

Some Chinese War Strategies – Applying Its Key Lessons to Strategic Leadership

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Abstract

In this concise yet poignant research review paper, looking at several Chinese war strategies of Old China [although there are many], the academic-practitioners seek to gather key lessons of strategic leadership. One such key lesson, for example, is that it is better not to have any war at all, and that (peace and non-violence) is the greatest victory (win-win) for all. These success principles can in fact be applied not only in the battlefield but also in one's daily dealings and life at the workplace. Such wisdom will not only increase one's ability to respond to problems, but also, be victorious in one's life, mission and responsibilities while having invaluable peace of mind.

Introduction

Why should one take a look at several of these Chinese war strategies? Books on the art of war, for example, Sun Tzu's and the 100 Strategies of War, take up an important position in traditional Chinese culture. (*100 Strategies of War* was written during the Song Dynasty, a few years after Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.) These books' rich, extensive and deep philosophy is highly acclaimed, and interestingly, military thinking not only sums up and directs the thousands of earthshaking wars in the history of China, but has also influenced the growth of Chinese military affairs, literature and technology. After all, when it comes to strategy, why not apply what Confucius (cited in Goodreads, 2014) had urged, that is, “study the past if you would define the future.” Besides, war strategies can also be applied to business strategies to counter competition, increase market share and/or enhance business growth.

The Paper's Aims and Objectives

Many war strategies and leadership lessons exist and there is, in fact, much to discuss by merely looking at several Chinese war strategies; it is the intention of this review research paper to draw out and analyze, what are, to the authors, as the vital and most preferred, if not, ten (10) best lessons of leadership from these war strategies. It is also hoped that these ten (10) principles for success can be applied not only in the battlefield but also in our business and everyday dealings. The paper is also about the art of advantage and maximizing opportunity; this wisdom will increase one's ability to respond to problems, and be victorious in one's life and undertakings while having peace of mind. Moreover, “the essence of strategy is choosing what not to do (**and avoid**)” (Michael Porter, cited in Goodreads, 2014, **bold**, authors' words) and succeed.

What Is Strategic Leadership?

“Strong leaders are an organization's most vital resource.” (Krause, 1997: 22). “Leadership in organizations is the process of guiding and directing the behavior of people in the work environment” (Quick and Nelson, 2013: 380); “leadership is influence” (Maxwell, 1993: 1; Low, 2013) and (getting followers,) leaders achieve goals and get results through people. They get people to “buy into” them before they “buy into” their leadership (Maxwell, 1993: 119). The people are with them; strategic leadership can thus be understood to give the vision, direction and ways or avenues to change or adapt for the growth and success of an organization.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines “strategic” as “(1) of or relating to a general plan that is created to achieve a goal in war, politics, etc., usually over a long period of time” and “(2) useful or important in achieving a plan or strategy”. Here, because of long-term thinking, being strategic can also be said to show or signify the sensibility, wisdom and acumen of the leader in attaining the plan or strategy.

1. The Soldiers’ (People’s) Vital Trust in the Commander/ Leader

Trust is beyond price; trust is priceless. Trust influences a leader’s impact and the company’s bottom line or results more than any other single thing.

Among all the qualities of the greatest leaders of our time, one stands above the rest: These leaders are all highly trusted. One can have a compelling vision, rock-solid strategy, excellent communication skills, innovative insight, and a skilled team, but if people don’t trust the leader, one will never get the results one wants (Horsager, 2012).

During the Spring and Autumn Period, Duke Wen of Jin surrounded the kingdom of Yuan and predicted that the battle would end within three days. In spite of his General’s advice to attack one more time so that Yuan surrender, he resisted after all, his people were ready to go home to meet their family members and loved ones. They had in the first place agreed to end the battle in three days; it was time to disperse the army then. Had he gained the kingdom of Yuan, he would lose the people’s trust and this he cannot bear; he was more concerned with what can he protect his people with? For Duke Wen, the people’s trust, a precious commodity, was indeed too great to be sacrificed for something small – even if another kingdom was won.

