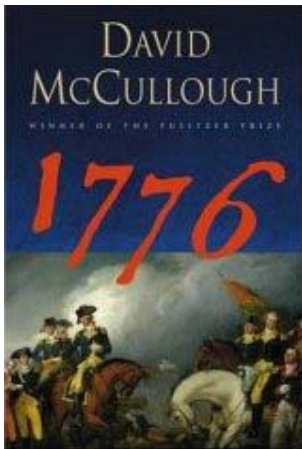


**HISTORY AS CLASSROOM: The Lessons of 1776**

By John Baldoni



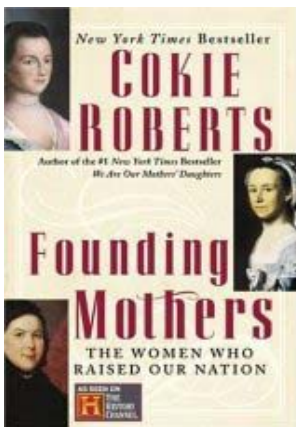
One of the most striking conclusions from reading David McCullough's *1776*, an artfully written history of the seminal year in the American Revolution, is just how many colonists were dead-set against independence. Popular culture likes to portray the rebellious colonists as falling lockstep into place behind George Washington and the other founding fathers. Yet according to John Adams, one of those founding figures, a third of the population was opposed to separation from Great Britain and another third was neutral. Many colonists were fearful of living outside the protective sphere of the most powerful nation on earth. Where would merchants sell their goods? Who would buy the colonies' raw materials such as wood, iron, indigo, and cotton? And to whom would the colonists owe allegiance, a

King, a governor, or a new head of state?

Such fears have parallels in our own lives, and the lessons of 1776 are usefully explored for today's implications.

*Make the cause tangible.* The Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776 is eloquent, righteous, and inspiring, but most colonists did not learn of it for upwards of a year.

What drove the colonists to rebellion was the tangible oppression of the Crown's taxes, tariffs, and restrictions on liberty. For driving change today, managers require a powerful mission statement for it but also need an articulation of the tangible reasons behind it.



*Communicate the cause frequently.* Rebellious colonists found sustenance in the many pamphlets that articulated British injustices and argued the alternatives. One of the best known, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, helped stir the masses to action against the wrongs of British rule. The rebels were also inspired by frequent letters from home. Cokie Roberts's *Founding Mothers* reports that husbands on the front lines received invaluable sustenance from their wives' repeatedly expressed zeal for the cause.

*Finance the cause creatively.* Starting the rebellion was one thing; funding it another. Robert Morris played a critical role in raising funds for the Continental Congress that wrote the Declaration of Independence, and he later found funds to sustain the troops in the field. A merchant by trade, he creatively kept the money flowing when there otherwise appeared to be none.

*Support the cause courageously.* “We must all hang together or assuredly we will all hang separately,” said Ben Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Had the patriots lost, the signers of the Declaration and many of their followers would likely have been executed.

*Hold for the common cause.* The colonists sometimes distrusted each other nearly as much they distrusted the Crown. McCullough notes that Washington did not think well of the unruly New England soldiers under his command. John Adams did not think highly of Thomas Jefferson for his profession of freedom but continued slave-owning. Still, most subordinated their many internal disputes in pursuit of the common cause.

*Further reading:*

David McCullough, *1776*. New York: Simon & Schuster 2005

David McCullough, *John Adams*. New York: Simon & Schuster 2001.

Donald T. Phillips, *The Founding Fathers on Leadership*. New York: Warner Books, 1997.

Cokie Roberts, *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*. New York: William Morrow, 2004.

*Note:* John Baldoni is a consultant and author whose most recent book is *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders* (2005); he can be reached at [john@johnbaldoni.com](mailto:john@johnbaldoni.com) and [www.johnbaldoni.com](http://www.johnbaldoni.com).