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## Patton on Leadership:

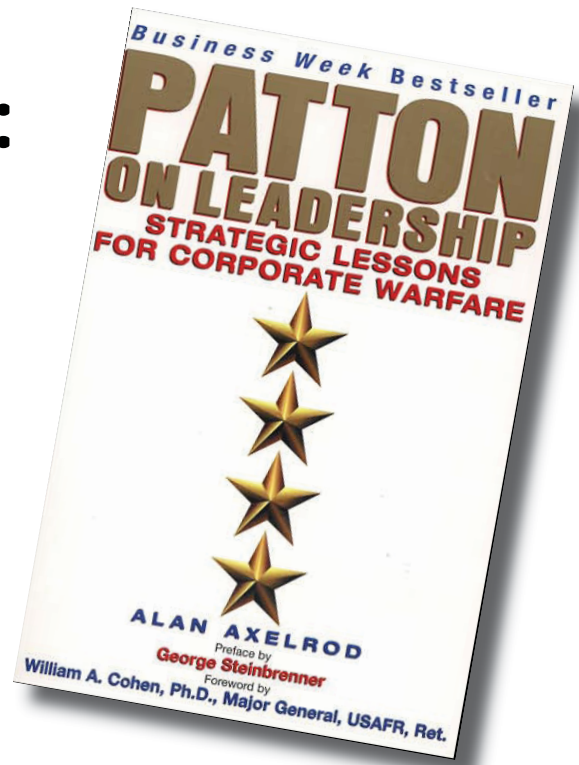
Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare

By Donald H. Kidd

**E**ver wonder what happened to "Total Quality Management" or "The Learning Organization?" Management fads with their attendant "buzz words" are constantly being proposed by academics, consultants, and management gurus to assist the common man in better managing organizations. Just as quickly as these fads rise in popularity, they are often replaced with new theories and ideas better suited to the ever-changing environment of the workplace, and so the cycle continues.

One aspect of management theory that remains constant, however, is the study of character traits in proven leaders. Since Machiavelli's *The Prince* was published in 1513, people have had an innate desire to study the proven leaders of generations past in an effort to discover leadership traits that are applicable to any generation. One leader who is often examined is General George S. Patton.

Many readers will recall George C. Scott's portrayal of Patton in the movie by the same name. Patton's problems with his superiors, the press, his own ego, and his desire to obtain more glory than his rival General Montgomery of the British Eighth Army are well documented in the movie. After word leaked out that Patton had slapped two American soldiers in Sicily whom he suspected of malingering, the press had gone for his jugular. An impolite remark before a ladies club in



England had set the press to howling again. Why did General Eisenhower stick by Patton? Simply put, he was confident of Patton's ability on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

The speed and precision with which Patton's armies advanced in World War II in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany remain legendary. In nine months between 1944 and 1945, Patton's Third Army marched through Europe and liberated or captured more than 100,000 square miles of occupied territory and 12,000 cities and towns.<sup>2</sup> The German Ardennes Offense where Patton's Third Army disengaged from the front line to race to relieve the surrounded and besieged 101st Airborne Division trapped in Bastogne was a brilliant tactical and logistical achievement.

It is doubtful that any person would be able to emulate Patton's personality and few would try. Whatever his personal shortcomings (and he had many), Patton was a leader who got the job done with the least cost in lives and materials. Alex Axelrod's book, *Patton On Leadership: Strategic Lessons For Corporate Warfare* is an excellent management text, but one which is much more useful to law enforcement managers than those in the corporate world. This article is based upon Patton's statements and as well as the management context commentary that is derived from Axelrod's book.

### Rules of Command

Patton believed that the first rule of command is to act as if you are in charge—**because you are**. Don't, however, confuse leadership with a popularity contest. A leader leads from the front and sets an example for others to follow. Focus on the mission and getting your people to focus on the mission. Leadership is a delicate balance between pushing and guiding. You lead, guide, and make decisions. Do more than is expected of you because advancement comes with habitually doing more than is expected of you.

Patton was an actor, no doubt about it. He believed that a big part of a general's job was to act the part of the general. This is true of any leader. It is also true that theatrics are hollow in the absence of results. Don't mistake the show of leadership, no matter how necessary, for leadership itself.

Patton believed it behooved any leader to know the history of his or her discipline and to read the experts in the field, particularly experts whose knowledge was based on actual experience. The object of this type of education is to develop a strategy and tactics that will create solutions faster and more efficiently than having to reinvent the wheel with each new problem that is encountered.

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Strategy is an overall plan that includes a set of goals. Tactics are the means by which you intend to carry out the strategy. Patton advised steadfastness in setting overall strategy, but flexibility in creating tactics. He also believed that a large part of leadership was a stubborn determination. In 1945, Patton ordered that the Third Army would continue its advance across France no matter what. When the tanks started to run out of fuel, one tank would drain the gas from the rest in its platoon, and when that tank ran out, the crew was to get out and walk.

### Executing Your Plan

While Patton planned carefully, he felt once the plan was formulated it should be swiftly executed. In *Drive to Victory*, Robert S. Allen stated that Patton never launched a campaign without first thoroughly exploring it with his senior commanders. He never jammed an opinion down their throats. It was his practice to assemble the corps commanders in the War Room, have the planning group outline a proposed operation and then invite the former to "work it over." He encouraged free and frank discussion. Likewise, Patton never prepared a battle plan without at least one alternate plan.

