

Schwarzkopf On Leadership

General Norman Schwarzkopf discusses some of the principles that helped him win the Gulf War.

BY GEORGE GENDRON



Inc.'s founder, Bernie Goldhirsh, recently attended a conference at which he heard General H. Norman Schwarzkopf discuss the principles that guided him to victory in the Persian Gulf. They may seem like truisms, but we'd all be better off if more companies followed them.

You must have clear goals. And you must be able to articulate them clearly. One of the advantages we had in Kuwait, said the general, was the clarity of the mission: "Kick Saddam Hussein's butt out of Kuwait. The goal was clear and simple, and something that every one of our troops understood."

Give yourself a clear agenda. Every morning write down the five most important things for you to accomplish that day. Whatever else you do, get those five things done. Insist that the people who report to you operate the same way.

Let people know where they stand. Everyone knows you do a disservice to a B student when you give him or her an A. That applies not just to schools. The grades you give the people who report to you must reflect reality.

What's broken, fix now. Don't put it off. Problems that aren't dealt with lead to other problems. Besides, something else will break and need fixing tomorrow.

No repainting the flagpole. Make sure all the work your people are doing is essential to the organization.

Set high standards. Too often we don't ask enough from

people. At one point in Schwarzkopf's career, he was placed in charge of helicopter maintenance. He asked how much of the fleet was able to fly on any given day. The answer was 75%. "People didn't come in at 74 or 76, but always at 75, because that was the standard that had been set for them. I said, 'I don't know anything about helicopter maintenance, but I'm establishing a new standard: 85%.' " Sure enough, within a short time 85% of the fleet was available on any given day. The moral: people generally won't perform above your expectations, so it's important to expect a lot.

Lay the concept out, but let your people execute it. Yes, you must have the right people in place. But then step back. Allow them to own their work.

People come to work to succeed. Nobody comes to work to fail. It seems obvious. So why do so many organizations operate on the principle that if people aren't watched and supervised, they'll bungle the job?

Never lie. Ever. Schwarzkopf said there had been a big debate about whether to use disinformation to mislead the Iraqis during the Gulf War. "We knew they were watching CNN. Some people argued that we could save American lives by feeding incorrect information to our own media." Schwarzkopf vetoed the idea because he felt it would undermine the military leadership's credibility with the American public.

When in charge, take command. Leaders are often called on to make decisions without adequate information. As a result, they may put off deciding to do anything at all. That's a big mistake, said Schwarzkopf. Decisions themselves elicit new information. The best policy is to decide, monitor the results, and change course if necessary.

Do what's right. "The truth of the matter," said Schwarzkopf, "is that you *always* know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it."

"Most great leaders I've met are simple men. People like Sam Walton and General Schwarzkopf -- they're far from stupid, but

they are basically very simple. I include myself in that category. I hate complexity. I think the world is already complex enough as it is, without me making it more so. The principles of management and leadership are simple. The hard part is doing them, living up to them day after day, not making lots of excuses for ourselves. You know all those complex management theories? They're just an excuse for not facing up to how hard it is to live by some very basic principles."

-- From a conversation with H. Ross Perot, founder of Electronic Data Systems Inc., and Perot Data Systems, during a recent *Inc.* conference