Besides, because the general did not fear death, so also were the soldiers, and the leader’s actions were exemplary. When fighting, soldiers must be prepared to die without fear or regret. If the top echelon can be trusted, the soldiers will give of their best without questioning. If the general (leader) is trustworthy, is just in instilling discipline and does not show favoritism, the entire army will be united against the enemy (the competition).

Trust cannot be built overnight; it really requires time, effort, diligence, character and consistency (Horsager, 2012). Krause (1997) spoke of the leader’s example, strength of character and inner fortitude. Very simply, the key lesson here is that if the commander/ leader is trustworthy, the soldiers will have no hesitation in following his orders; they will even die for him. In war or in business, the trust of the people in the leader must prevail (Gagliardi, 2011); otherwise the leader will not be successful.

2. The Military Commander/ leader should be Flexible

Note that the opposite of flexibility is rigidity. Bertrand Russell 1872-1970, the English logician and philosopher once lamented (12Manage.com, 2014) that, “the whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.”

Herodotus, 5th century BC, Greek historian highlighted that, “unless a variety of opinions are laid before us, we have no opportunity of selection, but are bound of necessity to adopt the particular view which may have been brought forward” (12Manage.com, 2014), and this can indeed add to closing of doors, options and minds as well as much inflexibility. Rigidity, to the authors, means closed minds and lack of openness; there is indeed a lack of mind growth and failure to see possibilities and different perspectives. And Michaelson and Michaelson, 2010 and Michaelson (2001) argued that when one is rigid, one is predictable. And he also indicated that in competitive encounters and crusades, predictability can be a weakness. Being predictable can signal one’s proposed action(s) or move(s) to one’s opponents, and the odds of failure increase.

“Victory is won by flexibly coping with circumstances” (Sun Tzu, translated by Zhang Huimin, cited in Michaelson, 2001: 57). To paraphrase Low (2010a)’s account of Sun Tzu, when leaders see the subtleties, they can easily win. When the leader plans, he is prepared. He needs to think of various possible settings and responses. He becomes agile of foot; he will not trip when the landscape changes, but will trot on regardless of rocks and obstacles. On even ground one will move swiftly, as fleet-footed as a deer in flight, and on steep rocky inclines, one will be as surefooted as a mountain goat.

To Sun Tzu, a Taoist, the leader should be like water; flexible (a kin of life, and if one becomes inflexible, one becomes a kin of death), (s)he adapts and moves well. To Lao Tzu, the highest good is like water; it gives life to the ten thousand beings and does not struggle. It flows in places men reject and so is like Tao.

Excellent Chinese military moves stress on being flexible, applying appropriate strategy depending on the situation and circumstances. They consider and vary their tactical options (Sun Tzu, mentioned in Michaelson and Michaelson, 2010; Michaelson, 2001). The military would emulate its desired flexibility like that of a dragon; when the competition attacks its head, the Chinese dragon uses its tail to strike. When its tail is attacked, it uses its head to strike the enemy. When the enemy attacks its center portion, both its head and tail will strike the enemy (Low, 2009: 55; 2010). There is truly wisdom in quick-wittedness, and mental agility is often cherished. First gets the oyster, and last gets the shell; good generals often respond or move their troops with lightning speed as those who delay will be on the defensive. Very much like putting a bottle of good wine at the finishing line, those who arrive first enjoy the drinks, and get drunk while those who come later could not even wet their lips. Whether in leadership or in marketing, there's much smartness, for example, in Singapore's hosting of Asia's first night Grand Prix, Formula One, reaping the publicity and benefits of the first mover (Low, 2008).

Flexible, the military commander needs to be adaptable whether the army is fighting whether in the marshes, on home ground, enemy ground or in a strategic location. The military commander can also find himself, at times, fighting in a desperate situation, or at times, in a dangerous situation. He should also learn how to handle a defeat well. Or for that matter, like the military commander, leaders should (learn how to) lead in any situation or, in fact, handle a crisis well.

