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Performance Improvement in Practice

Battlefield seminars and reenactors help teach lasting leadership lessons

Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Winston Churchill and Sitting Bull have much to teach about leadership. And today's business executives are listening.

Management trainers from top universities and the training industry are using historic figures and events as metaphors to teach timeless leadership principles and techniques in a meaningful and memorable way. Famous battle sites, such as Gettysburg National Military Park or Little Big Horn, are increasingly popular as learning laboratories because they engage students beyond an intellectual level.

"You come away with an emotional hook into the lesson, whatever it is," explains Antigone Ladd, whose company,

Tigrett Corp. in Arlington, Va., has offered "leadership lessons through history" since 1989. "It's a little gimmicky, but so is teaching management principles through sports metaphors. People are tired of classroom sessions and even experiential exercises. You need to have something that will involve them emotionally to make a lasting impact."

Tigrett Corp. offers a variety of management strategy seminars that are tailored to today's clients' needs.

The Gettysburg program focuses on teambuilding in the downsized organization. It dramatically illustrates how Union Col. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was able to win the loyalty of and motivate his poorly equipped



The strategic alliances series on Sitting Bull is held in Montana with a tour of the Little Bighorn Battlefield and a culture briefing by a Plains Indian. "Part of building alliances is appreciating others' life/work styles," notes Tigrett cofounder and program developer Antigoni Ladd.



Tigrett Corp.'s battlefield-based seminars, which blend history and modern-day management practices, offer a unique dimension to executive training.

troops at Gettysburg in 1863.

There also are programs featuring Sitting Bull, whose strength was in creating strategic alliances and convincing people to pursue a common goal, and Abraham Lincoln, who as "CEO" of a new country, was tremendously successful in establishing goals and communicating his vision.

Tigrett's business has grown steadily during the past nine years, reflecting companies' interest in finding new ways to teach leadership principles to their managers, says Ladd. The two- and three-

day seminars can be geared toward either senior executives or mid-level managers. They include background and evening reading assignments, lectures, video clips and, where applicable, site tours.

A three-day program, meals included, costs \$15,000 for 10 to 20 participants.

The seminars have been taught at the Executive MBA program at Loyola College and at the Graduate School of Retail Bank Management at the University of Virginia. Tigrett also has conducted train-the-trainer courses for MCI Communications Corp., which uses history-based learning as part of its ongoing management training.

"They worked with us in the development of our in-house version of the

Lincoln seminar," explains Patty Flaherty, department head, Human Resources Training and Development. "We go to Gettysburg and use case study analogy to examine the challenges Lincoln had at time of those battles, as well as issues his administration faced throughout the Civil War, and draw parallels to what our managers face today."

Visiting the battlefield adds a dimension of reality to a very serious leadership situation, says Flaherty. "The participants are surrounded by history; we even have a Lincoln impersonator get involved. The executives get very caught up with the challenges Lincoln faced,

and they become very receptive to the key learning points. They're able to take the key strategies Lincoln used during that time and apply those back to their own world."

The Lincoln seminar is one of many elective courses offered to MCI managers as part of their training in what the company has identified as core executive competencies. Most of these electives are provided by outside providers, such as Wharton, Harvard and the Center for Creative Leadership. ■

On the final day of Tigrett's Lincoln seminar, an actor dressed as the former President makes an appearance and engages participants in a conversation about leadership. "People ask him questions about how he'd handle this or that, and he stays in character. They're intrigued," says Ladd.



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