.

Truth converts to trust. The ultimate measure of the Consigliori/Leader relationship is trust. As both come to trust each other, their ability to make decisions and enact them rises to near perfection.

If the relationship succeeds through time and challenge, much comraderie will grow. Together with passion for the truth and a determination to make the best possible decisions, the foundation for true *friendship* becomes well established. This extraordinary *friendship* is the true force that most greatly serves the mission. It is the definitive means of transforming the Leader, empowering him to achieve the greatest degree of his potential possible. If the team is right, it can last a lifetime, always winning its way to new levels of performance and profitability.

LAST THOUGHTS

As a single case in point, I am truly pleased to offer – on the following page – a LinkedIn posting from July 31, 2018. It was posted by my very own beloved Don, Craig Millard, with whom I have worked for 22 years.

The work of a Consigliori is not for many people, but it is honorable, and good work, and when you have the honor of serving a leader like Don Craig, the rewards are beyond measure.

Which brings me to my final proposition for your consideration. Bearing in mind the utter impossibility of enjoying these values in any other relationship, the following simple statement cannot be refuted:

Every Leader Destined For Greatness Must Have His Consigliori.



Craig Millard

Managing Partner, Executive Recruiter at The Millard Group

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As I reflect back on the 1st half of 2018 (this will be my 22nd mid-year review in search) - I have to give a shout out to my team for their dedication and outstanding performance. The 2nd half looks to be just as strong. Thanks **Noelle Stevens**, **Nancy Nash**, **Christine Miller**, **Cheryl Parmelee** and my Consigliori, **Pasquale Scopelliti** #reflection #reviews



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