1. Overview

Born into one of America’s greatest ever political families in 1942, Daley was schooled at De La Salle independent school in Manhattan, and went on to complete his undergraduate and Law degrees at De Paul’s University, Chicago. It was not long before the Mayor began to follow in the footsteps of his legendary father, Richard J. Daley, who is Chicago’s longest-running Mayor, holding the position between 1955 and 1976 - 21 years. In 1972, Richard M. was elected to the Illinois Senate only to be re-elected in 1976. He subsequently became State Attorney of Cook County in 1980, and was re-elected in 1984 and 1988 on the back of a good record against narcotics use and rape. Daley increasingly set his sights on the Mayor’s Office, and in 1983 contested the Mayoral primary but lost. It wasn’t long before he realized his ambition. On beating Eugene Sawyer (the incumbent Mayor) and two others in the primary in 1987, he eventually won the Mayoral election and was proclaimed Mayor in 1989, to begin the second leg of the Daley’s dynasty at City Hall. Daley was subsequently re-elected five consecutive times 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, and 2007. At present, his current term will end in 2010, and will equal the 21 year Mayoral tenure record set by his father (City Mayors, 2006).

During Daley’s time as Mayor he has had a number of notable successes from taking direct control of public schools in the city, to promoting a more racially diverse city workforce, clamping down on crime, and investing heavily in the city’s public realm (City Mayors, 2006).

For these successes the Mayor was named Municipal Leader of the Year by American City and County magazine; a Public Official of the Year by Governing magazine; and Politician of the Year by Library Journal, all in 1997. In 2005, the Mayor received arguably the most prestigious accolade of one of the ‘5 Best Big City Mayors’ for being ‘the nation’s top urban executive’ (Gibbs, 2005).

However, of late his administration has been tarnished by malpractice, cover ups, and the illegal bulldozing of Chicago’s Meigs Field City Airport, for which the city was fined $33,000. None the less, the Mayor hasn’t suffered irrepairable damage: he was re-elected for his 6th term in 2007 with more than 70% of the vote (City Mayors, 2006).

2. Personal and leadership skills exemplified

An innovator

Unafraid to defy convention and carry out a course of action that he sees as right, rather than blindly follow received wisdoms, Mayor Daley is an undoubted innovator. No better is an example of his inventiveness seen than with public education, which he has comprehensively restructured and modernized. In 1995, the Mayor took direct control of public city schools from the elected city schools board. Widely praised for this innovation, Time Magazine wrote ‘across the nation, mayors look to Daley’s reform initiatives as a model for what they might do to revive their own public schools’ (Time magazine, 1999 in City of Chicago, 2008).
Pragmatist and confident in his convictions

Though unpopular with many across the city including business leaders with aircrafts stored there, Daley ordered the overnight bulldozing of Meigs Field Airport near downtown Chicago without consulting either the public or Airport users. Despite arguments to the contrary, the Mayor insisted that his actions, which took place on the night of the March 30th 2003, would ‘make Chicago a safer city’ and that though ‘there [had] been no specific threat, as mayor of the city of Chicago, public safety is one of my primary responsibilities. I take it very seriously’ (Daley, 2003 in Fountain, 2003). The city were fines $33,000 for the Mayor’s actions but this ability to make tough-love choices is one of the reasons why the Mayor has been so successful.

Indeed, this pragmatic and grounded approach has its admirers. According to columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, ‘[Daley] may just be the best mayor in the country, the prime representative of the new bred of local leaders who are competently doing things while the ethereal globalizers see their unreal worlds crashing down around them’ (Geyer, 1998 in City of Chicago, 2008).

Commitment and passion towards his goals

When the Mayor has his teeth into an agenda or an idea he doesn’t let go until he is done. Many observers have commented upon the tenacity with which the mayor pursued his goal of improving the city’s built environment. The Urban Parks Institute for instance highlighted that ‘Mayor Daley has made an incredible commitment to improving all sorts of parks and open spaces throughout Chicago in a way that no other mayor has (Urban Parks Institute, 2001 in the City of Chicago, 2008). David Molyneaux, Cleveland Plain Dealer claimed, as a result of the Mayor’s work, that he couldn’t ‘think of another American city that spends so much money, time and energy on public places [and that] there’s always some sort of construction in Chicago that is aimed at improving places where people go during their free time -- to the parks and lakefront, walkways and bikeways, museums and ball fields (Molyneaux, 2002 in City of Chicago, 2008).

