



On Leadership

Given the number of books I have bought on leadership and project management and the number of leadership and public speaking courses I have been on, one would think I should be president by now! However, very few of these have resonated with me.

It has only been in the last few years that I have discovered one leadership approach which *has* resonated: military-style approach to leadership and project management.

It was recommended to me by a brilliant financial controller to purchase the Art of War by Sun Tzu, an ancient book on the strategy of war. Searching for applications to business strategy and modern corporate life, I found the 'Art of War for Managers'. Fundamental lessons from this book include:

- 1) Avoid acting or reacting without full knowledge of the situation
- 2) Plan a united team effort by creating a common vision, and build belief
- 3) Take full advantage of opportunities by acting when others are unprepared to do so
- 4) Decentralise by empowering the team with authority

Further, two retired US Navy Seals, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin's' approach of Extreme Ownership (EO) also resonates strongly. EO means *"that you're not going to blame anyone else or anything else when something goes wrong. You're going to take ownership of that problem, and you're going to get it solved."*

These are the primary lessons from those books, with a few crossovers with Sun Tzu's approach:

- 1) **Lead up the chain** as well as across and down. To lead down and across the chain is standard; however, leading up the chain can be counter-intuitive to some
- 2) If you want influence over someone, **allow yourself to be influenced** by them. If you want respect, be respectful of others. If you want to be listened to, listen to them first
- 3) **Subordinate your ego**. Your ego does a lot of the talking, the reacting, and the emotions and is often wrong and counterproductive. Your number one priority should be to complete the mission, and therefore you must do what is best for the mission and the team, not for your ego
- 4) **Cover and move**, and **keep it simple**: build the team, protect the team, progress is the only option. Keep the mission and its purpose simple; use clear and concise instructions
- 5) **Prioritise and execute**: Focus on competing one thing at a time; do not get distracted
- 6) **Decentralise command**: give authority to your team to make decisions

Three final points

- 1) Be ruthlessly positive and always appear in control
- 2) Relationships mean everything. Your top priority should be to get the mission completed, and to do that, good relationships need to be built and strengthened.
- 3) Do **not** trust your gut. Your instincts are based on the wrong environment and incomplete information. The environment you expose your brain to, whether that be social media, the corporate office or your favourite coffee shop, is what your brain understands to be the entire world, and thus makes quick decisions based only upon that world. Inevitably, your gut instincts will likely be incorrect.