



By Joe Byerly

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

Joe: In your books, you've examined the stories of hundreds of leaders. Who are some great and bad leaders we should study? And what do you think is the dividing line between these two types?

Robert: In the military, I'm attracted to people who are innovative and creative. I've also been a student of Sun Tzu. He advocates the more open creative and East Asian style of battle: Winning Through Maneuver.

If you've read [The 33 Strategies of War](#), you know that I'm a great admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte. A lot of young men died under his flag and that isn't so great. But he's a genius who revolutionized western warfare. I like to call him the Mozart of maneuver warfare. He was so creative and so ahead of his time and understood the one aspect of war that most people miss: the organizational and structural aspect.

He understood the importance of an army being structured the right way. In his case, it was structured into these fast moving easily divisible divisions led by field marshals who had a mission statement; that was the key to his success. It wasn't in some particular strategy, he

merely used strategies that had been in warfare for centuries such as the counterattack, the flanking maneuver, etc. What he revolutionized was how you structured the army and the art of letting go of control. He didn't have to control the army like the Prussian generals who tried to control every aspect of the battle, and he crushed them. He gave a lot of leeway to his field marshals and he unleashed on Europe a kind of maneuver warfare that no one had seen since Genghis Khan.

There's been no one like him in war. He had ten years of unprecedented success before his ten years in a downturn.

I'm also an admirer of George Marshall who was the Chief of Staff during WWII. I like him because he was a structural genius. He understood the War Department needed radical reforming and he did it in a methodical and rational way. I liked how he got rid of the bad apples and put his own lieutenants like Eisenhower in the right place. He knew how to create a war department. He figured out how to take a giant, slow moving, and not very creative bureaucracy and turn it into something that led probably the greatest war effort in mankind. When I advise business leaders, I often point to him. I tell them to follow his lead on how you organize your group, develop a mission statement, get people on the same page, and delegate — these are the keys to success. Marshall is the model for that.

The other person I like, and you will like him too because you are a tank man, is Rommel (*Editor Note: I'm an armor officer, but have never been on a tank #ScoutsOut!*). Rommel was absolutely brilliant in the tradition of Napoleonic maneuver warfare of the desert. What I loved about him is that he had knowledge of all aspects of the battle.

In [Mastery](#), I talk about reaching that intuitive level where ideas come to you in the moment and you are thinking on a higher level. It comes from 10-20k hours of working in a field. Rommel could literally disassemble a tank with his hands and put it back together again. He knew every aspect of the machines he worked with, every aspect of the men that he led, he knew all about the topography of the desert. He had a mastery of all the details, so I would put him very high on the list.

As far as disastrous leaders go I can think of few. General MacArthur as a military leader and Michael Eisner, who was the CEO of Disney. These two men let success go to their heads and thought they were god-like. Patton had this flaw in him as well. They believed they had the golden touch and they could do anything. Patton thought he could single-handedly crush the Nazis after D-Day. Eisner had this idea that he could build Euro Disney or put his mind to anything and it would be successful. MacArthur thought he could win in

Korea with a strategy that was completely ignorant about the Communists and the manpower they had. These are examples of people who let success go to their heads and lost touch with members of the team or those on the field.

Leaders like these think they can guide an entire war effort from their tent or from their office and that anything they say has the magic touch. These traits are the opposite of some of the great leaders I've pointed out.

So the ability to learn from experience is the dividing point between great and horrible leaders.

When you study these leaders you should ask yourself, are you someone who can learn from your defeats and mistakes? Can you learn from experience and then put those lessons to good use? Or are you someone who lets success go to your head and think you are a genius who can accomplish anything?

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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