In effecting strategy, flexibility is crucial; there are no single but a variety of solutions and options. Flexible and even creative human resource programs can also help to reduce staff turnover and various schemes and incentives may be adopted. And these among other things, include birthday leave, community service leave, grandparent leave, floating cultural day, outcome based employment contract, and many others, considering the local context as well as the competitive international environment.

3. The Military Commander Should Not Assume or Take Anything for Granted

Next, we will discuss one of the many strategies under the 36 military strategems, maxims that have become China's most revered sources of wisdom; they are ways of raising one's sphere of influence. One particular strategem is "to cross the river under camouflage", chosen because we should not assume the ordinary as ordinary or that anything can happen from the ordinary. Basically, the strategy highlights or alerts us that a recognizable or an obvious, everyday sight usually attracts no attention, and in fact can be taken for granted. The more ordinary the activity, the less attention it draws; it is thus said that secrets often hide in the open (Low, 2010a); thus, the usefulness of this strategy.

Fraudsters may sometime take advantage of such obvious everyday happenings such as working late (overtime) almost everyday or having long, accumulated leave periods while committing fraud and surreptitiously taking monies from the till. A key lesson for corporate leaders; indeed, they need to ensure that such things are not assumed or taken for granted. Checks and counter checks should be made to prevent misappropriations or frauds; at least, corporate leaders should not assume or take anything for granted. A good case in point has been highlighted by Low (2006: 66), that is, the famous February 1995 Barings debacle is, in fact, a classic 'lack of separate of duties' case, a feature that was assumed as **normal** in the company due to the busyness of the traders and the industry as a whole. Nick Leeson assumed multiple roles, wearing many hats. He was the General Manager, head trader and, due to his experience in operations, de facto head of the back office. Such an arrangement should have rung alarm bells, but no one within Barings' senior management appeared to **notice the blatant conflicts of interest; yet this was considered normal**. Accordingly, Leeson and his traders had usual authority to perform two types of trading, i.e., transacting futures and options orders for clients and for other firms within Barings, and arbitrating price differences between Nikkei futures traded on the SIMEX and Japan's Osaka exchange. In short, his wearing multiple hats easily allowed him to avoid detection (Leeson, 1997, Low, 2006, **authors' emphasis in bold**).

When things are obviously peaceful, all the more we need to take guard or be extra careful. And, in fact, be ever vigilant.

4. The Commander Should Embrace Humility and Conversely, Make the Enemy Feel Arrogant

At strategic level, changing or maneuvering is a way of thinking about how one is going to act in a way that puts one's opponent at a disadvantage (Michaelson, 2001).

Low (2010a: 55) indicated that great wisdom is not obvious or shown, and great value is often not advertised; humility is also unbroken and an integral part of strategic leadership. And the military commander should not take things for granted. Or he should not be proud or arrogant. Instead he should be humble. When he is humble or modest, he can also take the strategy of making the other party or the rival feel arrogant or bloated with overconfidence. And the other party would underestimate or misread him.

If the enemy is strong, one may not be able to win the war. In this regard, it is wise to be modest when dealing with them. At the same time, offer them handsome gifts to flatter them and wait for an opportunity to attack.

Napoleon (cited in Goodreads, 2014) once said that, “Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.” When one’s enemy gets carried away, becomes complacent and is less alert, then this is the time to defeat the enemy. The rule or trick is that humility enables one to achieve success.

Since the olden days, even at ground level, arrogant soldiers have always been defeated. Even experienced warriors are no exception. Clever generals are not only humble but calm too. Composed, such a leader is better able to come up and devise plans to make the enemy feel big-headed, absorbed by self-importance and pride. In this way, victory is assured, and what is applicable to the opponent is similar to the English saying, “Pride comes before a fall”.

5. The Commander Has A Clarity of Purpose and Vision

Sheldon Adelson highlighted that, “I’ve already figured out when I’m going to be No. 2 and No. 1” (afterQuotes, 2014).

