

10

The Omen of Aquileia: “The Essentials of Decisiveness”

Aquileia was an imposing sight. Resting high on a hillside, surrounded by a water obstacle, its walls high and thick, its city gates reinforced, it was a bastion of Italy. Aquileia was familiar with invasions. Over the years, it had held against the Germans and various Asiatic tribes.

Inside, it was fortified by a well-trained garrison. Its food reserves and magazines were sufficient to withstand long sieges. Its people were resolved not to surrender their vast treasures, acquired by trade and an abundant agriculture, to any invaders—no matter how imposing.

The Aquileians were inexperienced with the Huns. The terror with which they regarded the horde was largely the result of the tales of the Huns' devastating attacks on other villages and lands. Attila's army was

LEADERSHIP SECRETS OF ATILA THE HUN

great in number. It consumed the countryside as though it were a swarm of locusts.

Coming off, as they were, two previous swift victories against other fortified cities, the Huns became impatient with their siege of Aquileia. Food for man and beast became scarce. The horde was restless—ready to march on to greater Italy. The conquest of Aquileia, however, was essential to Attila's plan to crush the empire.

Morale became low. The tribal chieftains challenged Attila's tactics. Dead horses were eaten and rations reduced—the Huns' situation became more desperate with each passing day.

This was not the horde of the past. Attila had altered many of their traditional habits. Now, they were a disciplined army, led by a king who had the patience to have taken some forty years to unite them.

Attila called his battle captains together in an evening council. He announced that the cost of the siege had become too great. They would bypass Aquileia the next morning. At daybreak, the Huns would begin preparing for their march.

On the following day, taking a final look at the city he hoped to defeat at another time, Attila observed a stork flying out of Aquileia, driving a young brood before her. It was destiny—an omen that would turn the course of events.

Announcing that animals could sense things before men, Attila ordered his army to fulfill the presage of this omen from powers beyond man's comprehension. Now, instead of bypassing Aquileia, they would attack.

Equipped with catapults and tall ladders, the newly disciplined Hunnish horde executed a masterful at-

THE OMEN OF AQUILEIA: "THE ESSENTIALS OF DECISIVENESS"

tack. The city, despite its experience with and repel-
lence of invasions in the past, fell. It was a swift victory.
Aquileia was left in flames, its vast treasures added to
the booty already overflowing Attila's chariots.

Destiny had been fulfilled through patience and the
ability to sense the precise moment to act.

ATTILA ON: "THE ESSENTIALS OF DECISIVENESS"

Our seasoned chieftains have become wise through ex-
perience as to when it is right to act and when it re-
mains best to contemplate further. On the other hand,
our young, ambitious Huns, anxious to demonstrate
their deftness, will often precipitate actions that result
in loss for them, their tribe and perhaps the nation.

Such rashness is unacceptable in those appointed to
lead. All chieftains must learn that victory comes to
one who knows not only what to do but when to do it.

Young Huns are taught skill in weaponry—master-
ing the bow, the lance, the lariat—and in horsemanship.
They learn the advantage of swift action on the
battlefield. They learn to be forthright in demonstrat-
ing these abilities.

As their mentors, we teach them to take the initiative,
to have the moral courage and force that make the
difference between followers and leaders. We must,
however, demonstrate for them the main points pos-
sessed by the leader who travels the determining mile
between sporadic and spurious accomplishment and
resolute performance in all things. One of these points
is decisiveness.

LEADERSHIP SECRETS OF ATILA THE HUN

Now, I give you chieftains counsel for acquiring skill in decisiveness.

