

Panera, Ronald Reagan and July 4th

Jul 1, 2016

Each Fourth of July, I send an inspirational message to the 92,000 people who work for Panera. This year's team note generated so much response that I wanted to share it with all of you. I believe we could all use a little Ronald Reagan in our lives right now.

Team,

Because it's nearly July 4th, it seemed an appropriate time to write about one of our former presidents: Ronald Reagan. Given my Democratic leanings, that choice may surprise some of you. In fact, I really respect Reagan – so much so that I'm living with him now.

“Living with him?” you might ask. Yes, Ronald Reagan has taken up residence in my conference room. Obviously, it's not the real Ronald Reagan, but rather a life-size cutout of the former president. My Ronald Reagan is an imposing figure who stands slightly to the left of my chair when I'm on video. He looks fit, relaxed and presidential as he watches over my meetings with an amused smile on his face and provides a near-living example to all of us.

Here I am hanging out with President Reagan at the end of another crazy day:



Seriously, there are three reasons I've asked our former president to join our meetings.

First, as you know, Reagan died of Alzheimer's. So, to help his memory during his second administration, it is said that his staff prepared a card that he carried everywhere in his jacket pocket. On the card were listed the three primary commitments he had made to the American people: 1) "Destroy the Evil Empire;" 2) Strengthen the military; and 3) Cut taxes. Because the pressures of his job required unrelenting attention to what mattered, the card was a powerful tool to help President Reagan as he went about his work. In fact, because of that card, President Reagan was better able to avoid distractions and deliver on his commitments. Indeed, the Ronald Reagan who stands in my office is meant to remind all of us at Panera to remain laser-focused on generating solutions to the problems and opportunities we claim really matter and to avoid distractions along the way. I share the story with you because I think this is an enviable objective for all of us.

Ronald Reagan is in my office for yet another reason. As you may know, several years ago I helped form No Labels, an organization dedicated to decreasing the hyper-partisanship in Washington, DC. Today, No Labels counts among its members hundreds of congress people who have

committed to bipartisan problem-solving. (However...given the state of the presidential campaign...I think we still have our work cut out for us.) As an individual committed to finding real solutions to resolve our nation's greatest challenges, I like Ronald Reagan. President Reagan set an example of how to lead and work with others. He was willing to listen and compromise. He abhorred Communism, but worked with Gorbachev to break down walls. And although profoundly conservative, Reagan had a productive relationship with the liberal former House Speaker Tip O'Neill. Together, the two men worked without rancor and passed legislation with the greater good of the country in mind. In my view, America today could benefit from bipartisan and long-term focused solutions to our nation's problems. Similarly, we at Panera are at our best when we think beyond our provincial interests and functional perspectives and work together to achieve our stated objectives – our Key Initiatives. And only by doing so will we be able to win over the long-term and build a company of sustaining value.

And finally, I have a personal connection to President Reagan. Heck, who doesn't have a sweet spot for a guy named Ron, with a wife named Nancy and a son named Michael?

To be serious, Reagan is not only relevant to our work at Panera, but he is relevant to the crazy times we live in. He never lost sight of the value of freedom. During his first inaugural address in January 1981, he stated, "Above all, we must realize that no arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women." How timeless those words are given the continuing threat of terrorist acts at home and abroad.

As we celebrate this Fourth of July, let us keep gratitude for freedom in our hearts and minds. Indeed, without such freedoms as those of speech, religion and assembly, the fabric of America would unravel. Without the right to our individuality, we would lose the very bond that unites us most strongly. No doubt my conference roommate would agree.

All my best,

Ron