Some people never see or lack the clarity; and they are the ever wanderers. The commander or the leader knows where (s) he is heading or wants to go to (Maxwell, 1993). The strategic leader also knows what he wants. One of the keys to leadership is to have priorities (Maxwell, 1993: 19-34) or to be precise, a clarity of one’s priorities. It is also worthy to note that strategic leaders should know themselves. They know that they have the necessary passion and a zeal for work that goes beyond money and power. Besides, strategic leaders are inclined to achieve the vision and goals with much energy and intense determination (MSG, 2013; Krause, 1997).

Clarity is very important for the customers and stakeholders of the Company; “one of the things that is most important for a company is to be very clear about their strategy, so investors get to self-select as to whether or not that’s the right strategy for them.” (Jeff Bezos, cited in afterQuotes, 2014). Horsager (2012) also indicated that “people trust the clear and mistrust or distrust the ambiguous”.

All in all, the leader definitely needs to be clear about his or her mission, purpose, expectations, and daily activities. When a leader is clear about expectations, (s)he will likely get what (s)he wants. When one is clear about priorities on a daily basis, one becomes productive and effective.

Moreover, a leader’s actions, as the evidence of his or her clarity, must extend naturally from his or her understanding. When a leader is both clear and congruent, an organization trusts in their judgment, in their capacity as a leader, in the course they’ve set and the decisions they’ve taken and this trust permeates their people’s feelings, thoughts, and actions.

As a leader, one’s clarity (or lack of it) is visible or noticeable in the way one perceives, thinks and acts. When one is clear, one knows what to look for - and what to watch out for. One has a reference point around which to organize one’s thinking – to both spark and to manage one’s creativity. And one knows precisely where, when, and how to act – congruently and confidently.

And in terms of strategic change and leadership, Healthfield (2014; in **bold**, authors’ emphasis) concluded that “a lot of what I see regarding change, hasn’t changed over the years... ..it’s ‘repackaged’, replicated, improved upon, etc. Basically if you **define the objective**, train your people (give them the tools), **communicate at all levels expectations**, (Note: what’s in it for me and rewards and recognition) and reward for success, change (and teams) will be successful.”

6. The Commander Should Always Be Prepared – Do due Preparations/ Planning and then Wait

Close to the strategy of not taking anything for granted is to make due preparations, bearing in mind that “Rome wasn’t built in a day”.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, the United States' post-World War 2 president once highlighted (Goodreads, 2014) that, "in preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." When one is well prepared, one can concentrate on one's strengths and battles are truly won by focusing on one's strengths. Operations succeed because someone knows how to concentrate strengths against weaknesses. If one does not have clear or real superiority, one cannot win (Sun Tzu cited in Michaelson, 2001). When one is well prepared, one can indeed be confident, cool and calm; and one can ordinarily have the luxury of time, marshaling one's resources and/ or waiting to ambush or attack. One can choose when to attack.

Remember too the Boy Scouts' motto, "Be prepared", and this is very applicable in strategy. While humble or modest, the leader should be well prepared, and in being in state of preparations, the leader gains a lead time. In this connection, let us examine the Stratagem 4, that is, "Wait at ease for the fatigued enemy" (Low, 2010a). Resting may give the impression of being laidback and weak; however, it provides the leader with an opportunity to consolidate his strength(s). This can in fact be combined with the earlier principle #3 that the commanders should be flexible – what appears soft and pliable can be strong and solid. The supple bamboo yields to the wind and remains standing unlike the mighty oak bough that snaps or breaks.

Sun Tzu once said, "He who is better prepared... will win." "Decisions made without thinking are often expensive" (Krause, 1997: 42). Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, spoke of those "who wishes to fight must first count the cost" (Goodreads, 2014) and this is part of preparations and planning. And Low (2010a: 39, *italics ours*) has added that, "Yes, it (*preparations and planning*) can be tedious, but there is no substitute for it. Indeed, the power to win is nothing unless we have the power to prepare."

Good commanders are normally well-prepared and before hand they would survey and factor-in the terrain; they normally would have done their homework before they attack or enter into battle.

