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The IdeaBridge White Paper Series:
Leadership Methods of Ancient Warriors
An adaptation from "Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun"



LEADERSHIP METHODS OF ANCIENT WARRIORS

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Summary

"Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun" was written by Wess Roberts, Ph. D. and was published by Warner books. This adaptation has real and direct application to our modern day business environment. The points that follow are directly from the book or have been adapted to a business framework and context.

- Huns were a nomadic, multiracial and multilingual conglomeration of tribes. To the civilized world, Huns were barbarians not far removed from wild animals in both appearance and life-style.
- As a child-conscript in the royal Roman court, Attila conceived his strategy to rule the world. His plan was methodical and extraordinarily precise. Attila despised his captors.
- Once he became king over the royal Hun tribe, Attila began his unification of the other fiercely-independent tribes into a Hunnish nation.
- He is said to have spent days in front of his tent in conference with tribal chieftains to confirm their loyalties to his unification plan; he summarily executed rebellious chieftains.
- His rule as King of Huns was marked by swift yet considerate justice. He did not act in haste. He gave the Huns a national goal: to bring under their control the Germanic and Slavic nations, to conquer Rome and Constantinople, to march against all of Asia, then on to Africa.
- His method was tempered by patience and unrelenting tenacity. Yet it became single in purpose, well disciplined and filled with esprit de corps.
- Attila became an extraordinary student of the internal and foreign policies of the empire. He grew in his awareness of their armies, weapons, order of battle and their lack of a strong navy.
- There is no quick way to develop leaders. They must learn throughout their lives – never ceasing as students, never being above gaining new insights or studying innovative procedures or methods.
- Those who actively participate in or encourage actions that are counter to the good of the company are disloyal and must be expeditiously removed.
- The role of a leader has inherent periods of loneliness, humiliation, despair, ridicule and rejection.
- Each successively higher level of leadership places increasing demands on the emotions of leaders. Leaders at every level have the stamina to recover rapidly from disappointment – to bounce back from discouragement – without losing clear perspective, the emotional strength to persist in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances.
- Vacillation and procrastination confuse and discourage subordinates, peers and superiors.
- Leadership skills are enhanced by applying the lessons learned through failure.
- An essential quality of leadership is an intrinsic desire to win.



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- A sense of competitive anger drives those who win on the battlefield, in negotiations and in situations of internal strife. A leader without a sense of competitiveness is weak and easily overcome by the slightest challenge.
- Learning to account for personal actions and those of subordinates is fundamental to leadership.
- The quality of unyielding drive to accomplish assignments is a desirable and essential quality of leadership. The weak persist only when things go their way. The strong persist and pursue through discouragement, deception and even personal abandonment of formerly loyal supporters.
- Committed leaders, those with a lust for leadership, a willingness to serve, will, however, be distinguishable by their wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, authority and courage. They will have a human quality and a strong commitment to their cause and to that of those they serve.
- You must have resilience to overcome personal misfortunes, discouragement, rejection and disappointment. Leaders must have the stamina to focus on accomplishing their responsibilities through the directed, delegated efforts of subordinates. Leaders realize that they can no longer do all the work.
- Be committed to persevere even in the face of opposition and challenge.
- You must be willing to make unrecognized and thankless personal sacrifice for those you serve and those you lead. This means spending extraordinary energies and patience to develop subordinates and tending to the needs of these subordinates at times when your own needs will often go unfulfilled.
- Leaders must be willing to accept the simple fact that they have flaws and will need to work every day to become a better leader than they were yesterday.
- Every leader must be willing to conform to those things that distinguish us as a strong, unified company. We must be single in purpose, i.e. the corporate “culture”, yet individuality that does not distract from the company must be preserved.
- Leaders must hold strong to personal honor. This is a cardinal virtue. One’s word must prevail over all other considerations.
- We must hold fast to our custom of high ideals and optimism – never being discouraged by those who would seek to gain personal advantage over us.
- Morale and discipline are central to unity. Discipline is not suppression. It is the teaching of correct ways expected of leaders. Discipline builds morale. Without discipline, leaders cannot behave with common action.
- Lack of morale and discipline is the most contagious and destructive disease that can ever enter our company.
- Morale and discipline is largely what leaders make of it.
- A leader’s value rests solely upon his demonstrated desire to support, under all circumstances, those goals we seek as a unified company.



