



PATTON

ON LEADERSHIP

STRATEGIC LESSONS FOR CORPORATE WARFARE

ALAN AXELROD

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Patton on Leadership

GEORGE S. PATTON. Nearly sixty years after his death, his name still evokes strong reactions...negative and positive. Most of us “know” General Patton from the great George C. Scott movie “Patton”; and in reading Alan Axelrod’s “Patton on Leadership: Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare” we learn that George C. Scott’s portrayal of Patton was largely an accurate one. From “Patton on Leadership”, beyond confirmation that Patton was a great motivational speaker and writer (the words in George C. Scott’s memorable and moving opening speech were Patton’s words), we learn that he led an organization, the Third Army, larger than all but a handful of modern corporations (437,860 men during its final campaign) to an unparalleled level of success (the Third Army liberated 81,522 square miles in France, 29,940 square miles in Germany, 3,485 in Czechoslovakia, 2,103 in Austria, 1,010 in Luxembourg, and 156 in Belgium including “1,200 cities, towns, and villages”). But more importantly, we learn how Patton trained, led, organized and evaluated his men, how he motivated them, and how he prepared for combat. No doubt disagreements about Patton will always persist. Some will argue that he was arrogant, others will argue that his view was simply that a general must always appear the general, and that his supreme confidence, grounded in forethought and planning, created the appearance of arrogance. That Patton possessed a great insight into the psychology of leadership and motivation, that he was a great organizer and a great delegator, that he was willing to lead from the front by example, and that he never shrank from responsibility for error while actively spreading the glory of success are all made undisputably evident in Axelrod’s work.

Moreover, Axelrod does an excellent job of drawing lessons for all leaders and managers from the practices of General Patton.

- *“The greatest general is he who makes the fewest mistakes – i.e. he who neither neglects an opportunity nor offers one.”* - NAPOLEON, PARAPHRASED BY PATTON IN HIS READING NOTES
- *“Use steamroller strategy; that is, make up your mind on course and direction of action, and stick to it. But in tactics, do not steamroller. Attack weakness.”* - PATTON, LETTER FROM NORTH AFRICA, NOVEMBER 2, 1942
- *“No one is thinking if everyone is thinking alike.”* - PATTON
- *“We never prepared any battle plan without at least one alternate plan.”*
- LT. PORTER B. WILLIAMSON, RECALLING PATTON’S LEADERSHIP STYLE
- *“The ‘fog of war’ works both ways. The enemy is as much in the dark as you are. BE BOLD!!!!”*
- INSCRIBED IN PATTON’S FIELD NOTEBOOK
- *“When a decision has to be made, make it. There is no totally right time for anything.”* - PATTON
- *“Success in war depends upon the golden rule of war. Speed – Simplicity – Boldness”*
- INSCRIBED IN PATTON’S FIELD NOTEBOOK
- *“There is a great deal of talk about loyalty from the bottom to the top. Loyalty from the top down is even more necessary and much less prevalent.”* - PATTON
- *“We can always learn from each other.”* - PATTON TO A JUNIOR OFFICER

Each of the foregoing quotes, and 174 others, preface an important message about leadership or management. Disagreements about Patton may persist, but there is no doubt about the efficacy of his approach, the loyalty he had to his troops, or the allegiance they had to him. In my view, there is much to be learned from “Patton on Leadership” and from the study of Patton in general.

W. Roberts

June 2005

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