



“The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter”

Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.”

“Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.”

— Mark Twain

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A Good Man

Occupant
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500
January 19, 2017

Dear Sir,

It has come to my attention — well, I guess it’s just starting to sink in — that you are about to leave a job that has kept you constantly in the public eye for the past eight years. While much attention has been focused on the next guy, I was thinking that it would be polite to drop you a note to say . . . well . . . **thank you**.

People have been talking about the job you did. So, sure, we can talk about that first, if you like; but I have something more important in mind; and we’ll get to that. So, first — how’d you do? Here’s a list of the usual kinds of things — and, as you know, some people consider these successes and others call them failures. You:

- Avoided a deep recession that you inherited when you first showed up for work
- Rescued the US automobile industry
- Ended the US formal combat role in Iraq
- Banned torture and brought Osama bin Laden to justice
- Initiated a program that insures about 20 million people who couldn’t get healthcare
- Appointed Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court
- Supported marriage equality
- Initiated heavy investment in renewable energy technologies
- Crafted a multinational agreement to end Iran’s nuclear weapon program
- Led 120 nations to agree to reduce emissions that threaten the worldwide climate
- Opened the US to Cuba

You know, the usual kinds of things. Now, some want to quibble about that list; but as I mentioned, I have something more important to talk with you about.

I want to thank you for being . . . you know . . . a Good Man.

Now, I grant you that being a “good man,” by some agreed-upon definition, has never been a job requirement in your profession. We’ve had lots of the other kind –we seem to vacillate on that score. Over time we’ve had to look the other way on a lot of things. But in your case, sir, we can look you in the eye without being embarrassed.

I admit that all of that economics and foreign policy stuff are all pretty standard for a guy in your profession; but a person in your job has other impacts that are sometimes overlooked. I know it seems like a small thing, but you have had this habit of *thinking* first before you talk; and after you do that, the things you say come out in complete sentences and paragraphs, which I tend to enjoy. And, when those ideas get translated around the world, those clear sentences can be pretty useful.

I also appreciate that you don’t stomp around and lose your temper, even when they say rude things about you that aren’t true. You seem to have overlooked even the worst of the lies. You don’t seem to get into the “revenge thing” that some others do. I appreciated your comment when some people predicted that the election results were “the end of the world.” You lowered the temperature a bit and quoted Yogi Berra: “I always say that the only thing that is the end of the world is the end of the world.” Even when guys tell gullible people that you weren’t born in the US, I’ve heard you make jokes about it. Oh, yes that reminds me — guys in your profession are not usually good at telling jokes; but you have some real comic timing. I still remember during a debate, Mitt Romney kept making a face and sputtering about “Obamacare” with obvious distaste. You mentioned that it was called “The Affordable Care Act,” but you looked at him and said, “Hmmm. Obamacare, I like it. I think we should call it that.” Even Mitt had to laugh.

I suppose the thing I admire most is that your time on the job featured eight years without a hint of scandal — that’s not normal for guys in your profession. You have been a steady husband and father and have behaved with a combination humor and dignity, even in the face of public insults. Some of us forget that a guy in your job serves as a role model for other people, whether they want to or not, notably for little boys who look around to figure out how grow up to become a man. Other public figures don’t seem to have an eye for that. In your case, we can feel comfortable that little kids might look at you and say to themselves, “I want to be like him.” OK, I know there are those, like Mark Twain, who said “Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.” But, you know, I have grandchildren. I hope they’ve been watching.

So, I want to say ‘Thank You.’ All of that policy stuff is a subject for another day; but today I want to thank you for being a good man on the world stage, personally representing us in a way that made me proud. It’s not mentioned in the news much; but it’s worth a lot to me.

Regards to you and your family,

PapaDan

