

# Art of war by sun tzu | leadership



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2. If we look back in ancient times Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War', a 2,500 year old book on military strategy, we find that most of his teachings are still relevant even in today's technologically advanced modern day war. The 'Art of War' written by Sun Tzu is regarded as one of the best and most successful documentation of military strategies.

3. Sun Tzu said that "a general must see and know alone, meaning that he should be able to see and know what others can not. Seeing what others do not see is called brilliance, knowing what others do not know is called genius. Brilliant geniuses win first, meaning that they defend in a such way as to be unassailable and attack in such a way as to be irresistible"[1].

4. Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' mainly deals with the objective of winning battles with minimum effort, minimum conflict, minimum losses and maximum operational efficiency, which are also the motto of modern corporates. In the book Sun Tzu has mentioned that best winning is to win without fighting which has become very important in leadership strategies.

In his book Sun Tzu had mentioned that :-

'if you know yourself and your enemy, you'd surely win'

'if you know yourself but not your enemy, you may either win or lose'

'if you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you would lose'[2]

5. While there has been a great deal of emphasis on the personality of the leader in modern leadership literature it is neither a new nor a novel idea. In fact, the leadership traits of an effective leader were described by Sun Tzu

over 2500 years ago and when one adds the dimensions of the follower and the situation to the leadership equation, “ the Art of War” becomes a handbook for leadership. A leader takes a very vital role in winning a war and SunTzu promotes leader as the central point in his last chapter[3]. The strong qualities and capabilities of a leader determine the success achieved in war whereas his weaknesses will lead his followers into defeat. This war strategy is already very old but it is still relevant in discussing the role of leaders in technologically advanced modern day battlefield transparency.

6. Sun Tzu describes five major qualities/traits of an effective leader which in turn describes the character of an individual . Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humaneness, courage and sternness[4]. A leader must possess the strength of character to ensure he takes all these qualities into consideration to be effective and inspiring others. Leadership is the main component of ensuring a fluid decision making cycle and Master Sun laid a lot of emphasis on a leader to practice these basic qualities to reduce friction.

(a) Intelligence. The intelligence and professional competence of a leader and his ability to use his intelligence and gained knowledge to plan and complete the professional tasks at hand is very vital . A leader must be technically proficient and tactically sound so that his followers develop full faith and follow him without questioning. Leading by example is a powerful tool and if a leader is professionally competent and have adequate knowledge of his job the people follow. Reliance on intelligence alone will result in rebelliousness. Leaders are in process of constant learning and evolving various methods to cope with the changing environmental,

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conventional and unconventional threats we face. A leader must be able to effectively communicate and put fwd his thoughts, must be able to understand the nature of conflict and the way it unfolds. The leader must understand strategy and essential tactics in order to detect, avoid, and resolve conflict, and make a sound plan to win. The law enforcement and security leader must know the rules of engagement, and the laws governing these rules, the risk stake involved in these encounters and still respond effectively. Another important component to a leaders knowledge is that Sun Tzu's theories are based on winning without conflict. Master Sun laid lot of emphasis on winning without fighting and said that those who win every battle are not really skillful———a good and intelligent leader has sound and effective plans to render the other armies helpless without fighting. Sun Tzu said that " To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting"[5]. The leaders knowledge of strategy and tactics must take into consideration, de-escalation techniques, climate and positioning based on the environment. Decisions must be made as to which members on the team qualifies, and placed in the position, with the best chance to resolve the matter by first reducing and then resolving the situation without escalation of conflict, if possible. Leaders must also consider contingencies and prepare for a more dynamic response by positioning other members of the organization if escalation is necessary.

