

Leadership Lessons Learned from Gettysburg

John Franklin | December 2020

The first rule in decision-making is that one does not make a decision unless there is disagreement —Peter Drucker

Several years ago, I participated in the Gettysburg Leadership Experience, along with military officers and corporate teams from firms like Exxon, Ernst & Young and Chick-fil-a. As I walked the same open field at the Gettysburg National Park where Pickett's Charge occurred over 150 years ago, I learned things that chilled me to the bone. Over half of the 12,500 soldiers who participated in that charge would become casualties because of poor decisions made by the high command. During this epic battle, with the direction of the war riding on the outcome, the pressure to make correct decisions was enormous on all leaders involved. This added emotional power to the learning experience and inspired this paper.

The intent of this paper is not to glorify the American Civil War or to make a case for one side or the other. The intent is to examine the "why" behind leadership decisions and the resulting outcomes. There are lessons to be learned from this huge and bloody Battle of Gettysburg that provide profound insights for corporate leadership. I focus on three: **Group Alignment**, **Healthy Disagreement**, and **Leadership Preparedness**. I believe if you can get these three concepts right, you are well on your way to maximizing the effectiveness of your team and your organization.

When I wrote about this experience the first time, I focused on leadership dynamics in the C-suite. I now realize that these concepts from battlefield leadership are truly universal and apply with equal effectiveness to board members and middle managers, as well as C-suite executives. Since then, I have presented these insights at senior living conferences, board retreats and leadership development seminars. And if COVID-19 has done anything, it has exposed organizational misalignment, ineffective conflict resolution, and poor leadership preparedness in organizations.

So, let's start the conversation.



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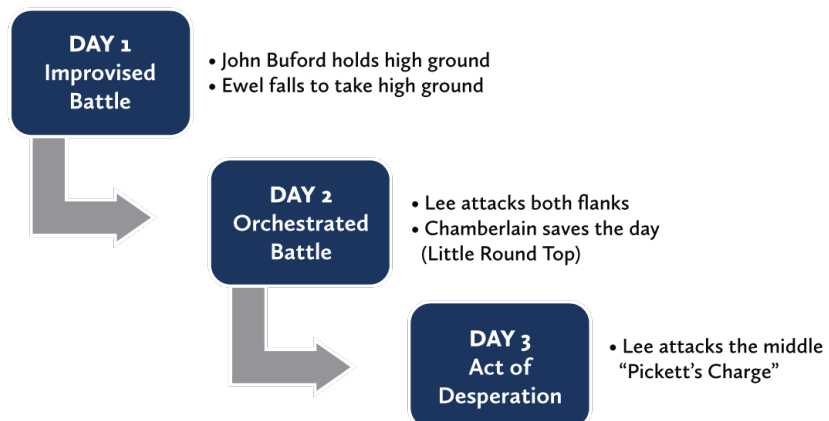
Introduction

It was a warm July morning when my oldest son and I, along with some military officers, and corporate teams from Exxon, Ernst & Young, Chick-fil-a, and others, began the slow three-quarter mile walk up a slight incline on the same open field where Pickett’s Charge had occurred over 150 years ago, on July 3, 1863. As we walked, one of our leaders explained the *consequences and futility of that infamous charge, which took place on the final day of the Battle of Gettysburg*, and was arguably the turning point in the American Civil War.

During that walk, I learned that over half of the 12,500 soldiers who began their own walk over that same open field would become casualties as the Union artillery and rifle fire, from their elevated positions, would rip the Confederate lines that advanced up the hill. And even more deadly, shells and shrapnel from the right flank would mow down men like bowling pins. Union cannons on the right flank were perched on Little Round Top, a hill that General Lee’s army had failed to capture the previous day. And, I learned more about Pickett’s Charge that chilled me to the bone.

