



By Joe Byerly

This is the first question, in a five question interview with author [Robert Greene](#).

Joe: You've spent decades researching and writing about power, mastery, and war. In your latest book, [The Laws of Human Nature](#), you have written what you call the fundamental truths about human nature. How important is the understanding of these truths to military leaders?

Robert: It seems obvious, but today we live in a time of numbers and algorithms where, at least in business, leaders spend more much more time concerned with data. The element of human nature, the psychology of the people you are leading into battle, is absolutely the most critical factor. Knowledge of human nature is essential to do this well.

For a long time in military literature, authors have written about the role that the spirit of team plays in the army. They called it man management back in the day. Carl von Clausewitz called it the ultimate force multiplier. So, an Army that is motivated, that believes in its leader, that has a clear mission, and feels like it's part of a team that's moving forward, can operate with twice the force of the disengaged army that feels like they are

automatons or robots being used by the general for whatever purpose. The spirit of the team in both war and business is a critical factor.

For instance, in Chapter 15, *Make Them Want to Follow You*, I talked about authority. The kind of qualities that emanate authority to human beings is a timeless thing. The same qualities that Hannibal displayed to motivate the Carthaginians fighting Ancient Rome are the same things that motivate people in the 21st century. I discuss what it is that people respond to in a leader, and I make it clear that human nature is designed so that we are relatively fickle in our affections.

In civilian life, the concept of authority has degraded over the years and there's not as much respect as there used to be. It's not the same as what you have in the military but still, it's limited. That respect can disappear rather quickly. I see people in business quickly lose their authority capital by the mistakes they make. Some of the common mistakes are not leading from the front, asking people to do things you're not willing to do, showing favoritism to certain people, and not being fair and equitable when it comes to rewards and punishments, not making people feel like they are essential and like their input and creativity is important to the group.

So knowing what human nature is as it relates to how people respond to authority is essential to anybody in a leadership role in the military.

In Chapter 4, *Determine the Strength of People's Character*, I discussed how to gauge people's character. If you are looking to promote someone, their character is absolutely the most essential thing you must be able to gauge. Many times, instead of character, we look at peoples' charm, their resume, or their technical skills. You want to see how well people handle stress, how they handle responsibility, do they have presence of mind when things start getting rough.

In Chapter 14, *Resist the Downward Pull of the Group*, I explained how within any group of people there is a culture. The military has a strong and very powerful culture. And there are parts within that culture that can be dysfunctional. And a dysfunctional culture can be very difficult to change. So as a leader, you have to be very sensitive to that aspect of the organization. It isn't something that's always obvious, you can't put numbers to it. You could have a loose culture or a tight culture. You could have a culture that encourages people to be creative or one in which their creativity is squashed.

Once, I gave a talk to Microsoft and I was amazed that the 20k people who worked there all

resembled Bill Gates in some way. They kind of dressed like him and had similar mannerisms. He had established a very distinctive culture but it wasn't a culture that promoted a lot of individual spirit. In some ways it seemed a bit old fashioned and not up with the times.

So you want to realize that in the military you are now dealing with Millennials. They have a different spirit. In Chapter 17, *Seize the Historical Moment*, I wrote about dealing with generations. They [Millennials] have a much different spirit and different values than Generation Xers. In understanding this, you can better incorporate them into the culture of your organization.

Understanding the psychology of members of your team, how to motivate them, and knowing what they respond to at a gut level is critical to great leadership.

We haven't even discussed understanding the psychology of your enemies or your rivals.

So, as I like to say, ignore the laws of human nature at your own risk.

Robert Greene is the author of The New York Times Best Sellers [48 Laws of Power](#), [the Art of Seduction](#), [The 33 Strategies for War](#), and [Mastery](#). He also coauthored [The 50th Law](#) with rapper 50 Cent.

In his latest book [The Laws of Human Nature](#) he examines people's drives and motivations. Drawing from ideas and examples of Pericles, Queen Elizabeth I, Martin Luther King Jr, and many others, Greene teaches us how to detach ourselves from our own emotions and master self-control.

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