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Cannons of Management

Executives Flock to Battlefields for Training

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Forget team building and getting-in-touch-with-your-inner-manager sessions: Those were the executive training trends of the past, experts say. Today, real managers do war.

Civil War sites are especially popular these days, with managers paying as much as \$1,000 per person to tour these hallowed grounds with an executive trainer who instructs them on the management styles of successful—and not-so-successful—army generals.

Experts say these trips teach executives important lessons of leadership that are just as relevant today as they were in the 1860s. For example, how can leaders flourish even when they have limited resources? How can

they develop a vision for their company and then “sell” it to employees?

By using history as a metaphor, leaders of these trips say they are able to reach executives in new and memorable ways. They say stories of the battlefield, and particularly the emotional encounters during the Civil War, stay with managers long after they return to the daily office grind.

“It gets into your psyche the way that nothing else does,” said Michael Useem, a professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, who takes executives to Gettysburg every spring. “It has a lasting impact.”

A slew of other history buffs and management mavens have joined Wharton in offering these battlefield

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BY SARAH L. VOISIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Guide Gary Kross at the Gettysburg battlefield teaches a group of corporate managers how they can apply the lessons of July 1863 to the business leadership issues of the 1990s.

Firms Use Battlefield Seminars to Build Leaders

BATTLEFIELDS. From A1

jaunts. Johns Hopkins University and Loyola College in Baltimore also offer Gettysburg seminars. Tigrett Corp., an Arlington consulting firm, has run Gettysburg tours since 1989 for the likes of MCI Communications Corp., and now holds six sessions annually.

Former military officials are also getting in on the Gettysburg action. Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, former Army chief of staff, has charged clients such as Motorola Inc. and Levi Strauss & Co. about \$12,000 a day for a group of 10 to 20. (He leads the tours along with two other former Army officials.)

Business leaders have long been attracted by military analogies. But some people argue it is useless to study the wartime decision-making because soldiers' unquestioning obedience to their superiors is seldom found in the corporate world.

Experts attribute the popularity of the military model today to a new emphasis on leadership. "Leadership teaching and change is on the radar screen in a way that it wasn't 10 years ago," said Uscem, who began offering the Gettysburg sessions four years ago.

Although some trainers go to Montana to study the contrasting styles of Sitting Bull and Custer in the Battle of Little Bighorn or to Normandy to study the site of the D-Day invasion, Gettysburg is one of the most popular destinations for executive trainers. It was at the tiny Pennsylvania town in July 1863 that approximately 172,000 soldiers fought a bloody three-day battle. Many historians say the battle, which resulted in losses of about 28,000 (soldiers killed, wounded and captured) for the South and about 23,000 for the North, was the turning point of the war.

So, what can a manager learn at Gettysburg? For starters, the importance of communication: Many historians acknowledge that insufficient communication between Gen. Robert E. Lee and his men played an important role in the South's defeat.

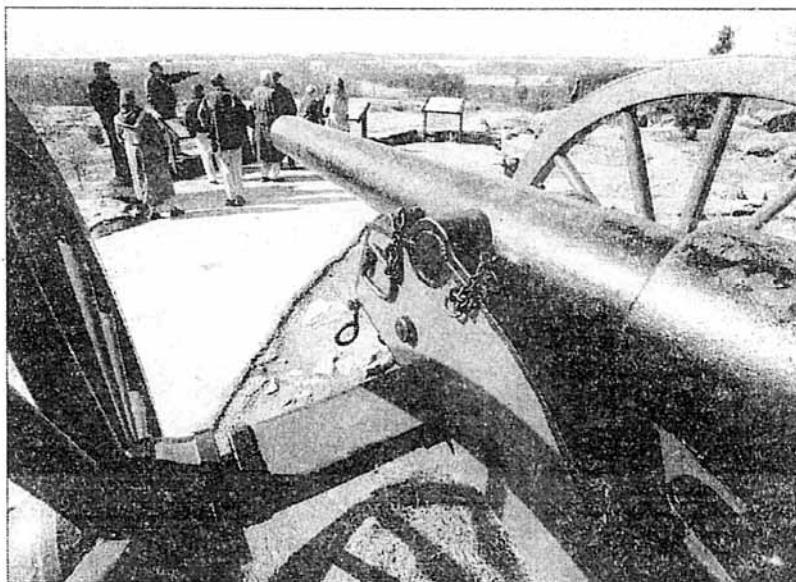
Experts also point to Union Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's defense of Little Round Top as a model for how to motivate disgruntled workers who have suffered through corporate cutbacks.

"With all the downsizing today, we're all walking around with a glum, dragging-our-chins work force who spend all their time in the coffee room gossiping," said Antigoni Ladd, who together with her husband runs Tigrett, the Arlington consulting firm. "What Chamberlain teaches us is that as a manager, you must treat those left behind with respect."

