

Straight Advice

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By Mike Whitehead

Two days after Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the U.S., I found myself coincidentally on a business trip in Washington, D.C. On Friday morning I awoke, got dressed and left the hotel at 6 a.m. for a morning run.

I ran up Pennsylvania Avenue, all the way up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, and paused a moment at the historic reflecting pond stretching between it and the Washington Monument. As I stood in that spot, it occurred to me that Washington, D.C. felt different than it had in trips past. The air felt different, people seemed different, and there seemed to be a curious energy I hadn't detected before.

As I looked around, I considered the possibilities and implications of the presidential election, and one thing stood out with great clarity: the world is different now.

The tipping point is occurring. We no longer have to strain to see changes in power, changes in demographics, changes in the economy, changes in energy usage, changes in climate, changes in jobs, changes in education, etc...The changes we are experiencing as people, as a country, and as a global community are rather obvious.

As we attempt to make sense of the rapid changes taking place, it is important to make intentional choices about our future. It is tempting to want to sneak back into what used to work, what used to be comfortable, or what looks like it might bring relief. But now, more than ever, we must resolve to be accountable for the choices we make for our future.

This also goes for our new president. Not that he is asking, but I offer the following to the President Elect.

- o Balance your concern for those in need with a message of self-reliance and self-responsibility. Not everyone needs, deserves, or wants a "bailout." Remember that many people have worked 2 or 3 jobs when necessary to cover their mortgage, rent, or college educations. Sometimes the greatest inventions and best ideas are borne from failures.*
- o Balance your language of diplomacy with words of power. Certainly we should embrace an emerging new image in the broader world and build effective*

relationships with other strong countries. But let us also hold world leaders accountable to the agreements they make with us. You have an incredible opportunity to renew our standing in the world and we are counting on your diplomatic skills – but also, trust and listen to your military advisors.

- o Surround yourself with strong Republican leadership. Be true to your word on bi-partisanship. Check yourself for bias and value the voice of those who disagree with you. Be reminded that you are representing ALL American people, and listen to those who communicate with facts and reason.*
- o Be acutely aware of your own influence as our first African American president. Use your position, your experience and your example to be the change that young African American children and young adults can believe in. Speak directly to all children about the bold pursuit of great dreams and unlimited possibility.*
- o Trust and know that you also have the support of millions of people from all races and backgrounds. Know that your presidency comes at a time when there is much at stake, and your leadership must transcend race. Then one day we can look back and declare your legacy as a great leader who united people of all kinds, for a world we have all wanted for a long time.*
- o Stay real. America needs a decent human being who will talk straight and admit mistakes. Be faithful to your wife and don't succumb to the seductiveness of the position. In your personal and public dealings, "be the change you wish to see in the world" – don't just talk about it.*

Let us not forget, our new President is not alone in the awesome responsibility for this country's future. The American people - Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated are equally responsible for the success of his leadership. We each have the opportunity to not only to give him a chance to succeed, but actively become part of the change process. We can give up the political finger pointing and waiting for him to "mess it up." Surely it is better for him to be a surprising success, than an accurately predicted failure? We must ask ourselves the hard question – "Would I rather be right about my views, or have a country that works?"

In this time of change, it is important to be focused on a common vision - a greater, healthier and more prosperous country. It will be a great leader who can unite diverse perspectives in a bold new direction for the benefit of a world that works for all.

