



HISTORIC
LEADERSHIP
TRAINING

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“When a broad table is to be made, and the edges of planks do not fit, the artist takes a little from both, and makes a good joint. In like manner, here, both sides must part from some of their demands, in order that they may join in some accommodating proposition.”

—Benjamin Franklin, Constitutional Convention Debate, June 30, 1787

COMPROMISE

Learning from our Founding Fathers



In 1787, state representatives from our young country met in Philadelphia to design a new structure for our central government. The Articles of Confederation, ratified by the original 13 colonies in 1781, had allowed individual states to remain independent and sovereign, with little role for the central government. There was a need for change, as states were arguing among themselves,

making separate agreements with foreign governments, printing their own money, and managing their own military.

A remarkable group of 55 delegates from 12 states worked from May through September to hammer out the Constitution which still stands today. In the sweltering summer heat, their debates were lively, opinions strongly expressed, and the risk of dividing the country always present. Differences were wide—small states vs. large, farmers vs. businessmen, slave states vs. “free” states.

Yet these leaders listened to one another and treated with respect their differences of opinion. Compromises were hammered out creating the three main branches of our central government—legislative, executive, and judicial. Then a two-chamber legislature (Senate and House of Representatives) was designed to balance the wishes of large and small states. Finally, they worked through the tricky issues of who would be allowed to vote for the Chief Executive.

Driven by the importance of their mission, they listened, made compromises, and created a constitutional government that is one of the most admired in the world.

Is their lesson in compromise still relevant? Read Colin Powell's perspective.

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TIGRETT CORP.

215 Ridgewood Drive, Gettysburg, PA 17325

info@tiggrettcorp.com

www.historicleadershiptraining.com