

The art of war — Sun Tzu

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Ask a dozen people to name the best business book ever and chances are several of them will say, “The Art of War.”

The Art of War was written by a Chinese general named Sun Tzu more than 2,500 years ago, possibly in the 6th Century BC.

The book has long been heralded for its advice on military success. And this advice has since been co-opted by legions of arm-chair soldiers and generals in the business world.

The book is composed of 13 chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of war. It’s a smart book. It’s also poetic, repetitive, and arcane. So we’ve boiled it down for you.

ON MANAGEMENT: Care about your team, but also be a hard-ass

There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general:

- recklessness, which leads to destruction;
- cowardice, which leads to capture;
- a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults;
- a delicacy of honour, which is sensitive to shame;
- over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.

Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.

If, however, you are indulgent, but unable to make your authority felt; kind-hearted, but unable to enforce your commands; and incapable, moreover, of quelling disorder: then your soldiers must be likened to spoilt children; they are useless for any practical purpose.

When the general is weak and without authority; when his orders are not clear and distinct; when there are no fixed duties as-

signed to officers and men, and the ranks are formed in a slovenly haphazard manner, the result is utter disorganization.

ON MANAGEMENT: Hire great people, because weak, frustrated subordinates will cripple you

When the common soldiers are too strong and their officers too weak, the result is insubordination. When the officers are too strong and the common soldiers too weak, the result is collapse.

When the higher officers are angry and insubordinate, and on meeting the enemy give battle on their own account from a feeling of resentment, before the commander-in-chief can tell whether or not he is in a position to fight, the result is ruin.

ON STRATEGY: Know thine enemy

If we know that our own men are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the enemy is not open to attack, we have gone only halfway towards victory.

In your deliberations, when seeking to determine the military conditions, let them be made the basis of a comparison, in this wise:

- which of the two generals has the most ability?
- on which side is Discipline most rigorously enforced?
- which army is stronger?
- on which side are the officers and men more highly trained?
- in which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment?

Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical.

ON TACTICS: All warfare is based on deception

Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him.

ON TACTICS: Be decisive and quick

Though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been seen associated with long delays.

There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.

The quality of decision is like the well-timed swoop of a falcon which enables it to strike and destroy its victim.

Therefore the good fighter will be terrible in his onset, and prompt in his decision.

Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted...

Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots.

ON TACTICS: Exploit your enemy's weaknesses, avoid his strengths

If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant.

Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

If we wish to fight, the enemy can be forced to an engagement even though he be sheltered behind a high rampart and a deep ditch. All we need do is attack some other place that he will be obliged to relieve.

So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak.

ON TACTICS: Don't just do something for the sake of doing something — make sure it helps you

If it is to your advantage, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are.

ON TACTICS: Plan ahead — don't make it up as you go

Ponder and deliberate before you make a move.

Carefully study the well-being of your men, and do not overtax them. Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength. Keep your army continually on the move, and devise unfathomable plans.

The skillful tactician may be likened to the shuai-jan. Now the shuai-jan is a snake that is found in the Ch'ang mountains. Strike at its head, and you will be attacked by its tail; strike at its tail, and you will be attacked by its head; strike at its middle, and you will be attacked by head and tail both.

We cannot enter into alliance with neighbouring princes until we are acquainted with their designs. We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country - its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps. We shall be unable to turn natural advantages to account unless we make use of local guides.

Hence the saying: The enlightened ruler lays his plans well ahead; the good general cultivates his resources.

WARNING: Don't attack someone just because they pissed you off

No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique.

INFORMATION IS KING: Don't go into battle without knowing what you're up against

What enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge.

Now this foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by any deductive calculation.

Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men. [i.e., spies.]

Spies cannot be usefully employed without a certain intuitive sagacity.

They [spies] cannot be properly managed without benevolence and straightforwardness.

Without subtle ingenuity of mind, one cannot make certain of the truth of their reports.

Be subtle! be subtle! and use your spies for every kind of business.

When a general, unable to estimate the enemy's strength, allows an inferior force to engage a larger one, or hurls a weak detachment against a powerful one, and neglects to place picked soldiers in the front rank, the result must be rout.

He who knows things, and in fighting puts his knowledge into practice, will win his battles. He who knows them not, nor practices them, will surely be defeated.

Carefully compare the opposing army with your own, so that you may know where strength is superabundant and where it is deficient.

HOW TO LOSE: Tell your people to do something they can't; promote idiots; or work your team to death

There are three ways in which a ruler can bring misfortune on his army:

- By commanding the army to advance or to retreat, being ignorant of the fact that it cannot obey. This is called hobbling the army.
- By attempting to govern an army in the same way as he administers a kingdom, being ignorant of the conditions which obtain in an army. This causes restlessness in the soldier's minds.
- By employing the officers of his army without discrimination, through ignorance of the military principle of adaptation to circumstances. This shakes the confidence of the soldiers.

The clever combatant looks to the effect of combined energy, and does not require too much from individuals. Hence his ability to pick out the right men and utilize combined energy

When he utilizes combined energy, his fighting men become as it were like unto rolling logs or stones. For it is the nature of a log or stone to remain motionless on level ground, and to move when on a slope; if four-cornered, to come to a standstill, but if round-shaped to go rolling down.

MISCELLANEOUS: Drag your ass out of bed early — and other tips

Now a soldier's spirit is keenest in the morning; by noonday it has begun to flag; and in the evening, his mind is only on returning to camp.

When the soldiers stand leaning on their spears, they are faint from want of food.

If those who are sent to draw water begin by drinking themselves, the army is suffering from thirst.

If there is disturbance in the camp, the general's authority is weak. If the banners and flags are shifted about, sedition is afoot. If the officers are angry, it means that the men are weary.

Thus the skilful general conducts his army just as though he were leading a single man, willy-nilly, by the hand.

It is the business of a general to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just, and thus maintain order.

He must be able to mystify his officers and men by false reports and appearances, and thus keep them in total ignorance.

Bestow rewards without regard to rule, issue orders without regard to previous arrangements; and you will be able to handle a whole army as though you had to do with but a single man.

ON WINNING

Thus we may know that there are five essentials for victory:

- He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.
- He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces.

- He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.
- He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared.
- He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign.

In the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it, to capture a regiment, a detachment or a company entire than to destroy them.

Therefore the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field.

The good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat, but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy.

Hence the saying: One may know how to conquer without being able to do it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

Read more: <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-art-of-war-sun-tzu-2011-5?op=1#ixzz3CGdARBzu>