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Leadership - Lessons from the Battlefield (Gettysburg)

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”Leadership”

Lessons from the Battlefield

Gettysburg

1. Time is opportunity – Kairos – Buford on Day 1. Stopping the Confederates for 30 minutes until the Union Army arrived. Oates on Day 2. Failure to take the high ground 15 minutes before the Union takes the high ground (Little Roundtop). If he had taken the high ground, the Confederates would have won the battle.
2. To attack and win one must learn how to cross the killing field.

Pickett’s charge. The walking time of troops versus the fire power of the Union Army and the fence at the toll road made the difference. The fence became the unexpected barrier. Over 5,000 killed in less than 20 minutes; over 50,000 lost during the battle of Gettysburg; 600,000 lost in the Civil War. The pace of the charge remained the same because the limitation was the human element. Technology improved and increased the fire power. The result was a wider killing field. This issue was not solved until the Second (World) War with increased artillery and armor; i.e., tank warfare.

Why did the soldiers keep charging? What motivated the soldiers to fight when people were being killed on either side of them? As they charged, they had to touch each other, because of the touching they felt the human strength of another.

3. Battles are won or lost in the execution of the plan.

Is the leader committed? Longstreet on Day 3 wanted to do his own plan. He wanted to flank the Union Army, but Lee wanted him to hit the middle and divide the army. Longstreet followed orders but he was not committed. He waited 5 long hours on the third day to execute. As a result, the artillery was not effective in the heat of the day. The shells didn’t have the distance, the smoke didn’t clear, and Pickett’s charge was a disaster.

On Day 2, Sickles, the Union general who was a politician from New York and wanted to make a big name for himself, disobeyed Meade's orders, charged when he should have held, broke the Union line of defense. Meade had to backfill and almost lost the battle because in the process of backfilling, he weakened the line. The Confederate Army came within minutes of winning the entire battle on the second day because Sickles was promoting himself, not his colleagues.

4. The objective determines the strategy and often determines the results.

Lee's objective was to win the war; Meade's was to win the battle. Lee didn't have an option. The South was beginning to run out of money and supplies. Meade had the strength of the economy of the North and plenty of supplies. Lee had to make a pre-emptive win to win the war. After Gettysburg, the war was lost for the South.

5. War is a test of will.

The "cause" becomes the significant determining factor. It is the reason why leaders lead and lead others into the battle – the killing field.

6. The plan is never executed as designed.

It's like crossing the river from one bank to another.

Do you see the other side?

Are you ready to get in the boat and be committed?

Have you determined what you will take and what you will leave behind?

Have you measured the strength of the current?