(b) SunTzu said that " generals are assistants of the nation. When their assistant is complete, the country is strong. When their assistance is defective, the country is weak"[6]. Ho Yan Xi further amplifies his statement

where he describes the word 'complete' which means the ability, thoroughness and intelligence of the generals. A country is safe and strong if its generals are thoroughly able, intelligent, have sound knowledge of progress of operations. The generals must have in depth knowledge of all the sciences of warfare before they command their own soldiers in battle and be able to assess the battlefield intelligence, battle formations to adjust and suitably modify their plans. A wise commander is able to recognize changing circumstances and act expeditiously to his own advantage.

(c) Trustworthy. To be honest and straight forward is one of the most important traits those being led respond to. If we as a leader fail to be honest, we lose respect of those whom we lead and organizational productivity and overall mission is put in great jeopardy. A leader must develop trust and confidence of his men which develops with feelings of appreciation and mutual bonds between leader and led established in the mind of people in the beginning. Master Sun brought out the importance of rewards and punishments only after the personal attachment to the leadership is formed. "If troops are punished before their loyalty is secured they will be disobedient. If not obedient, it is difficult to employ them. If troops are loyal, but punishments are not enforced, you cannot employ them"[7]. It is amazing what people will accept reward and punishments when they sense it comes from a fair and trustworthy leader.

Trustworthiness in a leader, leads to cohesion and develops mutual trusts and bonding. Mutual trust takes place and shows itself in an organization where the leaders exhibit full faith and trust on their frontline soldiers to accomplish the mission and those frontline soldiers do have full faith and

confidence that they will be supported by their leaders in all facets in completing the mission. Developed “ mutual trust” is paramount to ensuring unity and focus which leads to individual insight, imagination and initiative. It leads to optimal situational awareness and critical decision making, which in turn leads to appropriate action.

(d) Humaneness. A leader must be caring and human in his dealings. He must love mankind, sympathises with others and appreciates their work. A leader must regard his soldiers as his children , & they will follow him into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons ,& they would stand by you even unto death. Leaders often get positions of authority and forget this critical component. We must show we care about our people and their feelings if we are to inspire and create innovative people. By caring a leader should show an uncommon commitment to the organizational goals and the goals of individuals in the organization. We do this by creating the best people, through sharing information , training and educating our people so they can be effective at the time and place required. Caring for members of the organization is also shown through the two previously discussed traits intelligence and trustworthiness. Sometimes despite our best intentions things go wrong in heated dynamic encounters faced by law enforcement and security professionals. All organizations face failure and mistakes but in our military profession that mistake can mean the difference between life and death, human life and death. In these moments a leader must be brave and press on and face adversity which involves risk. Mistakes, failure is often seen in only a bad light, but the true strategist, tactician and leader understands, more is learned from failure and that failure is part of chaotic

dynamic encounters. It takes true strength of character and courage to advance and complete the mission despite adversity during and in the aftermath of an encounter.

(e) Courage. It can be shown physically by facing physical challenges of an armed individual and resolving that threat accordingly. If a general is not courageous he will be unable to conquer doubts or to create great plans. Courage is also internally, known as moral courage where you as a leader stand up for, support, your people in an effort to show the well meaning intent of your organization. It also means admitting mistakes and challenging others to learn from and adapt the lessons learned to future problems. In today's climate where explicit answers are sought even for dynamic encounters that require implicit judgments' in rapidly changing circumstances a leader must be brave and "dare what seem like the impossible" and face the adversity head on.

(f) Strict. To accomplish our goals as an individual or organization, Sun Tzu says we as leaders must be strict. We must be willing to do what needs to be done. This includes a deep look into ourselves as leaders, a self assessment, to ensure that we are indeed the best leader. We must be willing to lead even in unpleasant situations, after all that is when a true leader shows the stuff he/she is made of. You must be there to lead and be seen taking charge in a variety of situations. This has a tremendous effect on the focus of an organization. So get out in front and be in charge, suffer the hardships and assume the risks and share the victories and defeats. You will be amazed at how this affects the morale and overall unity and focus of an organization in meeting its goals.