After walking the terrain, it became obvious to our group that attacking the Union’s fortified position on the high ground in the middle of their lines was not the wisest strategy. Its futility was predicted by the charge’s commander, General James Longstreet, and it was arguably an avoidable mistake from which the Southern war effort never fully recovered — militarily or psychologically. So, why did General Robert E. Lee, considered by historians as one of the greatest military commanders that West Point ever produced, override General Longstreet’s objections and order the attack? The answer to that question and insights into other decisions and actions that officers

Battle occurred over three days (July 1 to July 3, 1863)



What I learned about Pickett's Charge chilled me to the bone.

made during that critical battle inspired this paper. *The intent of this paper is not to glorify one of America's darkest periods in history, nor to make a case for one side or the other. The wounds and scars of this history are still fresh.* The intent is to examine the strategies of leadership and the resulting outcomes. There are lessons to be learned from this huge and bloody *Battle of Gettysburg* that provide profound insights for corporate leadership.

When I wrote about this experience several years ago, my focus was on leadership dynamics in the C-suite. I now realize that these concepts from battlefield leadership are truly universal and apply with equal effectiveness to board members and middle managers, as well as C-suite executives. Since then, I have presented these insights at senior living conferences, board retreats and leadership development seminars.

The Gettysburg Leadership Experience, in which I was fortunate to participate, was presented by Battlefield Leadership, LLC (www.battlefieldleadership.com) and took place on the grounds of Gettysburg National Park. Battlefield Leadership programs, like the Gettysburg experience, take place on famous battlefields around the world, and are designed to use famous battles as backdrops to teach invaluable leadership concepts. The grounds of [Gettysburg National Park](http://www.gettysburgnationalpark.com) became our interactive classroom as we walked the battlefield, discussed critical points of the conflict, and applied leadership lessons learned from the battle to the corporate environment. With the direction of the war riding on the outcome of this epic battle, the pressure to make correct decisions weighed heavily on all leaders involved. Imagining the enormity of their responsibility added emotional power to my learning experience, much like my experience walking the same footsteps as the soldiers during Pickett's Charge.



During the drive from Gettysburg to Richmond, Virginia, I debriefed the three-day experience with my son, who teaches English and History. We determined that the leadership lessons we both learned were relevant to my clients and could be applied to achieve and maintain organizational success in their organizations. The Gettysburg Leadership Experience offered twelve leadership principles across various case studies. In this paper I have chosen to focus on three — **Group Alignment, Healthy Disagreement, and Leadership Preparedness** — for their relevance

during my own career and their intersection, each one with the other. I believe that if you can get these three concepts right, you are well on your way to maximizing the effectiveness of your team and your organization.

Group Alignment and Leader Intent—*Buford and Ewell*



General Robert E. Lee

In early June 1863, as General Robert E. Lee made the fateful decision to lead his Army of Northern Virginia across the Potomac River into Maryland and eventually into Pennsylvania – with the goal of destroying the Union Army of the Potomac – he did so, hoping that his strategy would create political chaos in the North and lead to an early end to the American Civil War. However, as he marched his army of approximately 75,000 men across the Potomac River into Maryland, he was without his number two commander, General “Stonewall” Jackson, who had been killed the previous May at the battle of Chancellorsville. So, the Battle of Gettysburg would be the first major battle in which Lee would operate with a new leadership structure and ultimately expose one of his flaws as a leader.



General George G. Meade

The Army of Northern Virginia was not alone in a recent leadership shakeup. The Union Army of the Potomac was emerging from an even bigger change. President Lincoln, who had grown increasingly frustrated with General Hooker’s lack of success against General Lee’s army, replaced Hooker on June 28th with a new commander, General George Meade. Therefore, although a contributing factor, the shakeup in the Confederate army’s leadership cannot be cited for some of the questionable actions that occurred during the battle.

Group Alignment may be the most fundamental and important of all leadership lessons because many dysfunctions within a group can be traced back to this simple but often-overlooked principle. One could argue that a lack of group alignment may have been the biggest mistake made by General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia during the Battle of Gettysburg. **Proper Group Alignment occurs when the leader or executive team clearly identifies the objective(s) of the group.** As the historic battle unfolded, the Union Army demonstrated better Group Alignment than the Confederate Army. Lee did not clearly communicate why it was important to invade the North and why it was important to engage the enemy as soon as possible. In contrast, General George G. Meade, the new commander of the North, made it clear that the Union Army was not to engage with Lee’s army unless the Union forces were able to hold the “high ground.”

