THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

COALITION BUILDING AT ITS FINEST

Over the summer of 1787 the nation's founders hammered out a four-page agreement that continues to provide the framework for our government. While some have referred to the construction of the Constitution as a "miracle," it was the founders' ability to **build coalitions** that allowed them to create a set of laws that have persisted for over two centuries.

How did they do it? What rules did they establish? What principles did they follow to minimize any personal conflicts? An examination of the factors leading to the Constitutional Convention, which delegates chose to attend the meeting, and the actual debates in Philadelphia, offers significant insights into building coalitions and the sub-competencies of **partnering, political savvy,** and **influencing/negotiating**.

Ultimately, 39 men signed the Constitution, while three would dissent. Ironically, it is one of those dissenters, George Mason, who offers perhaps the most compelling leadership insights from this entire saga. We conclude with the story of Mason's dissent, and what that example provides for all of us. A final activity asks participants to reflect upon what lessons they can take from the Constitution Convention regarding **building coalitions**.

This session combines the insights from Russell Linden on collaboration in government, Roger Fisher and William Ury on negotiating (from their classic *Getting to Yes*), and Peter Block's work on coalitions to offer practical insights into the factors leading to the founding father's ability to craft such a revolutionary document.

This session can be a stand-alone seminar or paired with a visit to an associated site such as the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, or Gunston Hall, Mt. Vernon, or the National Archives in the Washington D.C. area.