Brave

The Chicago Tribune argues that Daley ‘has earned his ranking as one of America’s best mayors not because his city looks pretty or because the night life charms conventioneers. He has taken risks - on dismal public schools, on high-rise ghettos - that his father dared not touch. More than any other achievement, Richard M. Daley has succeeded as mayor by bridging many chasms that, in painfully recent times, divided an angry Chicago’ (Chicago Tribune, 2005 in City of Chicago, 2008).

3. Coalitions built and leverage achieved.

Daley undoubtedly built a number of important coalitions in order to accomplish so much and remain Mayor for so long, and much of the leverage he achieved was in large part precisely because of these two factors: the length of his reign and the great progress he made as Mayor. Indeed, Joel Kotkin, author of ‘The City’ suggests that as a result of the Mayor’s reign, ‘Chicago has stability and continuity. That’s what international capital and local businesses want’ (Kotkin, 2005 in City of Chicago, 2008). The Mayor’s great successes have also given him the political capital to build relationships to affect change in his city. In 1996, Daley headed the US conference of Mayors. Amongst other awards he has also been named as Municipal Leader of the Year and one of the United States’s top 5 Big City Mayor’s, all of which are titles which give him more clout and more contacts still to push through his agenda (City Mayors, 2006).

But the Mayor is also a natural relationship-builder. He ‘really does seem to want to be the mayor of all Chicagoans’ according to Joseph Epstein of the Wall Street Journal (2005 in the City of Chicago, 2008). In addition and according to ‘The Economist,’ Daley has ‘modernised his father’s approach to government, embracing rather than suppressing opponents and working with prominent businessmen to
improve life in the city’ (The Economist, 2006 in City of Chicago, 2008). This embracing and conciliatory style has also been extremely important in leveraging control in Daley’s Chicago.

More specifically, Daley has energized support for his plans across both the public and private sectors. He has personally organized US and Canadian mayors behind an initiative to protect the Great Lakes. In 2004, he opened Millennium Park as ‘the most ambitious public-private undertaking in Chicago's history’ (City of Chicago, 2008). The project involved the ambitious construction of a theatre for music and dance, a restaurant, ice rink, an interactive fountain within the setting of a large landscaped garden open to all city residents (Millennium Park, 2008). Indeed, since the Mayor came to Office the City and its sister agencies have in total spent more than $11 billion in capital improvements in the city (City of Chicago, 2008). A number of business friendly measures such as trimming business taxes have helped with his relationship with the private sector.

Evidence of his leverage can also be found in the fact that two important governance models have been adopted in many cities across the US - his school management model and his community policing model. Here it is as much the quality of the product that the Mayor helped produce than anything else, which has made him a powerful figure (City of Chicago, 2008).

He has achieved success with both the public and private sectors as a result of his leadership style, quality and longevity, and perhaps the most important symbol of the Mayor’s leverage is his continued popularity amongst the electorate: elected in 1989 he has been re-elected in 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007, and all by overwhelming margins (City of Chicago, 2008).

4. How he told the story of the city.

In his addresses at keynote occasions, the Mayor tells of a Chicago that he inherited being divided along racial lines, one that fought amongst itself and lost sight of common goals. The Mayor now speaks of a Chicago that has ‘lowered [its] voices, raised [its] sights and put the divisiveness behind us so we can look to the future and address our shared problems [and] as a result, we’ve improved the lives of people from every walk of life’ (Daley, 2008). Chicago is a city of many successes: its schools, its downtown, its neighborhoods, but the Mayor, as well as reinforcing progress made suggests that ‘we can't take our progress for granted; that we must always challenge the status quo; and, that we can always do better’ (Delaney, 2008). It is into his 6th term now that he intends to do just that.