We learned that many ineffective decisions made by Lee’s commanders during the battle were rooted in a lack of Group Alignment. **By clearly communicating intent and making sure everyone understands the rationale for a particular objective, leaders create a**



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When decisions support the leader's intent, junior leaders are willing to take greater risks to advance group objectives.

"well-aligned team." Our retreat leaders informed us that most organizations discover widespread disagreement on group and organization objectives when polling their groups. Many leaders assume everyone is aware of the leader's intent and that all team members understand the group's objectives and, hence, everyone is aligned. However, unless leaders clearly and frequently communicate goals and get clear signals that everyone understands and agrees on those goals, group misalignment will result.

Group Alignment is obviously important to creating a cohesive team, but there are other critical advantages. One advantage is that Group Alignment creates an environment in which tactical decisions can be made by junior staff and leaders without the need for senior leadership to approve every decision, creating a more effective and efficient organization. This leads to greater autonomy, a key component to keeping high performing staff, a topic I discuss further in another paper, ["Hiring and Retaining Good Employees – Creating the Aggregate Intelligence Culture."](#) By eliminating micromanagement and creating "guardrails" for decision-making, junior leaders in the organization feel empowered because they clearly understand management's intent and the group's overall objective. ***As long as those decisions support the leader's intent, these junior leaders are willing to take greater risks to advance group objectives.***



Commander John Buford

On the eve before the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, John Buford, commander of two brigades of Union Cavalry, made several critical decisions that gave the Union Army a strategic advantage before the larger battle ever began. Buford felt empowered to make some agonizingly difficult decisions because he clearly understood the Union Army's objective. In contrast, later that same day, Confederate General Richard Ewell, who had been recently promoted to Corps Commander as a result of General Jackson's death, made a decision – arguably an indecision – that clearly inhibited Lee's army to win the battle. Ewell's indecision was partly created because he did not understand Lee's intent and did not clearly understand the Army of Northern Virginia's primary objective.



General Richard Ewell

As leaders, we have the opportunity to create the mission and objectives for our organizations. This is especially true for board members who must agree on "missional purpose," which may require modification, over time, depending on changes in the industry. Once created, every person must understand the missional objective, and it is up to all leaders in the organization, from board members to every level of managers, to communicate intent and objectives, and it starts with immediate reports. This is an ongoing process that requires continuous affirmation, periodically communicating the leader's intent through various means, and reminding the group of its primary objective. ***Do not assume Group Alignment exists.***

The responsibility for creating Group Alignment does not stop with the leader. Almost every person within an organization is both a leader and a follower. Even CEOs have leaders above them — the board of trustees. As followers, if we are unsure of the leader or supervisor's intent or the group's primary objective, just ask. Just because

leaders may assume subordinates know their intent does not mean that subordinates should not ask for clarification. Many subordinates may fear asking for clarification because they do not want to appear disrespectful, uninformed or incompetent and, occasionally, they may not ask because they are afraid of the answer.

Sometimes subordinates believe that by not assuming responsibility for clarifying objectives, they are “off the hook” because the leader did not clearly communicate expectations. As a subordinate, consider how critical it is to understand the leader’s intent and the larger group’s objective. If you do not understand your leader’s intent and the objective of the group he or she leads, how are you as a leader able to align your group’s objectives with those of your leader’s? The answer is that you cannot, and you have failed your group. Therefore, you owe it to every person in the group you lead to ensure that you understand your leader’s intent. This “upward management” cannot be overemphasized. I was reminded of this by a colleague at my previous employment. He posed two questions. ***What is our leader’s goal for his group? And what should be the goal for our group to help him achieve the goal for his group?*** It was a reminder to me that creating Group Alignment is a two-way street.