- Noble resolve to do the right thing is characteristic of prudent decision making. Responsible decisions are difficult to improve upon.
- Wise is the chieftain who never makes a decision when he doesn't understand the issue. In decision making, valor is guided by prudence.
- A chieftain should allow his subordinates the privilege of making decisions appropriate to their level of responsibility. Weak is the chieftain who reserves every decision for himself out of fear that he might lose control.
- The circumstances of a given moment are not to be used as an excuse for being unprepared to make decisions incumbent to a chieftain. Indecisiveness is bred by failure to accept the responsibility of office—be it great or small.
- A chieftain who fails to accept full decision-making responsibility—or who blames others for his own bad decisions—is weak and lacking in an essential, inherent quality of leadership.
- Rarely are there perfect decisions. The best decisions are usually the more prudent of the logical alternatives. When you must be overly persuasive in gaining support for your decision, it's usually a sign of a bad one.
- When the consequences of your decision are too grim to bear, look for another option. Compassion is the

THE OMEN OF AQUILEIA: "THE ESSENTIALS OF DECISIVENESS"

byword when making difficult decisions that, unavoidably, have temporary or long-lasting adverse consequences for even a few Huns.

- Next to the importance of knowing when to make a decision stands the insight to know when to forgo making one. Impatient chieftains often precipitate premature action.
- Perhaps the most critical element of decision making is timing. Prompt determination after appropriate deliberation is a worthy principle of decisiveness.
- In selecting an alternative, wise chieftains look for the choice in which the benefits outweigh the risks and costs of the decision. Noble chieftains make decisions in favor of the common good.
- Chieftains are to be cautioned against rushing to conclusions when there is time and opportunity to improve upon the basic decision.
- Wise chieftains often extract from obscure places the critical elements for making the right decision. The key is learning to find the obscure places and to recognize the critical elements.
- Skepticism has value in that it delays premature decision making. When a chieftain can't make up his mind, it's worthwhile to restate the problem.
- Chieftains should delegate only those decisions they want their subordinates to make. Conversely, chieftains who inappropriately make decisions for their subordinate leaders diminish the potential that exists for the young chieftains to learn and grow by

LEADERSHIP SECRETS OF ATTILA THE HUN

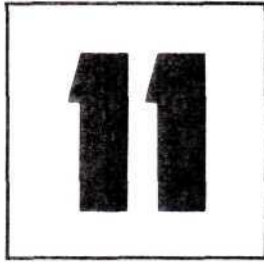
exercising their judgments and being held accountable for the consequences of their decisions.

- Initiative in decision making is not sufficiently demonstrated by a chieftain when it occurs only in relation to easy assignments. It must be exhibited when facing difficult and high-risk tasks as well. A sure sign of a weak chieftain is hesitation to act out of fear he might fail.
- Doubt and delay are frequently symptomatic of chieftains promoted beyond their capacities. On the other hand, we often find ourselves in unfortunate situations in which too many chieftains make too many decisions with too little wisdom.
- Chieftains must avoid decisions that favor themselves at the expense of the Huns. Every decision is an opportunity to improve the conditions of the Huns, the tribe and the nation.
- Chieftains grow to understand that the wisdom of a particular decision can change with time. Make every effort, therefore, to improve future decisions by learning from those you've already made.
- It takes less courage to criticize the decisions of others than to stand by your own.
- Paradoxical as it may seem, sometimes the best decisions are made void of the emotions evoked by the facts bearing on the problem.
- It is good to remember that chieftains are, in large, rewarded for the decisions they make. Huns, conversely, are, in large, rewarded for how well they support and carry out decisions.

THE OMEN OF AQUILEIA: "THE ESSENTIALS OF DECISIVENESS"

- Self-confidence is critical to decisiveness, for without it, a chieftain loses his following in challenging situations.
- In the end, vision, drive, energy, singleness of purpose, wise use of resources and a commitment to a destiny worthy of his efforts become a character of a chieftain who excels.

You chieftains must make the extra effort and demonstrate rigor in developing a sense of decisiveness. Knowing by instinct or by fact when the time is right for action will yield a high measure of success. Decisiveness in leadership action carries a heavy burden. Often it means victory or defeat. We cannot hesitate to act, but neither can we prematurely precipitate decisions that will work to our disadvantage.



Horse Holders: “The Art of Delegation”

Even as the rider who dismounts and expects to return to his fiery steed requires a horse holder, it was necessary that Attila have assistance from his chieftains in order to attend to all of the responsibilities that demanded his attention.