On a recent trip to the Pennsylvania battlefield, Ladd and half a dozen managers ventured up to Little Round Top, a strategic hill that Chamberlain and his men defended on July 2, 1863, the second day of the battle. The executives, who paid \$500 for the two-day seminar, stood at the spot where Chamberlain's men began their famed bayonet charge against the Rebels.

Gary Kross, their licensed battlefield guide, explained that the Union soldiers had no choice but to turn to their bayonets. They had run out of ammunition.

His lesson to executives:



Executives pay as much as \$1,000 per person to tour battlefields such as Gettysburg for lessons in leadership.

Trends in Management Training

Management through self-awareness: This technique, first popular in the 1970s, was characterized by "encounter groups," in which managers of all levels got together to discuss their emotions in a painfully honest way. It has since evolved into a less raw practice: for example, a training coach might look at how a manager's personality determines his or her leadership abilities.

Management through teams: Most popular in the 1980s but still used today. Managers become "team leaders," as everyone works together to solve a problem. One example is Outward Bound, the wilderness trips where co-workers must depend on each other for survival.

Management through metaphor: Whether by studying the Civil War or sports figures, experts say this technique can make a lasting impression on a manager. If a story is compelling, a manager will remember it and, ideally, incorporate it into everyday decision-making.

Here's a perfect example of how innovation—in the form of the bayonet charge—can allow a leader to succeed, despite limited resources.

Kross went on to explain that Chamberlain, a 34-year-old former college professor, was further aided that day because he had clear orders from the top: Under no circumstances could he surrender to the enemy. (Another lesson: Communication has to go both ways.)

But Chamberlain was a smart guy and had a hunch the odds were against him. In addition to running short on ammo, his men were outnumbered and a third of his troops, or 120 men, had tried to leave the Union Army before their contracts were up.

Chamberlain ultimately persuaded the reluctant soldiers to fight with him: historians say their participation was crucial because the Rebel troops did, in fact, outnumber Chamberlain's men. Without the would-be deserters, the disparity would most likely have been too great for his troops to triumph that day.

Chamberlain's successful courting of these soldiers offers business leaders a host of lessons, Ladd said.

"What was the first thing he did when he met them?" Ladd quizzed her students. "He asked them if they'd had anything to eat. He treated them well, like

real people, not like deserters." The moral: That kind of sincere act goes a long way toward wooing an unhappy worker over to your side, she said.

The lesson was not lost on seminar participant Rick Buckingham, president of a Bethesda training and consulting firm, GoalStar Business Strategies Inc. "Chamberlain just was very reasonable and practical. He got them back to why they were there in the first place, reminding them of what their intrinsic motivations were," he said.

Another participant, Ned Felton, chairman and president of the New York subsidiary of Bank of Bermuda Ltd., said he was struck by how Chamberlain was able to communicate his wishes to his troops.

That lesson is something Felton said he would do well to remember. His subsidiary has changed direction three times in the past five years, emphasizing certain product lines over others. The restructurings have resulted in some layoffs. "It's so often easy to have the vision, and then neglect to communicate it properly within the organization," he said.

These battlefield trips are part of a larger practice of using metaphors as a teaching method. It's an effective technique, experts say. "Metaphors reduce complexity to something you can get your hands around. You can get across

a heck of a message," said Pat Martinelli, who teaches the seminars at Johns Hopkins and Loyola College, in addition to other Gettysburg tours that have included executives from as far away as Chile and the Netherlands.

"What people really remember, really translate into their daily behavior, comes out of looking at other people who've faced exceptional circumstances," Useem said. "It has to touch your emotions for these principles of doggedness and determination to stick."

Global competition is part of what's spurring this new focus on what makes a good leader, he said. Other reasons for the emphasis: a flattening of corporate hierarchies and the prevalence of corporate restructuring, including ever-increasing numbers of mergers and acquisitions.

"People are struggling with leadership today, rather than just management," said Sullivan, who is now president of the Association of the United States Army in Arlington.

As companies strive to develop better leaders, they are throwing more money toward training in general. The American Society for Training and Development said U.S. firms spent about \$55 billion on formal worker training in 1996, up from about \$30 billion in 1990. At the same time, executive education programs at Wharton and other universities are drawing record attendance as more companies send their managers back to school.

Patty Flaherty, head of MCI's department of human resources training and development, says the company sends as many as 40 executives to Gettysburg each year through an in-house program. The lessons learned on the battlefield have translated well at MCI. In particular, executives have remembered—and applied—what they learned about the importance of communicating their vision and the value of a diverse leadership, she said.

The impact of these seminars is gradual, but is definitely a long-term plus, Sullivan said. "Any leader has reflective moments, when some of these lessons learned come back," he said.