As we peel back the Group Alignment onion, it becomes evident that not having group alignment leads to excessive organizational failures. General Buford, one of the commanders of the Union Calvary, made sure that he completely understood the Union Army’s objective and then communicated his intent to support that objective back to his superior officer, General Reynolds. This feedback loop, along with other leadership attributes that Buford exhibited, gave him the confidence to make some very bold decisions that ultimately made it easier for the Union Army to achieve its objective: to engage Lee’s Army from high ground and to protect the high ground, providing the Union Army with a clear strategic and tactical advantage.

Healthy Disagreement—Lee/Longstreet and Meade/Hancock

Another leadership concept, that I now believe to be more critical than organizational alignment, is the need to provide a healthy environment for conflict and disagreement. One could argue that without healthy conflict and disagreement, organizational alignment cannot occur. In fact, Patrick Lencioni’s [five step approach to achieving team alignment](#) includes healthy conflict. Lencioni says executive disagreement can and will occur. Because individuals have personal histories and beliefs, different opinions are bound to arise. ***Not only is disagreement inevitable, it is also desirable.***

As Peter Drucker, one of the pioneers of the study of organizational behavior, states:

“Decisions of the kind the executive has to make are not made well by acclamation. They are made well only if based on the clash of conflicting views...The first rule in decision-making is that one does not make a decision unless there is disagreement.”



Not only is disagreement inevitable, it is also desirable.

So, why is healthy conflict essential to building truly functional teams and effective organizations?

- First, it fosters the pursuit of truth.
- Second, it seeks the best possible solution.
- Third, it avoids interpersonal resentment.
- And finally, it builds trust, which is essential to any healthy relationship, whether it be personal or professional.

In fact, on day two of our leadership retreat, we all agreed that the concepts we were learning to be effective corporate leaders were the same concepts that build successful marriages! And leaders and organizations, especially in the non-profit space, are starving for ways to create an environment for healthy disagreement. I know this because I have been asked to speak about this subject more than any other.

I would like to stop here and make a point that was discussed at length during our Gettysburg leadership retreat. Although it is okay, even desirable, to have different opinions on how an organization achieves its mission, it is not acceptable to fundamentally disagree on the principles and values of an organization and its missional objectives. ***You can differ on opinions, but you must agree on basic principles.***

If two parties do not agree on principles, executive disagreement cannot be fixed, and the organization is better off if the two parties part ways. This was a painful lesson for me to learn during my own career. Unfortunately, I had to experience it twice to realize its significance. My oldest son, the teacher, who participated in the Gettysburg Leadership Experience with me, shared copies of my original white paper with colleagues. A few months later, while golfing with my son and his boss, my son's supervisor pulled me aside and thanked me for writing the paper. He said it helped him understand that some issues he was having with one of his subordinates were rooted in the employee not buying into the missional purpose of the school. Once he saw this realization, he terminated the employee's contract because he recognized the constant disagreement could not be fixed due to a fundamental disagreement on principles. And, he was confident in his decision, knowing it was the best thing for the organization and the employee.

Prior to the Battle of Gettysburg, General Stonewall Jackson, Lee's number two in command and possibly the most feared commander in either army, died during the Battle of Chancellorsville. He was replaced by General James Longstreet, who had become Lee's most trusted confidant. Despite this close relationship, Longstreet and Lee had several major disagreements prior to and during the ensuing battle. And, although they shared the same missional purpose and strategic goals, they differed on how to achieve those goals, with Lee preferring an offensive approach and Longstreet preferring a defensive strategy.



General James Longstreet



General Winfield Scott Hancock

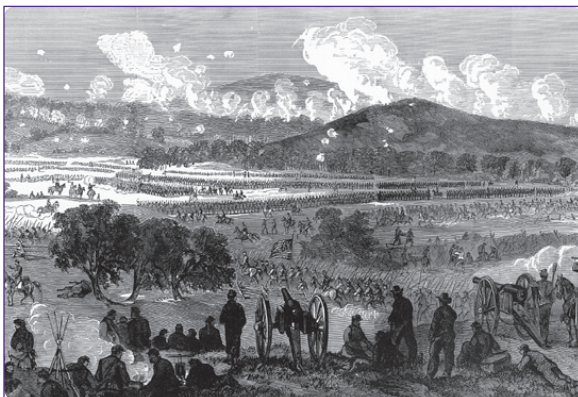
On the Union side of the battlefield, Meade was newly promoted to lead the Army of the Potomac. After the death of Reynolds on the first day of the battle, General Winfield Scott Hancock became Meade's second in command. Like Lee and Longstreet, Meade and Hancock had different temperaments and beliefs and, hence, disagreements on how to execute. How did these generals, like executives or co-workers who disagree, resolve these conflicts?