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- Let it be known that we will no longer tolerate cunning of any nature among our leaders that undermines the unification of our company at any level or on any issue.
- Beware of the treacherous leader who pledges loyalty in public then spreads discontent in private. Make every effort to identify and remove these ignoble characters.
- Reward leaders of character and integrity – they are rare.
- Attila ordered them to wear garb of rough fur and leather, to eat only raw meat and to inflict the most horrible tortures on their prisoners. All of this “planned fury” was for the sake of perpetuating a legend.
- If a leader does not command the respect of his subordinates and that of his foes, he is weak and held to be undeserving of his title.
- Attila always rode first into battle, at the front of the horde. He was, after all, their leader.
- Do not expect everyone to agree with you – even if you are king.
- Do not consider all opponents to be enemies. You may have productive, friendly confrontations with others inside and outside your tribe.
- Do not delegate an assignment and then attempt to manage it yourself – you will make an enemy of the overruled subordinate.
- Leaders can and must influence and control the spirit of our company.
- By their own actions, not their words, do leaders establish the morale, integrity and sense of justice of their employees. They cannot say one thing and do another.
- Leaders must attach value to high standards of performance and have no tolerance for the uncommitted.
- Leaders must provide direction to their business, never letting them wander aimlessly.
- Leaders must inspect their business units frequently in order to see that what is accomplished meets with what is expected.
- Leaders make great personal sacrifice for the good of their business unit.
- Leaders must encourage healthy competition among their people, but must contain it when such becomes a detriment to company goals.
- Success is the result of hard work that overcomes all forms of disappointment and moments of discouragement. Success is not achieved through complex strategies. It is achieved only through conscientiously carrying out the duties of your office and exercising the responsibilities of leadership – nothing else will prevail.



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- Wise is the leader who never makes a decision when he doesn't understand the issue.
- A leader should allow his employees the privilege of making decisions appropriate to their level of responsibility. Weak is the leader who reserves every decision for himself out of fear that he might lose control.
- When you must be overly persuasive in gaining support for your decision, it's usually a sign of a bad one.
- Leaders are to be cautioned against rushing to conclusions when there is time and opportunity to gather information that will help the basic decision.
- Leaders should delegate only those decisions they want their employees to make. Conversely, leaders who inappropriately make decisions for their employees diminish the potential that exists for the young leaders to learn and grow by.
- Doubt and delay are frequently symptomatic of leaders promoted beyond their capacities.
- Attila: Even I cannot accomplish for you what you are not willing to accomplish for yourselves. You must be willing to accept the responsibilities that I choose to delegate to you. At the same time, your charters are too great for you to accomplish alone. You must trust to your subordinate leaders those responsibilities that fit their office.
- Attila: I must entrust you with certain important duties as leaders. I cannot supply counsel that applies to each act of delegation. Nonetheless, I can provide counsel useful to you in the act and art of delegation.
- Leaders must accept full responsibility for all assignments – even those they have delegated to their subordinates.
- Once a leader has delegated responsibility, he should never interfere, lest his subordinates come to believe that the duties are not truly theirs.
- A competent leader will delegate important assignments to even inexperienced subordinates in order that he might accomplish his mission, develop his subordinates' skills and demonstrate loyalty for and trust in his subordinates.
- Subordinates will never develop their skills if their leader precisely directs them how to accomplish their delegated assignments.
- Never reward a subordinate for doing less than is expected of him. Heaps of booty, promotion through the ranks and recognition as being a mighty warrior are reserved solely for those who go beyond the normal call of duty.
- Never arbitrate. Arbitration allows a third party to determine your destiny. It is a resort of the weak.
- Honor all commitments you make during negotiations lest your enemy fail to trust your word in the future.



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- Sometimes you will lose; regardless of how prepared you are to win.
- Reserve a portion of your emotional stamina for those times when to overcome obstacles requires even your last resources.
- Attila would have said, "We cannot expect to change our long-held traditions, to reorganize our company and to create great business units without internal opposition. Among you leaders and subordinates will be those whose spirits cling to our past ways. We will show patience with you unenlightened ones. Yet, if you choose not to follow our new course and cause dissension, you will be stricken from our ranks."
- A king with chieftains who always agree with him reaps the counsel of mediocrity.
- The wise chieftain kills the Hun who fails to deliver bad news.
- You must have an insatiable hunger for victory, absolute belief in your cause and an invincible courage that enables you to resist those who would otherwise discourage you.
- Chieftains who drink with their Huns become one with them and are no longer their chieftain.
- As a leader achieves greater success, the jealousy others feel for him intensifies.
- Successful Huns learn to deal with adversity and to overcome mistakes.
- Fundamental errors are inescapable when the unqualified are allowed to exercise judgment and make decisions.
- The ability to make difficult decisions separates leaders from subordinates.
- A wise leader always gives tough assignments to those who can rise to the occasion.
- Subordinates learn less from success than they do from failure.
- Leaders are often betrayed by those they trust most.
- Critical to a Hun's success is a clear understanding of what the king wants.
- A Hun without a purpose will never know when he has achieved it.
- Kings should always appoint their best Huns as chieftains, no matter how much they are needed in their current position.
- A wise leader never depends on luck. Rather, he always trusts his future to hard work, stamina, tenacity and a positive attitude.
- A leader can never be in charge if he rides in the rear.