

# MAYOR'S CORNER

A BLOG BY MAYOR JAMES D. STEWART, JR.

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## Leadership Requires Courage, Not Consensus

Reflections on the cost of blazing new trails, and why it is worth every step

Early this morning, before the city was fully awake, I found myself reflecting on what it truly means to lead. Not the kind of leadership that earns applause. The real kind. The kind that costs you something.

As a public servant, and as anyone who has ever been in a position of authority, I have learned something easy to understand but incredibly hard to live out: **you cannot lead if you are constantly thinking about who will stay with you and who will leave you when you make tough decisions.**

The gravitational pull of people-pleasing is one of leadership's most dangerous traps. Your instinct is to bring everyone along, to build consensus, to make sure no one is left behind. That instinct is not wrong. But there is a critical difference between informed leadership and approval-driven paralysis. The moment your decisions are shaped more by who will be pleased than by what is right, you have quietly surrendered your authority. You are no longer leading. You are managing a poll.

*You are no longer making decisions; you are taking a poll. You are no longer leading; you are managing approval ratings.*

Real leadership demands clarity on your values, conviction to act on what you believe is right, and the courage to accept that some people will disagree, even leave. That is not failure. That is the price of leading. And it is a price every trailblazer must be willing to pay.

This is especially true for those of us who are first. As the first African American mayor in Irondale's history, I understand the weight of that seat. There is no blueprint to follow, no identical path to borrow. The temptation is to make yourself smaller, to sand down the edges that make people uncomfortable. Resist that. The very things that make you different in that seat are what qualify you to lead in ways those before you could not.



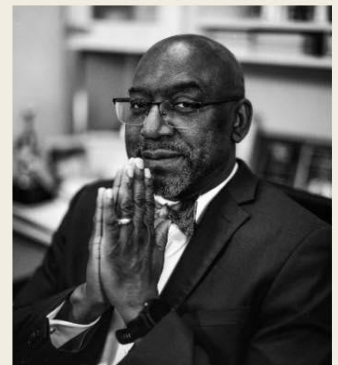
My faith anchors me in those hard moments. Galatians 6:9, the foundation of my DiE principle, Do it Every Day, reminds me that the harvest comes to those who do not give up. God honors integrity. The approval that ultimately matters is not measured in applause or approval ratings. It is measured by whether you were faithful to the call.

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up." — Galatians 6:9*

So here is my challenge to every leader reading this: stop asking how many people will stay with you when you make the hard call. Start asking whether the call is right. Make it. Move forward. Trust that the people who are meant to be on the journey will find their way to you.

**Your legacy will not be measured by how many people liked you. It will be measured by what you built and who you became in the process.**

The trail will be hard.  
**Blaze it anyway.**



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