

New York has plenty of lessons for Boris



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So Boris will meet Mike this week. Good idea.

But he should go further and consider lessons to be learned from Fiorello, Ed, and Rudi, and even John and David. Yes, New York mayor Mike Bloomberg will have a lot of good ideas on how to be a successful mayor of a major, ethnically diverse, traffic-congested city heavily dependent on financial services. But I am not sure that Bloomberg, notable for his bland managerial style, is the perfect model for the somewhat less retiring Boris, who should be more able than Bloomberg to wrap himself in the energy of a city, its sheer excitement, its fun. Mayors have limited statutory powers and more limited budgets. But they command what President Theodore Roosevelt called "the bully pulpit" – the ability to rally voter support for actions that go beyond their specific writs. This is where Boris (I use the brand name throughout) has an advantage over any other mayor in the world: he is the most visible elected official in the land, especially now that Britain does not have a Prime Minister directly chosen by voters.

To use his implied power, Boris might consider taking a leaf out of

the book of the highly successful Fiorello LaGuardia (1933-45).

LaGuardia did more than run a clean, efficient administration. He related to New Yorkers, a notably tough and cynical breed, by combining integrity and gesture politics, both of which Boris should have in abundance. When the newspapers went on strike, LaGuardia was on the radio to read us kids the comics, lest we lose continuity in these serialised strips. He rode fire engines, to show that he was not remote from the day-to-day problems of a city in which fires were a menace in creaky tenements often heated with dangerously antiquated equipment. The modern expression would be "being there for us". He also flaunted his Italian and Jewish heritage but, despite Boris's attempts to establish roots in exotic lands, I suspect that won't work quite as well for London's new mayor.

Ed Koch, who was elected on a law-and-order platform in 1977, and re-elected twice, garnering 78 per cent of the vote in his third run, also had a few virtues worth Boris's study. First, he prowled the streets of New York, famously asking passers-by: "How'm I doing?" Voters loved it. More substantively, Koch broke a bus and subway strike by using a law that prohibited strikes by public service employees and, equally important, by showing solidarity with commuters: he joined footsore New Yorkers as they walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. No immoderate liberal, he. Rudi Giuliani is too well known

to be ignored as a model. Boris has as his top priority making London a safer place. And he seems to understand the Giuliani "broken windows" approach – little things mean a lot. Stop what Rudi would call "crime" and Brits call "anti-social behaviour" and you've gone a long way towards taking control of the streets.

Giuliani, of course, could hire and fire his police commissioners, which Boris cannot. But that's where the "bully pulpit" comes

Deliver safe streets, and the public will forgive much



in: he can continue his effort to make Sir Ian Blair's position untenable. He can also wrong-foot Labour, and incidentally his own party, by stepping up demands for more jails, even though shadow chancellor George Osborne plans to stick with Labour budgets that leave no room for a significant expansion of prison places. There was more to Giuliani

than tough talk. He set up elaborate systems of accountability that enabled him to see daily crime reports by police precinct and immediately call commanders who seemed to allow too much thuggery on their turf. Similar data are available for London, and Boris should demand that the Home Office give him access to them. "Name and shame" can put pressure on incompetent commanders. Not quite as good as being able to fire them, but a lot better than restricting oneself to making speeches attacking crime.

Giuliani also pursued a policy that Boris should adopt: don't deal with rabble-rousers who claim to represent minority communities. More often than not, pandering to these self-elected spokesmen by previous mayors resulted in concession after concession, and the alienation of most citizens.

Finally, Boris can learn from two of New York's spectacular failures. John Lindsay, blond, handsome, the product of the post Bushkey and St Paul's Schools and Yale University, decided to expand New York's welfare state. Welfare rolls soared; bureaucracy metastasised; the appetites of trade union bosses grew by what they fed on; bankruptcy loomed. The voters finally had enough, and replaced the charismatic Lindsay with a dull accountant.

Then there was David Dinkins, who defeated Ed Koch in the Democratic primary and went on to defeat Republican Rudi

Giuliani. The voters sought to buy racial peace by electing a black mayor, and instead got the spurt in lawlessness that next time around propelled Giuliani into City Hall and New York City into a new era of peace and prosperity. Giuliani identified with the cops and victims, not the crooks; knew that criminals under lock and key could not commit crimes; and that the chief beneficiaries of lower murder rates were the decent members of the black community; and managed to survive a personal life that was not decorous. That should ease Boris's mind: deliver safe streets and the public will forgive much.

Add one further thing: become the noisy advocate-in-chief for London and Londoners. New Yorkers always find this endearing in their mayors. Give the business community what it needs to be internationally competitive, even if that means a thumb in the eye to George Osborne's plan to make the City less attractive to non-domiciled foreigners such as yours truly. Persuade the leader of the Opposition and the shadow chancellor that the high-tax regime they plan to retain will hurt London's small businesses, and don't hesitate to make sure that entrepreneurs' interests are not subordinated to those of the ever-whingeing City bankers. And don't forget the neighbourhoods outside of the Square Mile.

"We all failed to come to grips with what a neighbourhood is," lamented a former Lindsay aide. And thereby lost touch with the voters.