When one thinks about the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus (or Octavian) likely comes to mind as the most famous and celebrated of its leaders. Though he was never known as the first Roman emperor until after his death, but rather Princeps Civitas (or “first citizen”), he brought order to a chaotic Roman Republic through an almost unending list of military triumphs, architectural innovations, and political, administrative, and legal transformations.

The autocratic power and decadent behavior of subsequent emperors such as Caligula, Nero, and others were largely absent from his rule. It began as a Triumvirate, a co-consulship with Lepidus and Mark Antony in 44 BCE, following the assassination of his uncle, Julius Caesar, and extended over 58 years until his death in 14 CE. Indeed, it was only under his skillful leadership that the foundation was laid for the Roman Empire to thrive and survive for hundreds—or 15 centuries in the case of the eastern half—of years.

So, as you may be asking, why am I recounting to you events from more than 2,000 years ago? The historical distance is not as far as you think. As Augustus established his rule, he exercised profound leadership traits and actions from which leaders can learn today. The following are a few of the more salient:

1. **Professional maturation.** Augustus was a great man but was not born into greatness. He did not possess Julius Caesar’s bravado and political genius; instead, he demonstrated unwavering, painstaking patience and learned from trial and error. He was a physical coward who taught himself to be brave. His initial career was marked by ruthlessness and cruel viciousness; but when he solidified power, he revoked his illegal acts and aspired to work within the confines of the political and social systems. Indeed, as a leader, Augustus improved with the passage of time, an important factor that contributed to his longevity and everlasting legacy.

2. **Change management.** The late Roman Republic was fraught with endemic corruption and social and political inefficiencies. It was in his attempt to reform these, which included consolidation of power, that Julius Caesar was killed. But where his uncle failed, Augustus succeeded. Working with the Roman Senate, he implemented far-reaching reforms that transformed a Roman Republic that was at risk of collapse into an imperial autocracy that thrived for centuries to come. This transformation occurred, not through treachery and threat but via adroit planning and political navigation.

3. **Diversity of opinion.** Augustus did not operate a “police state” as did many of his successors. He did not have a “secret police” that arrested, jailed, and murdered his opponents in the middle of the night. He actually embraced independent thought and opinion and permitted dissident voices to be heard. Consider Livy and Virgil who praised those wishing to uphold the republican cause such as Pompey the Great and Marcus Porcius Cato. Rather than quiet these
Augustus allowed them to uphold past leaders and even criticize his decisions and actions. He believed that a diversity of opinion stimulated discussion and helped bolster his positions.

4. Delegation. Augustus entrusted great responsibility to those around him. It began in his teens when he put immense responsibility upon his two classmates—Maecenas and Agrippa. Many of his military, political, and architectural successes were directly attributable to them—particularly Agrippa. Without them, his legacy would most certainly look much different and might not even exist. His willingness to delegate authority and responsibility continued later in life with his stepsons Tiberius and Drusus and grandsons Gaius and Lucius.

5. Focus on the people (“employees”). Augustus recognized that the Roman Senate had become corrupt and inefficient. The reforms he instituted focused on addressing these issues. Further, an unwavering focus of his reforms was on the people; he knew that without the masses, his political, cultural, and military successes would be impossible. Rallying the people to his causes was always a critical priority throughout his rule.

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Leadership takes many different forms. It is vital during a time of transition and change. With the appointment of Steve Bennett as Symantec’s new president and CEO in late July, I’ve had an opportunity to observe a new leader in action—from his communications approach to how he plans to go about defining and solving problems. In coming months, we will be hearing more from him, including a planned Executive Q&A with him in the April 2013 issue.

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