Yet another angle of this strategy is that after one's homework and due preparations have been made, one has certainly marshaled all the information and resources. The successful strategic leader (a good negotiator-cum-influencer) has done a thorough strengths/ weaknesses/ opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the other party (OP) and himself/his party. The leader is well prepared; persuasive, (s)he can better guide his or her people. The leader can be said to be influencing or persuading his or her people from a position of strength.

7. The Good Commander Ensures Good Strategic Maintenance

In leadership and good marketing, strategic maintenance is critical, if one keeps on improving, bit by bit (*kaizen* or continuous improvement is effected), one develops leadership excellence, and with that, rivals may find it difficult to shoot or down a moving target (Low, 2009a).

Ensuring good strategic maintenance, leaders relate well, "appreciat(ing) the gifts of (the) family" (Lonely Planet, 2011: 117, also cited in Low, 2014) and making the people (organizational members/ citizens) part of the family (Low, 2014: 176). Note that people also want to have friends and connections (Horsager, 2012), and it is also helpful to maintain good relationships and understanding with people and others around us (Horsager, 2012; Krause, 1997). Horsager (2012) indeed pointed out that "grateful people are not entitled, they do not complain, and they do not gossip. (They) develop the trait of gratitude, and you (the strategic leader) will be a magnet". After all, as Sun Tzu pointed out (Goodreads, 2014), "when one treats (one's) people with benevolence, justice, and righteousness, and reposes confidence in them, the army will be united in mind and all will be happy to serve their leaders."

Today's leader is not someone who knows all the solutions or answers because in this world that is impossible. The new or strategic leader is "someone who can assess a situation, bring people together, build consensus and discover solutions, drawing on the talents of everyone involved. The new leader is a facilitator, a communicator, a team builder, who realizes that our greatest natural resources are our minds and hearts, together with those of the people, around us" (Dreher, 1996: 5).

Valuing people (Sun Tzu, cited in Gagliardi, 2011; Michaelson and Michaelson, 2010) as one's "most appreciable asset" (Maxwell, 1993: 113), a good commander and a strategic leader should take care of his or her people. And monitoring, maintaining and overall up-keeping of the people's trust is one good example of such strategic maintenance. Here, we should next examine stratagem 10 that speaks of "concealing a dagger in a smile" (Low, 2010a). This saying is similar to the, saying, "Have Buddha face but with tiger heart." True, a strategy is a strategy and a tactic is a tactic; it's thinking that makes it good or bad.

However, if the intention is ethically unbecoming, then it should not be subscribed; the authors do not urge or even encourage leaders to adopt this strategy since they believe that leadership should be not be hypocritical but rather be run in a sincere way and plain honesty is indeed preferred. Leadership can even, what more, be applied with the Confucian character and integrity (*lien*) in mind.

Moreover, in the above strategy, on the surface or from the external appearance, the leader looks kind, but at heart (s) he is far from kind. (S) he may even have an untoward intention towards the people. It can also be taken as winning the people's trust and getting what one wants only after the people's guard is down. Or after winning the elections, the leader may not deliver the goods or even do what that has been promised. In other words, the leader is nice to the people, gaining their trust, while all the while setting them up to take the fall or loss. The leader can also, sometimes, put forward or cast the deal in a positive light to make the situation palatable, thus misleading the people. Indeed to stress, trust here is broken or not up-kept.

It should overall be noted that as leaders, one needs to take cognizance that this is really a short-term move or step; leaders and even friends need to ensure that others' trust of them is not misplaced or lost, and should, in fact, be always there. The leader's maintains his or her integrity ("a high influence value", Maxwell, 1993: 39, "a solid reputation"; Maxwell, 1993: 41) and credibility; and as a leader, one's integrity builds the people's trust of one (Maxwell, 1993: 38). Note that a leader must truly be a man of high integrity (Owen, 2012). It is better to live truth instead of expressing or voicing it and one stands tall. Smartly, (s) he should thus maintain the trust of others while up-keeping relationships with the people and others.

