

Without the combination of skills and conviction that I...

Published: January 13, 2026, 1:20 am

The Covid inquiry goes on.

I am under no illusion that Lee Cain and Dominic Cummings, who gave evidence yesterday, are objective witnesses. They might have told the truth as they see it, but they also have their own stories to tell, and their own backsides to cover. No one is ever objective in that situation. The ministers who have yet to give evidence will be no better as witnesses for that very reason, and they face the risk of prosecution, which these advisers likely do not.

So what did we learn from the day, the highlights of which have been summarised in a useful video here from Politics Joe, who I consider to be reliable?

<https://youtu.be/fdK-A01OUjs?si=6355ltmOA-W4m2yV>

The list of lessons could go on for a long time. I will only offer key thoughts as a result.

First, Johnson really was incapable. It cannot be pretended otherwise. He did not only not have the skillset for this moment, as Lee Cain suggested. He simply did not have any required skillset for the job of prime minister. A person who cannot decide, and usually does so to appease the last person in the room, is always unfit for office. Johnson was that person.

Second, the dogmatists with whom Johnson surrounded himself were also wholly unfit for the tasks demanded of them. None brought management skills or competence with them. Whatever skill sets they might have had were never required in No.10, most especially at that time.

Third, if you need to swear all the time, you have lost the argument. I am not saying I have never sworn. I have. It can be cathartic. But I have also been to companies where the language amongst senior management was persistently of the type that was obviously commonplace in No.10. It was wholly dysfunctional, unthinking and destructive. The mindset that gave rise to it was beyond salvage. The only thing to do with the company was to sell it, which is what happened. In the case of Johnson's

government, it should have been replaced by those aware of what was happening. Many bear the responsibility for not calling that out - especially if they appeared at podiums on television to cover for it.

Fourth, the one thing very obviously missing at No.10 was courage. The need to do the right thing simply did not get into the agenda. At best, pragmatism did. In the case of Rishi Sunak, even that was not true: he just cowered, believing that financial markets ruled the roost and that anything he might do would upset them, meaning he was willing to sacrifice people to whatever he thought they demanded.

Fifth, there was no moral compass. If there had been, the vulnerable might have been protected. They were not. It's not possible to be a good leader without a moral compass. It is not clear that there was one anywhere near Downing Street at this time.

Sixth, without the combination of skills and conviction that leadership requires Downing Street failed us in 2020, and afterwards. Tens of thousands of people died as a result.

I hope there will be accountability for that.