

# General William Tecumseh Sherman

War may be hell, but the business world can be just as challenging.

Hone your leadership skills with lessons from the Civil War's "total war" general.

**T**he Union leader who kept his promise to "make Georgia howl" brought war-ending destruction to the South during his epic March to the Sea in 1864. Sherman waged "total war" before the term was even invented, and he was successful because he understood how to motivate Soldiers, both on and off the battlefield.

## Loyalty – Up, Down, and to Peers

Loyalty in business, as in war, is critical to success and involves not only how one treats those of higher rank, but equally important, how one treats subordinates and peers. The give-and-take of business requires faith in others to do what is best for the organization. Sherman embraced the value of loyalty. For instance, he said of his relationship with U.S. Grant, "Grant stood by me when I was crazy, and I stood by him when he was drunk, and now we stand by each other."

## Be a Leader, First and Always

In today's business environment, it is common to find blurred lines of authority and operation. Sherman felt it was important for those in charge always to act as leaders. Cautioning against becoming so friendly with subordinates that the difference between leader and employee disappeared, he said, "The true way to be popular with troops is not to be free and familiar with them, but to make them believe you know more than they do."

## Use Common Sense

"What is grand strategy? Common sense applied to the art of war," Sherman once said. In his battle plans and discussions of strategy and tactics, he emphasized utilizing a practical approach when planning. Simplicity is key, and trying to come up with an out-of-the-box solution to every problem may well pose new challenges.

## Operate Leanly

Too often in business, leaders are tempted to increase staff in the belief that bigger is somehow better. Sherman, however, worried about having too many people in the decision train. He believed in operating leanly, saying, "A bulky staff implies a division of responsibility, slowness of action, and indecision; whereas a small staff implies activity and concentration of purpose."

## Understand the Organization's "Soul"

Every great organization has some special quality that separates it from the competition. Such businesses also understand the proper blending of a mission with the human resources available to accomplish the task. As Sherman described it, "There is a soul to an army as well as to the individual man, and no general can accomplish the full work of his army unless he commands the soul of his men as well as their bodies and legs."

## Have Healthy Self-Confidence

A keen difference exists between an arrogant leader and one who is self-confident when making decisions. Sherman understood this, and it is one of the reasons he has been remembered in history. He said, "I make up my opinions from facts and reasoning, and not to suit anybody but myself. If people don't like my opinions, it makes little difference as I don't solicit their opinions or votes." ★

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Sherman was such a dominating personality on the battlefield that the Prussian general staff studied his military campaigns in the years after 1870.