Of significance, Gagliardi (2011; in **bold**, authors' emphasis) highlighted that the most common misreading among people who have not studied Sun Tzu's work (**or even most Chinese war strategies**) is that its basic competitive philosophy is Machiavellian, empty of ethical considerations in advancing its principles of success in competitive arenas. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, Sun Tzu imparts that ethical behavior is the foundation for success in competition.

Horsager (2012) presented another precious pointer; he underscored that, "people notice those who do what is right ahead of what is easy. Leaders who have built this pillar consistently do what needs to be done when it needs to be done, whether they feel like doing it or not. It is the work of life to do what is right rather than what is easy". And interestingly too, this is echoed in Krause (1997: 40) who stressed that leaders "seek what is right rather than to accept what is easy; to show courage and patience in times of crisis".

Krause (1997: 98) also pertinently pinpointed these, "wealth and power by forfeiting the principles underlying your character cannot possibly bring you contentment" or even peace of mind.

8. The Commander Should Be Wise; Wisdom Is Better than Mere Knowledge or Having Certain Information

Chin-Ning Chu once pointed out that, "Before you journey, (be wise,) observe the wind carefully, detect its direction, and then follow it. You will get to your destination twice as fast with half the effort." (afterQuotes, 2014).

Of significance, having wisdom is better than having mere knowledge or having certain information. Being wise is to "having the power of discerning and judging properly as to what is true or right; possessing discernment, judgment, or discretion"; it is also "characterized by or showing such power; judicious or prudent: a wise decision" (Dictionary.com, 2014).

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* can also be seen as teaching us to stop defining successful in terms of winning conflicts or in terms of beating opponents (Gagliardi, 2011). To elaborate, there is wisdom, and that wisdom is about or in having peaceful cooperation, collaboration, creation of alliances, teamwork, win-win, enjoyment of mutual benefits and synergies, and they are better than having friction or conflicts and waging war and competing. Take, for example, the creation of an economic union such as the European Union (EU) can lead to mutual benefits and increasing economic efficiency as well as establishing closer political and cultural ties between the member countries.

As a good gardener prepares the soil, so a wise leader creates and cultivates a setting that promotes community. (Dreher, 1996). Tao in fact urges us to look for the underlying harmony beyond apparent division and accord – and one by suspending judgment and practicing patience and presence to affirm the Taoist principle of Oneness (Dreher, 1996: 186). Conflict is neither good nor bad, but it is how one responds to it.

And interestingly, in Japan, the word for community is “wa” or harmony, and leadership has always meant responsibility for maintaining “wa”; conflicts are opportunities to learn, “transforming competition into cooperation (and) creating heaven from its opposite”. (Dreher, 1996: 119).

Indeed the best war is never fought. It is better to “win without fighting” (Sun Tzu, cited in Michaelson, 2001: 22). Strategies are preferred to the use of force or violence; Sun Tzu said that “complete victory is when the army does not fight” (Cleary 1991; also cited in Low, 2010a: 99). This is tantamount to Lao Tzu’s using light to return to Light. Then one can breathe one’s last breath yet be ever living.

Low (2010a) also highlighted that although ancient China often had many wars and internal strife, the wise Chinese general tried very hard to avoid wars and violence. The “Big Peace” is subscribed to. Ordinarily, non-violence was embraced, and war or violence was and is seen or deemed necessary as the last resort. To win without fighting is better than winning with losses. According to Sun Tzu, in war, the winning strategist only seeks battle after success has been secured or gained, where as those who is fated to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.

True one may also argue that Sun Tzu’s ethics are pragmatic rather than idealistic. He focuses on the fact that direct conflict is innately costly (Gagliardi, 2011). Those who naturally react to competitive situations by wanting to engage in battles and defeat their opponents are ruined to defeat, even if they time and again win their battles. However, this is also real in marketing warfare as it is in military fights; Sun Tzu advances the art of war as a strategy for swopping the artless, destructive conflicts that define most competitive battles, including those that too often occur among business rivals. Sun Tzu’s analysis is that victorious conflict is so naturally costly that it is never worthy or meaningful. A business can win a market by spending too much money, but it cannot make a profit doing so.

