

Building Brooklyn Bridge

The Brooklyn Bridge, which links Brooklyn to Manhattan Island, is one of the most famous bridges in the world. At the time it was first conceived in 1883, however, bridge-building experts throughout the world told the designer, a creative engineer by the name of John Augustus Roebling, that his idea would not work.

Roebling convinced his son, Washington, who was also an engineer, that his idea had merit. The two of them developed the concept, resolved the problems others had forecast, and enthusiastically hired a crew to build their bridge.



After only a few months of building, a tragic on-site accident took John's life. Soon thereafter, Washington designed two large pneumatic caissons that became the foundations for the two towers. In 1870, fire broke out in one of the caissons, and Washington, being in the caisson, directed the fight against it.

Working in compressed air in these caissons under the river caused him to get decompression sickness (the "bends"), shattering his health and rendering him unable to talk or walk or visit the site. Everyone thought the project would have to be abandoned, since the Roeblings were the only ones who knew the dynamics of building the bridge.

Washington Roebling, however, could still *think*, and he had a burning desire to see the bridge finished. As he lay in his hospital bed, he had an idea. He would communicate with the engineers by using one finger to tap out in code on his wife's arm what he wanted her to tell them.

Washington tapped out his instructions for 13 years until the bridge was built.

The lesson to be drawn? Leaders are not only self-starters, they are finishers.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course (2 Timothy 4:7).

– Beecher Hunter