7. Sun Tzu had discussed in chapter 8 about nine variants which describes five weaknesses of a leader, which are useful means to evaluate and appraise the quality of our leaders. These five weaknesses[8]and their impact on leadership styles are enumerated below:-

(a) A Reckless Leader Might Get Killed. In a war, courage is one power a leader must have. But, courage with no consideration comes with considerable risks of falling into defeat. Courage is not just a determination covered with recklessness. A leader who manages to go to war with neither concept nor strategy is doomed to disastrous recklessness.

(b) A Cowardly Leader Might Get Captured. A leader having a pretty soul laden with worries and fears will always hesitate in making decisions. If he keeps this attitude in any of his action, enemy would easily anticipate his moves. So in any opportunity he would fall into enemy's hands.

(c) A Temperamental Leader Might Easily Be Provoked. Anger will only sink a person to the “grave” of his ego which then easily plunge him into troubles. Emotional or temperamental attitude of a leader will fully expose him to provocation. This will eventually lead him into acting recklessly and fooling himself so a temperamental leader could very likely fall trapped into some “mud-hole” ready to ruin him.

(d) A Megalomaniac Leader Might Easily Fall Victim To Slander. If a leader is too anxious to defend his honour and to glorify his status and position, it might make him an easy target of slander. Such a leader, especially in pursuing higher title, might tend to act recklessly to achieve his ambition. In



such condition he might be accused of selfishly promoting himself while neglecting the true essence of his struggle.

(e) A Submissive Leader Might Be Disappointed. Compassion is a noble character that must be firmly retained. Nevertheless a leader who is too easy to show compassion could just be disappointed. An excessively unconsidered compassion for his people will just cause troubles. Any policy decided only after much judgement is likely to waste so much time as to miss any good chance coming along at the time.

All these five traits mentioned above are serious faults in a general and in military operations are calamitous. The ruin of a army and death of the general are inevitable results of these shortcomings. They must be deeply pondered.

8. Sun Tzu discussed several ways to motivate & lead troops in battle which incl leading by example, sharing the common soldier's lot , improving morale and delegating authority. Sun Tzu believed that if an army is led by its leader from front he will win the support without extorting it and gain affection without inviting it and wins trust without demanding it[9]. The best way to prove one as leader is to show character where he leads by actions and not by words. Strategies, missions and orders are imp and must be followed and supported by actions by the leader in order to send a truer and clearer msg to his soldier. A leader must do his best to ensure that troops are well fed, well armed and hard trained. He should meet with small unit commanders, non commissioned officers and individual soldiers to learn their concerns and needs. A leader must know the units capabilities, take suitable measures to

improve and strengthen the unit's morale. A leader must not reward frequently as it shows end of his resources and not punish frequently as it shows that he is in acute distress.

9. Erwin Rommel, both as a small unit leader and as a field marshal, always lead in this manner. As a pl & coy cdr he would often lead the adv elements and take scouts to penetrate behind en lines. Rommel also believed that a leader " must be first in the toils and fatigues of the army," sharing not only the army's triumphs but also its tabulations which establishes a bond and increases their moral making them stronger in the face of war.

10. Leadership , as practiced by general WU Chi, is all about to know your men , eat with them the same food and wear the same clothes as the troops do, on the march he did not mount his horse and carried his reserve rations. He shared axhaustion and bitter toil with his troops. This was to an extent practiced by Gen Norman[10]Schwartzkof in American Div at Chu Lai in Viet Nam as Bn commander.

11. Leadership is a key to effective decision making and the overall performance of individuals and hence the organization. People in an organization depend upon leaders, so we must commit ourselves to the leadership qualities Sun Tzu describes, and inspire total commitment from others. Do not let lack of leadership be the friction in your organization, there is enough uncertainty, chaos and complexity and new information being processed in dynamic encounters to make decision making difficult enough. The will to win starts with the top. Take charge and be the leader you know and build a thriving organizational culture.