



Congressman Don Manzullo has known the challenges of running businesses all of his life. Before going into politics, Manzullo started his own law firm while running a cattle company. His parents opened a grocery store in Rockford, Illinois during his early years and then switched to the restaurant business a few years later. Although his parents have passed away, Congressman Manzullo's brother still runs the family business—Manzullo's Famous Italian Restaurant.

What motivated you to enter politics?

This is the first political office I've ever held. When I was ten years-old I said that I wanted to be a Congressman and a lawyer in a small town. It's easy to be a small-town lawyer—you just become a lawyer and settle in a small town. But I had no idea how hard it would be to become a Congressman.

What exactly does the House Committee on Small Business do?

It has oversight jurisdiction over any problems impacting small businesses. But small business is defined as not only for-profit businesses with less than 500 employees, but it also applies to churches, faith-based groups, non-profit organizations, local governments and educational institutions.

LEADERS

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
DON MANZULLO
OF ILLINOIS

by Exo

What is your vision for small business in America?

I am motivated by the fact that the government is too big and too intrusive. My kids deserve a chance to live in an America that is more respectful of their lives and their wallets. I want small businesses to thrive in an environment with a fairer tax scheme and less regulatory burden, so that they can make more money and put more money back into their businesses and the community. I want to create a healthy environment for small business that spills over into the community.

How do you define success?

Success is when you feel that you are being used for a greater purpose and helping people as a servant. In government we say that we are “public servants.” That shouldn’t be a cliché, but a truism. When you try to serve God and serve people, God will bless your life and that is the meaning of success.

What lessons for success have you learned during your time in Congress?

There are some phenomenal principles from the Bible that I try to live by. First of all, there is the statement that says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil ... or take revenge on anyone.” That’s hard to do in politics. You get bruised and your first instinct is to bruise back. I really try not to do that, but to do the opposite instead: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” I try to practice that.

The second is, “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.” Everyone is to be treated evenly, fairly, and decently, regardless of their party or their persuasion. That applies not only to the members of Congress, but also to the people I represent. That is a huge lesson.

The third one is, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on

you, live at peace with everyone.” That means I have to be a peacemaker, even though I may not enjoy it. A city or a town or a family where there is strife and hatred is a place where there will be no success. I think I succeed at being a peacemaker and this is something that is desperately needed in our country and in the world today.

Those are lessons for success because they determine your attitude. If you are an individual of peace, humility and goodness, then you are a true leader who leads by example. It also helps you avoid the pressure of blaming yourself or blaming others for so much of what happens in life. It’s easy to blame others for problems and negative circumstances, but that is not leadership. Leadership is about solving problems and helping others achieve success.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional accomplishment?

My greatest accomplishment was when I got involved in keeping open a factory of 300 people in a town of 7000—and it wasn’t even in my district! It was a very unusual situation where I was placed in a position of authority and had to make some decisions and come up with a solution.

I didn’t want to see that factory close and I knew that God really cared about those people and that town. So I prayed to God about it for a long time and asked for his help. While riding the subway to my office on Capitol Hill one morning, I felt God impress upon me an absolutely phenomenal solution to the whole problem. I wrote everything down and then presented it to some Senators, members of the House and a few military personnel. When I presented the solution, people literally gasped because it was so innovative and creative. I told everyone that it wasn’t my idea, that it came from God as a result of my prayers. We kept the factory open and everyone was so happy. That was a real accomplishment!

What advice would you give business and political leaders today?

You can’t separate your personal life from your professional life. We do not lead a bifurcated life. Your professional life is an extension of who you are personally. I try to spend a lot of time with my family—I have 3 teenagers. There are many times that I can’t make a political event because of family commitments and my constituents sometimes complain about that. But I remind them that I am not competent to help govern a nation unless I succeed in governing my own family. You can never forget that your children are precious and that they are with you for a short period of time. I’ve been in Congress now for 11 years, and so far that philosophy has worked pretty well. 

Congressman Don Manzullo represents the Sixteenth Congressional District of Illinois, one of the most diverse in the nation. On January 8, 2003, Congressman Manzullo was reappointed Chairman of the House Committee on Small Business, which oversees the Small Business Administration and a broad range of issues that matter to small businesses with less than 500 employees. During the 108th Congress, Congressman Manzullo also serves on the House Financial Services Committee.

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG HARGREAVES

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