Seeking Additional Perspectives

When Meade and Hancock had different opinions on battlefield strategy, Meade brought other members of his staff into the discussion. With additional information, he ultimately followed Hancock's strategy. Meade demonstrates how seeking additional input from others is a very effective tool in resolving executive disagreements. Lee, however, did not bring others into the discussion when he and Longstreet disagreed on battlefield strategy. In hindsight, we can argue that Meade made a better decision based on what eventually occurred. But even without hindsight, it's clear that getting additional perspectives might have been helpful to Lee.

If Lee had made the decision to bring others into the discussion when he and Longstreet disagreed, would he have changed his mind? We do not know. But by broadening participation when there is executive disagreement, both parties gather more data points and inherently more insight and perspective, providing the basis for a more informed decision. As my son and I stood on the ground close to where Lee and Longstreet had their disagreement before the second day of battle, it was rather painful to know the outcome and that Lee limited his options by not seeking additional perspectives. What made the lesson very real and powerful was recognizing that thousands of lives were sacrificed as a result of one instance of failure in leadership.

Based on his extraordinary track record and the writings of his contemporaries, most historians describe Lee as a masterful leader. So why did he not seek additional perspectives? When discussing how Lee and Meade handled disagreement during the battle of Gettysburg, it is important to understand that Lee had led the Army of Northern Virginia for two years and had just achieved four successive victories against the North. Meade, on the other hand, was new to his role and had inherited an army that had not yet won a battle. This nuance is important, especially as it relates to our



The Leader's Responsibility

- Set the tone and give permission
- Invite challenge and disagreement
- Ensure participation from all
- Reaffirm all attempts at rigorous debate

industry. Many CEOs have been leading their respective organizations for many years, arguably with some success. In those situations, leaders can become accustomed to resolving executive disagreements with little if any feedback from others, especially if it seemed to work in the past.

Avoiding Confirmation Bias

There may be several reasons why Lee did not expand his discussion with Longstreet to include others. One reason Lee did not assemble his team may have been simple logistics. As the battle unfolded, the Confederate line became stretched out resulting in its leaders becoming more separated. However, another reason may have been that Lee was afraid of what he might hear. Although Longstreet tried to bring facts into the discussion, Lee disagreed with his facts. Therefore, *the facts have to be facts that people can agree on.*

Seth Godin, a wonderful thought leader and philosopher, posted a key insight on this subject in his blog, "[Don't argue about belief, argue about arguments.](#)" He says,

"The key question is, 'Is there something I can prove or demonstrate that would make you stop believing in your position (sic)?' If the honest answer is no, then we are not having an argument, are we?"

Before investing time trying to resolve a disagreement, make sure that you are not arguing against a belief system.

General Lee focused only on the facts that supported his viewpoint. This is known as "confirmation bias." A corollary to confirmation bias is "willful ignorance," which occurs when we ignore the facts that do not support our viewpoint. Confirmation bias and willful ignorance usually show up as a pair. We ignore the facts that do not support our viewpoint and cling to the facts that do support our viewpoint. This is very common among people and organizations that are experiencing enormous stress because of rapid change. All of us have been guilty of this, especially when we feel very strongly about something.

Focusing on Facts Instead of Emotion

This is a good time to mention three more tools that are useful to resolving differences of opinion. The first is to focus on facts instead of emotion. As many of us know, people often make decisions based on intuition and emotion instead of facts. I will admit that controlling my emotions when I disagree with someone may be my biggest challenge. And it blinds me to logic and facts.