In the early stages of his efforts to unify the various tribes, Attila sought to gain loyalty from easily allied chieftains. Thus, he would have the formidable power of numbers when he challenged more-powerful chieftains.

As king, he would not be capable of overseeing every action of his nation, its tribes and its chieftains. He would require the unfeigned loyalty of trusted chieftains to whom he could delegate responsibility.

The Hunnish nation had long been wandering, individual tribes that sold their services to any cause for

HORSE HOLDERS: "THE ART OF DELEGATION"

a price, or for short-term gains of booty and perhaps even ephemeral moments of peace.

The chieftains and their tribes had lost some deference for Attila as a member of the Hunnish royal family for he had not been long in their camps, as his childhood had been spent in the court of the Romans as a hostage.

Waiting patiently, as a spider waits for its prey, Attila used his time to develop sufficient loyalties and a following that would yield him chieftains to whom he could delegate national unification responsibilities. This he could do with a minimum of risk that they would cast their lots once again with other chieftains or with foreign leaders.

Risk in delegation was high; however, without accepting such a risk Attila would, alas, have been destined to rule over only the tribe of his royal family, and his greater ambition to unify the tribes into a powerful nation would have been lost.

ATTILA ON: "THE ART OF DELEGATION"

Our nation cannot prevail as the dominant world power if its leadership is contained to one man. Even I, Attila, cannot accomplish for you what you are not willing to accomplish for yourselves. You must be willing to accept the responsibilities that I choose to delegate to you. At the same time, your charters are too great for you to accomplish alone. You must trust to your subordinate leaders those responsibilities that fit their office.

Ours is too great and too complex a nation for even such as I, Attila, to direct and lead every action. I must entrust you with certain important duties as chieftains

LEADERSHIP SECRETS OF ATTILA THE HUN

of your various tribes. If I cannot, we are destined to wander as small bands of nomads.

This gathering is for the purpose of my imparting to you my counsel regarding the leadership principle of delegation, which is central to your success as chieftains.

Judgment, experience and the incumbent duties of office dictate the order of delegation. I cannot supply counsel that applies to each act of delegation. Nonetheless, I can provide counsel useful to you in the act and art of delegation.

Learn these precepts well, or your burden will be too great to accomplish those responsibilities in your charge.

- Chieftains should never delegate responsibilities necessitating their direct attention.
- Those actions that don't require a chieftain's direct handling are appropriately delegated to the one most able to fulfill the assignment.
- Wise chieftains grant both authority and responsibility to those they have delegated assignments.
- Wise chieftains always hold their subordinates accountable for delegated assignments.
- Worthy chieftains accept full responsibility for all assignments—even those they have delegated to their subordinates.
- Once a chieftain has delegated responsibilities, he should never interfere, lest his subordinates come to believe that the duties are not truly theirs. Such superficial delegation yields fury in the hearts of subordinates.
- When asked to, a chieftain should assist a subordi-

HORSE HOLDERS: "THE ART OF DELEGATION"

nate with his delegated tasks—otherwise the subordinate may fail because he is not yet of the mettle necessary to fulfill the assignment.

- Realize that a chieftain cannot accomplish every responsibility of his office by himself. Should he prove otherwise, a leader should understand that he is, in fact, chieftain over little or nothing at all.
- A competent chieftain will delegate important assignments to even inexperienced subordinates in order that he might accomplish his mission, develop his subordinates' skills and demonstrate loyalty for and trust in his subordinates.
- A chieftain should surround himself with subordinates to whom he feels comfortable delegating assignments. Otherwise, he must perform the incumbencies of both his and their offices.
- A chieftain should never punish a subordinate who has failed if he did his best to carry out a delegated responsibility.
- Chieftains should encourage their subordinates to use creativity to fulfill delegated responsibilities.
- Subordinates will never develop their skills if their chieftain precisely directs them how to accomplish their delegated assignments.
- A wise chieftain expands his influence and ability to serve the nation only through the art of delegation.

More counsel on this subject escapes me at this time. Perhaps it is best, for I wish not to underwhelm you with weakening thoughts.