9. The Commander Should Run Away – and to Return to Fight Again

A killed or dead hero is not good or beneficial. As such, another useful strategy is to run away – especially when one knows that one is losing the battle or the war. And this is often a good option. For (s)he who survives or lives for another day can return to fight again.

In the modern-day context, companies can do research and development to innovate and improve their products or train and grow their people to be better skilled and equipped (Michaelson, 2001). They “develop what is good in others, minimize what is bad... Promote people who have talent; train those who lack skill.” (Krause, 1997: 99). Strategic leaders can also “find the best leaders and copy their methods. In this way, you will also discover the meaning of leadership.” (Krause, 1997: 35). They can also recruit professionals and quality people to build up their organization, on its wings or strengthening itself to counter and maneuver any competitive actions made by their opponents.

10. The Commander Should Go into Uncontested Area(s) [The Commander’s and the People’s Overall Success and Victory is Non-Warfare]

To advance the point made earlier, most wars are not necessary, and the best wars are not often fought. Winning without fighting is always the best option. If there is no fighting or violence, all parties or everyone wins. Fighting, warfare and violence involves deaths, losses and a waste of resources. Having said these, then again, amidst chaos... or to apply Sun Tzu’s words (cited in Goodreads, 2014), “In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity”. Perhaps, the leader needs to capitalize the situation, marshaling the conditions, being smart to change the playing field while seizing the prevailing opportunities.

It is worthy to note that Sun Tzu also teaches that all of us depend on others to create opportunities for ourselves. Every marketplace has unfulfilled needs, just as every business has weaknesses. Both are opportunities for improving our position, and frequently those opportunities are masked as problems. All of us do not recognize these opportunities simply because we are not trained to see them in the challenges that face us (Gagliardi, 2011).

All of us must move. Leaders must move. It’s about in search of excellence and not perfection (Dreher, 1996). And to paraphrase Gary Comer (cited in Pencak, 2014), when a leader worries about being better; bigger will take care of itself.

Strategic leaders keep on climbing mountains. Learning is an essential part of our nature (Niven, 2000; Dreher, 1996; Krause, 1997). They “seek understanding like a thirsty man lost in the dessert seeks water – with fearful determination” (Krause, 1997: 70; Niven, 2000). Strategic leaders never stop learning and adapting (Niven, 2000), and they (Tao leaders) “realize their unlimited capacity for growth” (Dreher, 1996: 75). The strategic leader’s art of advantage and maximizing opportunity here lies in learning, adopting and adapting a blue ocean strategy. In business and marketing, the leader should lead the people into the blue ocean, uncontested or unrivalled grounds (for example, growing markets; strategic moves simply create a leap in value for the company, its buyers, and its employees, while unlocking new demand and making the competition irrelevant; Kim and Mauborgne, 2005) as opposed to the red ocean which is competitive, and a saturated, price-cutting or discount-giving marketplace, that is, indeed crowded with many players.

As a prelude to the conclusion, perhaps it is good to see the key points as listed in *Figure 1*; it shows the 10 key lessons of strategic leadership gathered from the various Chinese War Strategies.



Figure 1: Shows the 10 Key Strategic Leadership Lessons Gleaned from the Various Chinese War Strategies

Conclusion

Leaders must be able to coax, persuade, encourage, influence and sway their people (Maxwell, 1993; Low, 2013). And strategic leaders are thus wise, effectively persuasive, motivating, even inspiring and influential.

Besides, strategic leaders keep on ascending, climbing mountains, learning, venturing and conquering new territories. And they are able to convince and get their people and others to follow them. As Winston Churchill wisely said (Woopidoo! 2014), “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results”, leaders should ultimately get their people to attain and achieve! Strategic leaders indeed get results, outcomes and accomplishments.

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