This concept was made especially clear to me when I read the book, *A Righteous Mind*, by Jonathan Haidt – [a worthwhile read for every leader](#). The author is a moral psychologist who does a wonderful job of explaining why people believe what they believe and how they make decisions. We may think we use logic and reason, when in fact we make decisions based on our emotions and intuition. Haidt uses the

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The first place you have to start to create healthy conflict is to identify your own tendencies.

following metaphor to make his point. Think of your mind consisting of an elephant with a rider on top, with the rider as the logical component of your mind and the elephant as the emotional or intuitive component. Guess where the elephant goes? Wherever it wants. The rider is there to justify why the elephant is going in a certain direction. So, focusing on facts instead of emotion is yet another way to help resolve executive disagreement.

Active Listening

Active listening is another powerful tool available to resolve executive disagreement, and I encourage you to learn more about this process. I learned how to actively listen during a three-month seminar that I attended at my church. I believe this practice is one of the most helpful tools ever developed to create healthy disagreement.

A pillar of active listening, and one of its most effective techniques, is “mirroring.” Mirroring is the act of restating in your words what you think the other person is trying to communicate. This is key to clear communication, and you will be shocked by how many times the message you thought you heard is not what the person intended. A game many of us played as children illustrates this point beautifully. You sit in a circle. You relay a message to the person next to you, who tells the person next to them the same thing, until the message comes back full circle to you. What you hear when the message comes back to you is rarely the same message you told the first person. However, if people had been allowed to mirror back to each messenger what they thought they heard, it would be corrected before it went to the next person, increasing the likelihood that your original message would return to you intact.

I now use this technique in my daily life. I almost always repeat back to the person what I thought I heard, especially if I have any doubt whatsoever what the person meant by the question or statement. By using this technique, many disagreements are cleared up because the issue was a miscommunication instead of a disagreement. And even if real disagreement is present, by articulating the other person’s position in your own words, you begin to develop some emotional ownership in how that position is framed. Further, by showing that you are actively listening instead of waiting for the other person to finish talking so that you can advocate your own position, you start to develop trust. And as [leadership guru Patrick Lencioni](#) states in two of his best-selling books, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *The Advantage*, ***the first step in building a highly effective and functional team is building trust.***

Creating Common Ground

Creating common ground is the final tool available to building an environment where healthy disagreement can flourish. To create common ground, both parties agree to go back to the place where they agree and start from there. From that point of agreement, it is usually easier to build consensus than to try to move from perspectives that could be far apart. This process has a way of narrowing the gap of disagreement to the point where the gap can be bridged with a slight compromise. Going back to common ground or to the common goal also creates psychological alignment with more willingness to listen and compromise.

The primary job of every leader is to develop other leaders.

To develop leaders, you need to delegate authority, not tasks.

Barriers to Healthy Conflict

In addition to identifying tools to help build healthy conflict and disagreement, it is also important to identify emotional barriers to healthy conflict. Those barriers include guilt, resentment, the desire to be accepted or liked, discomfort, the need to be right, fear, the need to be in control, conflict intolerance and conflict avoidance. Robert E. Lee exemplified the last two. In a recent biography of Robert E. Lee, entitled [Clouds of Glory](#), Michael Korda states,

He (Lee) kept the firmest possible reign on his temper, he avoided personal confrontations of every kind, and he disliked arguments. These characteristics, normally thought of as virtues, became in fact Robert E. Lee's Achilles' heel, the one weak point in his otherwise admirable personality, and a dangerous flaw for a commander, perhaps even a flaw that would, in the end, prove fatal...

When I ask leadership experts "What is the number one cause of failed leadership?", most reply, "A lack of self-awareness." So, ***the first place you have to start to create healthy conflict is to identify your own tendencies.***

There is one side note worth mentioning. The previous discussion of this paper may give the impression that Lee was an ineffective leader. He was anything but that. In fact, despite fewer men and resources than his enemy, he continued to win battles and kept the war going for two more bloody years. Like all leaders, he made mistakes. But unlike many leaders, he owned his mistakes. After the Battle of Gettysburg, he personally apologized to his entire army and took full responsibility for the defeat there. He even submitted his resignation, but it was not accepted. ***Sometimes the greatest thing a leader can do is take responsibility for a failure.*** This reminds everyone in the organization that it is okay to take risks and that it is okay to fail, as long as the strategy is aligned with the leader's intent and the organization's objectives.