5. Specific problems addressed.

The Mayor will have been in office 21 years by the end of his current term in 2010. And so, there are many, many examples which could be quoted to support his successes in the face of distinct city challenges. However, the examples below will expand on his most profound successes during his reign thus far:

**Public Education**

Daley has worked energetically to improve standard in his city schools. His first step, taken in 2005, was to assume control of the public school system in order that he might be able to stamp his trademark upon them without having to deal with frictional bureaucracy. His specially-created management team overturned a $1.8 billion educational budget deficit so much so that he was able to spend $4 billion on capital improvements. As well as improving student safety, reversing the culture of underperformance in poor neighbourhoods and making homework compulsory, the Mayor has made particular efforts to improve parent involvement in education and to raise teaching levels. The results of these initiatives have been rising standards since 2005, and in many areas, test scores are now above the national average. Indeed he is pushing harder, for even better performance. In 2004, he announced
the renaissance 2010 initiative which sees the creation of 100 new schools to replace poor performers and ageing structures. This policy is backed up by the Modern Schools Across Chicago plan, a $1 billion initiative to construct 24 new schools (City of Chicago, 2008).

Investment in the built environment and the city’s cultural attractions

This theme has been one of the Mayor’s passions, and he insists that simple, horizontal development at the basic street level can make a tremendous difference. An editorial in the Chicago Sun claimed ‘Rich Daley has irrefutably made Chicago a better city to live in the 16 years since he has taken office’ (Chicago Sun, 2005 in City of Chicago, 2008). Indeed, ‘no other great urban centre in the United States equals Chicago’s consistently high average of civic design’ (Martin Filler, 2004 in City of Chicago, 2008). The city centre has been a distinct focus for work and has been called perhaps the ‘handsomest downtown in the United States. No other cities attend to its ‘public and commercial spaces with such civic pride’ according to New York Times journalist Richard Woodward (Woodward, 2003 in City of Chicago, 2008). Since his inauguration the Mayor has also planted over 500,000 trees, created 100 school campus parks, removed graffiti from city walls and implemented a city-wide recycling program. In the same period, the financial commitment by the Mayor, the City and its sister agencies has been to the tune of $11 billion - a huge sunk investment, but one that has raised the attractiveness of the city to investors no end (City of Chicago, 2008).

Policing and Crime

In a fight against crime the Mayor has increased the Police Force by some 1,500 officers, cracked down on gangs, seized 10,000 to 15,000 illegal weapons, policies which have seen crime rates fall every year since 1992 (City of Chicago, 2008).

Housing

In a fight against homelessness in Chicago the Mayor has spent over $3 billion primarily for the construction of 125,000 affordable housing units. The Mayor has also tripled the provision of available beds for the homeless and has fervently championed the rights of all in his city to affordable housing. His strong voice on the subject has seen him bid for funding at the state and federal levels (City of Chicago, 2008).

Business, the Private Sector and Minorities

To make the city more business friendly the Mayor cut business tax rates in Chicago and has created a ‘business assistance programme,’ which is essentially an agency to lend support to small and medium enterprises, which are growing in the poorest areas of the City. In 1990, the Mayor made the landmark decision to offer at least 25% of all city contracts to Black and Minority Ethnic-run businesses and 5% to female-run firms. Employment in local government amongst minorities has also significantly risen. The Mayor also chose to privatise around 50 of the city’s internal contracts, which has improved efficiency and accountability, saving the tax payers $50 million per year (City of Chicago, 2008).

6. Legacy

Like his father before him, the figure of Richard M. Daley will be remembered as legendary. If he decides to run for Mayor for a record 7th term he will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the most successful Mayors to not only have presided over Chicago but in the whole world. The volume he has achieved and the longevity of his popularity with the voters, in spite of periodic scandal, is remarkable. His achievements have also come across the board from fiscal affairs to coalition building to fund raising to education and policing - again, remarkable. No wonder he is held in such high regard by
peers, colleagues, big business and the public alike. As for a lasting legacy, it very much depends on how long he decides to stay as Mayor and what he decides to tackle next.

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