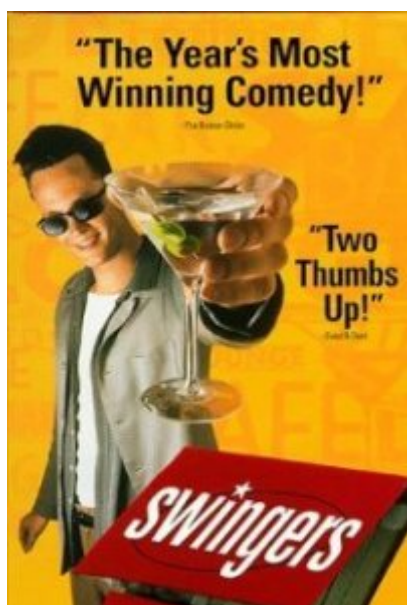


The Guy Behind the Guy, Behind the Guy: A Case for Taking our Roles More Seriously



“Remember this face! This is the guy behind the guy, behind the guy!”

Vince Vaughn’s character spoke those words to the cocktail waitress in the 90’s hit, *Swingers*, when he was trying to pump up his wingman, played by Jon Favreau. While this post isn’t focused on the context of this quote, it is focused on the importance of being “the guy behind the guy.”

When I talk to fellow leaders and ask them questions like “What are you reading?” or “What kind of program are you implementing to develop your subordinates?” the answers I receive are usually disheartening. A common response I get is “Hey man, I don’t plan on becoming a general, so I’m not wasting my time.”

Maybe they are right. They may never rise to the highest levels of the military. They may never be as famous as Eisenhower or Clausewitz, but all of us can be a Scharnhorst or Conner.

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You see, we may have never heard of Clausewitz or Eisenhower if it wasn't for the guy behind the guy.

Scharnhorst (1755-1813) valued education and understood its importance in developing the necessary skills required to effectively wage wars. In the absence of actual experience on the battlefield, he believed that by studying war and warfare one “[enriches] oneself with the insights and experience of others.” His reading, writing, and reflection was validated during his first experience in combat when he earned the reputation as a leader who could rapidly think through situations and outsmart the opposing commander. With his belief in the study of war validated by experience, Scharnhorst set out to educate an army. In his role as an instructor at the Berlin Institute, he gained one of his greatest roles, the mentor of Carl Phillip von Clausewitz. When Carl first arrived to the Berlin institute, he struggled to maintain pace with the educational requirements of the institute. His wife later wrote, “At first it was very difficult for him to follow the lectures because he lacked the necessary prerequisite knowledge. He was near despair, and might have given up, if Scharnhorst had not taken notice of him early and encouraged him with such characteristic kindness and

empathy.” When we read *On War*, we see Scharnhorst’s influence shine throughout Clausewitz’s greatest contribution to the profession.

Would we know the name Clausewitz if there was never a Scharnhorst?

Dwight Eisenhower was stationed in Panama 1922, and although he never got the opportunity to serve in combat during the First World War, this particular assignment would play a key role in his later performance as the Allied Commander. Prior to this assignment he openly admitted “I was, in matters of discipline, far from a good cadet. I didn’t think of myself as either a scholar whose position would depend on the knowledge he had acquired in school, or as a military figure whose professional career might be seriously affected by his academic or disciplinary record.” Fox Conner, his immediate supervisor, quickly uncovered Eisenhower’s anti-intellectualism and set out to educate his subordinate. Conner shared several books from his personal library with Eisenhower to include *On War*, and he didn’t stop there. He followed up the book lending, with professional discussion that pushed Eisenhower to delve deeper into pages he was reading. According to the late historian, Stephen Ambrose, “under Conner’s direction, Eisenhower found a sense of purpose. For the first time he became a serious student of his profession, which he found to his delight truly interesting and exciting.”

Would Ike have ever made it to the level of Supreme Allied Commander if he never cracked a book?

We should never shoot for being the next general officer, instead we should focus on learning as much as we can so that we may help develop and mentor our subordinates. Taking this role for granted does an injustice to our subordinates and ultimately hurts the profession.

Everyone in the military is either going to be a Scharnhorst and Conner or a Eisenhower and Clausewitz. Shoot for the former, and maybe the latter will happen.

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