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## “Tear Down This Wall” — A Book for Leaders

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Communication is one of the central tasks of leadership. No one seemed to know this like Ronald Reagan. Much like Winston Churchill, President Reagan understood the power of words and the opportunity of a great speech.

On June 12, 1987, President Reagan delivered the 1,279th speech of his presidency. He stood at the Brandenburg Gate and the Berlin Wall and called for the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to take down the wall.

Well into his speech, the President said:

*We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness. Some political prisoners have been released. Certain foreign news broadcasts are no longer being jammed. Some economic enterprises have been permitted to operate with greater freedom from state control.*

*Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet state? Or are they token gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it? We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace. There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.*

*General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*

“Tear down this wall.” Those four words, now so memorable, were words with effect. Just over two years later, the wall fell, torn down by a people tasting freedom.

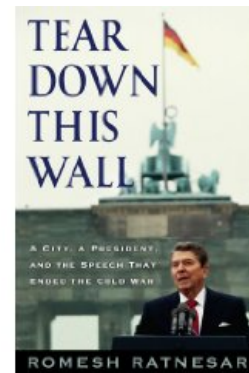
In *Tear Down This Wall: A City, a President, and the Speech that Ended the Cold War*, author Romesh Ratnesar, deputy managing editor of TIME magazine, tells the story of that speech and its delivery.

That story is nothing short of amazing. Ratnesar’s book takes the reader into a feverish debate at the very top levels of the American government. He tells of diplomats and other figures who sought at great length to prevent the President from speaking those four words. The diplomatic establishment feared that the President’s ultimatum would “embarrass” Gorbachev.

Ratnesar takes the reader into the times, into the White House, and into the mind of President Reagan. The book is a fascinating historical account. Leaders will be especially interested in *Tear Down this Wall* for its lessons in the strategic importance of words, a message, and the power of the spoken word.

From the book:

*Reagan loathed the Wall. On a trip to West Berlin in 1978, he was taken to an eighth-floor office overlooking it and*



*told the story of Peter Fechter, the youth who had been gunned down by East German police in 1962 as he tried to crawl over. The authorities left Fechter unattended for nearly an hour, while he bled to death. "Reagan just gritted his teeth when he heard all of this," says Peter Hannaford, a longtime aide who was with Reagan that day. "You could tell from the set of his jaw and his look and some of the things he said that . . . he was very, very determined that this was something that had to go.*

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