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Some Advice for President-Elect Donald Trump

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Some advice for President-elect Donald Trump



ALAN GARFIELD

Congratulations on winning the presidency.

To be honest, I was vehemently opposed to your candidacy and dumbfounded that so many Americans supported you. But the voters have spoken. I accept

their choice.

First, I want to thank you for your gracious acceptance speech. After such a vitriolic campaign, it was a relief to hear you acknowledge that Hillary Clinton has “worked very long and very hard” for this country and that “we owe her a major debt of gratitude.” I also appreciated your call for Americans to “bind the wounds of division,” and your pledge to be the president for “every citizen.”

In your speech, you asked for guidance from those who did not support you “so we can work together and unify our great country.” I write now with the same goodwill with which your request was made, offering you my advice.

Winning isn't everything

I am a lifelong Democrat, so it was hardly surprising that I would prefer a Democratic nominee over a Republican. But in your case, my hesitation did not come from policy differences alone. I was also very concerned about your character.

Throughout the campaign, you seemed to value winning over everything else. Indeed, all other values fell by the wayside if you thought they blocked your path to victory.

Honesty certainly was not a barrier. If facts got in your way, you ignored them, embellished them, or flat-out lied.

You callously perpetuated the myth that President Obama was not a natural born citizen because it helped to get you publicity. That this lie denigrated our nation's first African-American president meant nothing to you.

Basic human decency was not an obstacle either. If people interfered with your progress, you happily crushed them. Make fun of a disabled reporter? No problem. Mock a Gold Star mother? Bring it on. Suggest a prisoner-of-war is a loser? Whatever works.

And if dividing and conquering furthered your cause, you'd gladly dish up scapegoats that others could blame for whatever ailed them. Lost your job? Blame Mexicans, even if your job was eliminated by new technology. Worried about terrorism? Blame Muslims, maybe even your Johns Hopkins-trained Pakistani cardiologist.



Donald Trump arrives to address his supporters and acknowledge his presidential win at his election night event at the New York Hilton Midtown in New York City early Wednesday morning. Republican Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton to be elected the 45th President.

BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

These behaviors are unworthy of a candidate for dog catcher. They should have disqualified you a thousand times over from running for president. But you engaged in them and won. I fear the lessons that future candidates will draw from your success.

Now that you've won, the big question is how you will govern? Will you continue to lie, demean, and divide? Or will you be honest, decent, and compassionate?

Your legacy depends upon which path you choose. So let's consider each in more detail.

Be honest as Abe

Truth matters. As our leader, you ignore facts at your own peril and that of the citizens you serve. A single example will suffice.

You once tweeted that climate change is a hoax concocted by China. That's a lie, which you surely knew. There is virtual unanimity among scientists that climate change is caused by human activity and that reversing it is one of humanity's most pressing challenges.

If you care about your children and grandchildren, and the children and grandchildren of people around the world, you will lead the fight against climate change.

So stop talking about pulling out of the Paris agreement or bringing back coal. Talk about strengthening the Paris accord and leading the world toward a healthier and sustainable planet.

Be a model of morality

You promised to “Make America Great Again” and told us we'll be winning so much we'll get bored of winning. But America's greatness has never been merely about winning. And certainly it has not been about winning at all costs. That's for dictators and fascists.

To the contrary, America's greatness comes from its inherent decency and humanity. Indeed, America's genius is that our melting pot of diverse races, religions, and ethnicities created a secular nation that is committed to the notion that every individual is sacred and deserves the utmost dignity and respect.

True leaders exemplify this commitment to decency. They do not make fun of disabled people. They pass laws to protect them, as did President George H. W. Bush. When signing the Americans with Disabilities Act, Bush said that America is “the most generous and optimistic nation on the face of the Earth,” and Americans will “not rest until every man and woman with a dream has the means to achieve it.”

True leaders do not scapegoat people because of their religion. Learn from President George Washington, who, after visiting the Jewish community in Newport, Rhode Island, reassured its members that America welcomes people of every faith. The American government, he said, “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

True leaders do not view half the population as objects to rank and grope. Listen to what Vice President Joseph Biden said to a group of world business leaders about the meaninglessness of a woman's economic progress if she is not protected from abuse: “None of this matters if a woman is not safe: safe in her workplace, safe in her home, safe on the street. It's a basic human right – the right to be safe.”

Be respectful of our rights

Americans of all political stripes revere our Constitution because it is the bulwark protecting our rights of liberty and equality. Preserving these rights is the sacred responsibility entrusted to each generation of Americans.

On the campaign trail, you seemed recklessly indifferent to many of our most cherished rights. You wanted to “open up our libel laws” so that you could more easily sue those who criticized you.

You seemed oblivious of the fact that only dictators use defamation lawsuits to silence their opponents. You need to understand that the Supreme Court limited defamation actions by public officials precisely so Americans would not be afraid to criticize their elected representatives.

Justice William Brennan explained that these rules reflect our “profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open.” As you plan to be president, thicken your skin. Presidents don't sue their critics. They try to beat them in the marketplace of ideas with thoughtful, factually based arguments.

And before you start talking about banning, registering, or randomly frisking targeted groups of people, keep in mind that our Constitution forbids punishing all members of ethnic, religious, or racial groups simply because individual bad actors might exist within the groups. We punish people who break the law, not law-abiding people who merely resemble people who break the law.

Go high

Michelle Obama had it right. True leaders go high when others go low. So follow her advice. Be honest. Be a model for how Americans should respect each other. Be committed to preserving our precious constitutional rights.

Live by these principles and you can prove wrong all those who doubted you, including me. Nothing would make us happier.

Sincerely yours,

Alan Garfield.

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