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<sup>1</sup> McDonald, Charles B., *A Time For Trumpets: The Untold Story Of The Battle Of The Bulge*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Mink, Michael, "Speed-Simplicity-Boldness," *Investors Business Daily*, May 5, 2006, A3.

<sup>3</sup> Axelrod, Alan, *Patton On Leadership: Strategic Lessons For Corporate Warfare*, Prentice Hall Press, Paramus, New Jersey, 1999, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Axelrod, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Axelrod, p. 182.

Patton believed that if you wait for the perfect plan or for ideal circumstances, opportunity will be lost. A good plan executed now is better than a future perfect plan. When planning, Patton assumed nothing. When a colonel was trying to explain to Patton that he could not predict the weather and was assuming average weather conditions and planning accordingly, Patton stated that we never assume anything is average. If we do any assuming, we will assume the worst weather.

Patton stated that it was a mistake to make a decision too early and a mistake to make a decision too late, but the biggest mistake was to never make a decision at all. When a decision has to be made, make it. There is no totally right time for anything. While Patton was highly decisive, he strove to base decisions on accurate information, and he always took great pains to obtain it. He was careful to determine what he needed to know and determined to obtain the necessary facts so his plans and decisions were based on a firm foundation. "How do we know that?"<sup>3</sup> was a frequent question asked by Patton. He wanted firsthand information, being careful to define just what facts were needed.

### **Pride in a Job Well Done**

Patton wrote that all human beings have an innate resistance to obedience. Discipline removes this resistance, and, by constant repetition, makes obedience habitual and subconscious. Self-respect grows directly from discipline. Compliance, cooperation, and coordination are always important, as is a commitment to doing the job well. These qualities come with discipline and pride.

Patton understood that the soldier is the army. Patton trained, disciplined, and prepared his soldiers for battle. While Patton's reputation is primarily as a commander on the battlefield, his training of his troops was the foundation of his accomplishment. Anyone who has seen the movie *Patton* remembers the general taking command of the losing American Army in North Africa. Among other measures, he ordered these combat soldiers to wear full and proper uniforms, including neckties. How did these soldiers feel about this? They started to take great pride in their spit-and-polish appearance. They were Patton's men. In the army of World War II, to "give a George Patton" meant to give a particularly snappy hand salute. Soon, it was naturally assumed that they were better soldiers.

### **Cultivating Your Staff**

When it came to staffing, Patton felt that you had to observe candidates for promotion in action. Evaluate achievement and focus on those who are able to marshal people and resources to get the job done. Patton stated that you never pick a person because he slobbers all over you with kind words.

While Patton believed in knowing what was going on in his command, he also believed in exploiting, encouraging, and rewarding individual initiative. He preferred a loyal staff to a brilliant one, but felt it had to work both ways. He stated, "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 devoted great energy to choosing a staff who knew their jobs so well that they needed little to no supervision.

### **Communication is Key**

A leader communicates facts, defines the mission, and explains why it is important. Patton stated that when issuing instructions, your sentences should be declaratory, not exclamatory and not questioning. He demanded a quick line of communication in both oral and written communications. He felt that orders should never exceed a page and a half of typewritten text and worked to find the fewest and best words to express what he wanted. General Patton always answered his own phone feeling that if you cultivate an air of remoteness and unavailability, people will stop talking to you and you will be cut off from information.

Every person wants to take direction from individuals they consider infallible, confident, decisive, and even energetic. Never use the words, "I believe," "I think," or "I guess," and never say, "I don't know." Every person who hears you speak must know what you want. You can be wrong, but never in doubt.

### **Give Praise When Warranted**

Few people believe in the power of inspiration anymore. Patton wrote that we should never neglect technology, but never forget that victory depends on maintenance of the spirit as much as it does on the maintenance of machines. General Patton had a base radio station that he used to commend special efforts by the troops. He would announce, "Found a damn good soldier today!"<sup>4</sup>

He would continue, giving the name of the man and the organization.

General Williams S. Paul stated that the greatest moment of his life had been at the Battle of the Bulge when Patton put his arm around him and said, "How is my little fighting son of a bitch today."<sup>5</sup> Major Isaac D. White stated that Patton inspired everybody with the idea that when you had gone just as far as you can go, you can still go a little bit further. You might not have loved him, but you respected him and admired him, and wanted to put out for him.

### **Conclusion**

In his book, Alex Axelrod gives us twenty-four of Patton's dimensions of leadership, from the qualities of great leadership to the most important tasks of every leader. He explains fifteen approaches to developing a winning attitude, forty one insights into analysis, prepa-

ration and planning, sixteen discussions on execution, forty-nine recommendations on training, mentoring, motivating and inspiring, and sixteen suggestions on communication and coordination. While it is a trait study of Patton, it is an excellent book on leadership with a great deal of relevance to law enforcement.

A single copy of this book is available for review through the Library of the Criminal Justice Institute. In addition, a used copy can be ordered over the Internet from Amazon and other suppliers for less than \$ 10.00.

**For more information about *Patton on Leadership: Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare* and other management titles currently available in the CJI Library, contact Allison Hoffman at [amhoffman@cji.edu](mailto:amhoffman@cji.edu) or (501) 570-8061.**



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