Leadership Preparedness—Jackson and Chamberlain

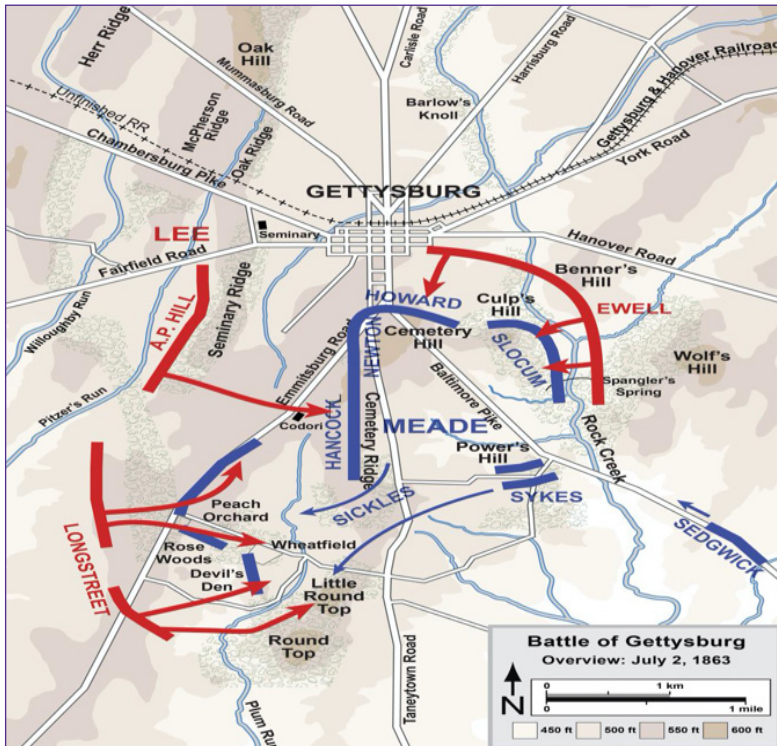
It is well documented that a large percentage of CEOs, executive directors and other C-Suite executives in the senior living industry are on the verge of retirement. How do we prepare our organizations for this wave? A more fundamental question is how do we identify potential leaders and also encourage and develop them – at all levels within the organization? One thing that the current global pandemic has done is to expose the weaknesses in many leaders and organizations. I was speaking with a CEO who admitted that her middle managers are much weaker as leaders than she had thought. The challenges of COVID-19 made it apparent that many were not prepared to make difficult decisions.

In studying the Battle of Gettysburg, it was clear that some officers were more comfortable making critical decisions during this intense battle than others. For example, two corps commanders under Lee, General Richard Ewell and General A. P. Hill, were indecisive during the battle, while Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, a Union officer who had been a rhetoric professor at Bowdoin College before the war, was

very comfortable making decisions during the heat of the battle. All three officers had been recently promoted. Why was Chamberlain ready for his new role, and yet, Hill and Ewell were not?

Both Ewell and Hill had been division commanders under General Stonewall Jackson. After Jackson's death, Lee split up Jackson's prior command into two corps and promoted each general to command one. The biggest difference between commanding a corps and commanding a division is in the types of decisions that have to be made, especially involving strategy. Jackson's leadership style evidently was very autocratic with little room for discussion or disagreement from his subordinates. He gave the orders and expected his subordinates to execute – and execute they did. While this style worked well while Jackson was there to give the orders, it did not work so well when Ewell and Hill were expected to step up and assume the same type of command. In fact, Jackson had named Ewell as his most likely successor, which meant that "succession identification" had occurred, the first step to succession planning and leadership development. However, "succession readiness" had not occurred.

