

General CEO

There are many books out these days by former generals and military leaders detailing how their careers in the military prepared them to be great leaders in the business world. Whether or not you agree with the notion that running an army is the same as running a company is irrelevant. What is important is whether or not there are leadership lessons that can be culled from military experience and how those lessons can be applied to the business environment.

Leadership is crucial to any enterprise. Not only must a leader believe in the abilities of his people (or he will be paralyzed and will not lead), so too must the led be convinced of the qualities of the leader. Executed properly, leadership demonstrates vision and elicits confidence and sacrifice.

So what are the qualities of a good leader, as garnered from the experiences and expertise of past military Generals? Here are some hearty tidbits:

- Informality – might seem like a surprise coming from a military guy you'd think was hung up discipline, but it seems that the higher the rank the less the formality of rank is. The reason they promote informality is that they believe it makes everyone feel like part of the team, leading them to try harder and sacrifice more.
- Acknowledgements – making sure the team takes the time to acknowledge and even celebrate their accomplishments. This not only shows appreciation, but also serves to draw the people together and promotes their functioning as a group.
- Ambition – leaders need to demonstrate their drive to succeed through their actions. When those around you see that you're pushing yourself to achieve more, they will push themselves too.
- Passion – leaders must have an intensity that declares that failure is not an option. By behaving this way and demonstrating your refusal to fail, you teach others that failure is not an option for them either.
- Confidence – when you believe in yourself others believe in you as well.

Certainly there are other characteristics of leadership that Generals embrace, but these are the essentials, and certainly enough to try to command without the benefit of many years in the military.

There are, to be sure, different styles among leaders, each with its advantages and disadvantages. Three leadership style categories can be identified. They are:

- Self Promoting – this sort of leader has been in the system too long and has taken away the lesson that politics and looking out for their own back is the way to stay on top. This is not a particularly inclusive for style of management, but it does create loyalty as this sort of leader takes care of those who serve him.
- Inclusive – this style of leadership believes in the strength of the team and the leader is very careful to include people in the processes that lead to decisions and actions.
- Value Oriented – this sort of leader defines his company according to a series of values and principles. He tends to view events through this prism of values,

which at times can lead to the company missing opportunities it, perhaps, should have exploited.

There are also some fundamentals about management and organizational structure that can be gleaned from the thoughts and actions of former military men. For example:

- The higher the rank the more likely the individual is to be willing to listen to dissenting opinions. The security of the rank and the sense of achievement that goes along with it seem to create a sufficient sense of self worth and security to allow the individual to accept dissent and criticism.
- The strength of character and the confidence in their own ability allows former generals to, at times, step aside and let themselves be led. They are not so rigid as to require emphasizing their authority at all times. The result is that people seek to take the initiative and enjoy being in positions of authority and responsibility.
- Make meetings short, even if you have to have them often. The idea is that people get disillusioned if they are spending too much of their time in meetings that seem to last forever while accomplishing little. The trick is to have meetings when needed, on the fly, and as often as necessary. But only when necessary.
- Military men are excellent at delegating responsibilities. Perhaps more than anywhere else, a professional soldier understands that he cannot rely only on himself to get the job done. The very structure of the military is based on command chains and delegated authority, and this is brought with them to the boardroom.

The general as a business executive may or may not be a good thing. Certainly the art of business is different from the art of war (although there are some correlations). The real benefit we can gain, as business people seeking to always improve, is that the general has organizational perspectives that can help us run our own companies. These lessons on management and leadership are worthy of our study.