



## Looking Outward

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Columnist

### On being 'presidential'

*Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens you will need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a supporter below.*

— President Harry Truman in a letter to critic Paul Hume 1950

President Harry Truman was very proud of his daughter and had encouraged her singing for many years. In December of 1950 she had a performance in Washington, DC, and the arts critic for the *Washington Post*, Hume, was in attendance.

On December 6, Harry woke up to read a scathing review of his daughter's performance and, while angry, unleashed a rant in the form of a hand-written letter to Hume. In addition to the above, he called him a "frustrated old man" (Hume was 34 at the time) and said he was an "eight ulcer man on a four ulcer pay." Harry acted

impulsively, in anger and without consulting his advisers. Those closest to him were aghast and predicted the logical outcome: the public perceived Harry's actions as being totally inappropriate and beyond the bounds of proper behavior for a sitting president. Harry learned a lot about public outrage after the incident.

Harry Truman didn't have too many instances where he acted that way, but for some reason he carried the reputation as being somewhat impulsive and a hot-head. I couldn't disagree more. The day he took office he was informed about the atomic bomb and spent a few months gaining information, hearing opposing viewpoints, seeking advice and we, of course, know the result. Regardless of how you feel about his decision, know it was very deliberative and not reactive.

But the above incident, and a few others, skewed public perception of him as impulsive and a guy who shot from the hip. Most of all, though, he listened and guided this country through some of the darkest days in its history during the beginning of the Cold War. He was a steady hand at the helm as he consolidated the vast executive power that he inherited from Franklin Roosevelt.

What Harry did with Hume was something people thought hurt the office, the perception of the office of president. People didn't like

the office of president to be cheapened or tarnished in any way.

There have been some presidents in my lifetime whom I strongly disliked, but to a person they were all presidential. This is incredibly important. It goes beyond maintaining the dignity of the office. The president needs to project certain things as the holder of the most powerful single position on the planet. Among other things his words, actions and deeds speak volumes about the person and the role they occupy. I guess you could sum it up as being "presidential."

For example, when Barack Obama made remarks following the Newtown horror he tried — and succeeded in — making some sense out of this tragedy and gave us hope. After 9/11 George Bush did the same thing. The president's presence and demeanor have a lot to do with how he is viewed internationally as well. There is a specific type of dignity and grace which are necessary and which are expected of the person in that position. When Harry Truman crossed that line it offended almost everyone, and he pulled back and regretted the momentary lapse.

The projection of calmness, ease, cool-headedness and steadiness does make us think things are OK or will be OK in spite of what is in the headlines. We rely on the one in charge to give

us that sense of understanding in times of tragedy and confusing world events, and it gives us all hope for recovery. Since we trust him we know we will bounce back. He puts it all in perspective for us, otherwise we would be in a constant state of agitation and uncertainty. He makes order out of chaos.

Internationally, it's vitally important to have this approach. Friends and allies need stability and steady steering from the most powerful country in the world. They need to know we hold to our commitments and we are there to help them in times of need. They need to know they can count on us.

I think those days are over. Donald Trump's style of bait-and-switch, illusions, contradictions, unpredictability and his tendency to be fast and loose with the truth may have served him well in making deals. I can see where putting someone in the position of not knowing what comes next could be useful for someone bullying

their way into a deal, but it is just the opposite of what is needed here. For the next four years we will all be on edge. His manner may have mesmerized his followers but it will not play well for most of us. His crazy behavior will bring a state of constant anxiety for us and our international partners.

To somehow think having someone who "shakes things up" is a good thing is beyond naive; its downright dangerous for all of us.

But every cloud does have a silver lining. I have not seen this level of activism in a long time. I guess all that agitation has its benefits, especially if it eventually leads to responsible and steady leadership some day.

A great thing about our country, we can deal with lunacy if we work at it. We will have a lot to regret in the next four years but I think we will also have much more involvement in public affairs. Nothing brings people together like a common foe.

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### Creating a Charitable Giving Strategy

For many of us, the New Year signifies a fresh chance to align our spending with our priorities. If charitable giving is an important part of your budget, now is a good time to take a step back and re-evaluate your giving strategy. There are a myriad of causes and organizations you can support, which can leave even the best-intentioned philanthropist confused and overwhelmed. The following steps can help ensure your money is being used effectively and efficiently by the organizations you choose to support.

**Step 1: Clarify your own values and preferences.** Before you reach for your checkbook, ask yourself a few questions. What causes are important to you? Is there a particular demographic or group of people you would like to support? Would you prefer to give to a local, regional, national or global organization? As a donor, what do you hope to see in the organization's leadership or structure? The answers to these questions can help you make a list of charities that will allow you to align your financial resources with your personal values — making your donation even more meaningful.

**Step 2: Consider each organization's mission.** Once you have determined which organizations meet your criteria, research each charity to make sure their programs, mission and goals match your expectations. Consider meeting with an executive or local leader to hear about the charity's strategy and their impact on the community first-hand. During the meeting, ask about the organization's short- and long-term goals as well as how they measure success. You want to be sure that the charity is making progress toward achieving its goals.

**Step 3: Investigate each charitable organization's financial health.** Look into how each donation is used and what percentage of the money goes directly to the cause. Fundraising and administrative expenses help the charity do its work, however you should be cautious about organizations with higher overhead costs. Ask the charity for a copy of their most recent annual report and Internal Revenue Service Form 990. These forms outline the charity's budget allocation and financial plans, and can provide you with insight into how your money is used to make the intended impact.

If you'd like an objective perspective on a charity's financial health, fundraising practices, day-to-day efficiency and accountability standards, look at how watchdog groups evaluate the organization. BBB Wise Giving Alliance ([www.give.org](http://www.give.org)), GuideStar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)) and Charity Navigator ([www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)) are several national groups that offer unbiased evaluations.

**Step 4: Make giving part of your financial plan.** As you figure out your donation strategy, consider meeting with a financial planner or tax advisor who can help you select the most appropriate donation method for your financial situation. These professionals can also work with you to create a strategy for ongoing contributions or to make giving part of your legacy. Keep in mind that there may be legal or tax considerations, depending on the amount and form of your donation (i.e. check, investment donation, etc.).

By taking the time to thoroughly evaluate charitable organizations, you'll give yourself the peace of mind that your money is being used wisely, effectively and for the purposes you intended.

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