Neither Ewell nor Hill had been properly prepared or coached to lead a corps. As a leader, Jackson developed followers, and as we learned, Ewell was not ready to make independent decisions. **The primary job of every leader is to develop other leaders. To develop leaders, you need to delegate authority, not tasks.** You also need to promote on potential as well as past performance. One important ingredient in well-run companies is developing a culture of leadership development.



As a colonel in the Union Army, Chamberlain did not have a huge leadership role within the Army of the Potomac, but the leadership he exhibited before the Battle of Gettysburg and during the battle itself had a huge impact on the outcome. It is a case study in how leadership can be exhibited anywhere within an organization. After the battle, Chamberlain became one of the most decorated officers within the Union Army and was personally selected by General Ulysses S. Grant to accept the surrender of Lee's army at Appomattox, Virginia. So, who was this professor of rhetoric from Maine and why was he such an exceptional leader?

Chamberlain joined the army as a lieutenant colonel and was second-in-command of the 20th Maine Regiment. As Chamberlain's superior officer, Colonel Adelbert Ames saw potential in the young lieutenant colonel and

began teaching him how to command. In fact, during the Battle of Fredericksburg, where Chamberlain received the first of six wounds he would incur during the war, Ames gave Chamberlain an opportunity to lead. Eventually, when Ames was promoted, Chamberlain was in turn promoted to command the 20th Maine Regiment just a few weeks before the Battle of Gettysburg.

Unknown to Chamberlain or the Union Army at the time, Chamberlain would make a series of decisions during the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg that arguably saved the entire Union Army from disaster. With 358 soldiers and 28 officers, he successfully defended the entire left flank of the Union Army from a series of attacks by a much larger enemy force. Known as The Battle at Little Round Top, the 20th Maine Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Chamberlain, would defend an important knoll, culminating in a dramatic downhill bayonet charge. The battle at Little Round Top subsequently became one of the most well-known actions at Gettysburg, and of the entire war. In summary, Chamberlain was prepared for this moment in history by his previous commander, representing one of the best examples of Leadership Succession and Leadership Development.

Unlike Jackson, who developed followers, Chamberlain's superior officer developed leaders, and he did it in a very natural way that was not disruptive. He did this by being "intentional." When opportunities presented themselves to develop Chamberlain as a leader, he took advantage of them. Obviously, Chamberlain exhibited natural leadership aptitude and, as a result, he was identified as Ames' successor. In contrast to Jackson, Ames practiced succession readiness. He made sure that Chamberlain was ready to assume a specific leadership role. Although Jackson did practice leadership identification, he failed to engage and encourage those same leaders in making independent decisions.

It can be threatening to leaders when their subordinates begin making independent decisions that are sometimes superior to the decisions they would have made. It's





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common for current leaders and supervisors to develop reactionary tendencies when feeling threatened, but this creates stress on organizations and often leads to less-than-ideal results and costly turnover. When that happens, the organization not only misses out on the contributions these employees could make, but also runs the risk that their natural leadership abilities may cause them to do things that are counterproductive to the organization or cause them to leave, usually to a competitor. Organizations should anticipate reactionary tendencies from leaders and ensure that current leaders do not feel threatened when they have a natural leader working under them. In fact, every organization should design a system that identifies and formally develops bench strength for each leadership position within the organization.

So, how does one identify bench strength or future leaders for possible succession? There are various ways to do this, and Chamberlain provides a wonderful example of someone who showed exceptional leadership aptitude. First, he was a continuous learner with enormous intellectual curiosity. He sought to improve himself and was not afraid to ask questions. Second, he was good at building relationships, not only with those above him but especially those who followed him. Chamberlain also had passion for what he was fighting for, and he was able to transfer that passion to others. Finally, he led by example.

As our leadership retreat group stood on that sacred spot in American history, known as Little Round Top, I believe we realized that ***Chamberlain was the complete package, a true servant leader.***

Speaking from experience, I was not ready for the early leadership positions in which I was placed. I was not taught the importance of group alignment, successfully mediating conflict, or developing leaders from within. I learned the hard way – from my many failures. We owe it to the organizations we serve, and more importantly to those with whom we work, to learn effective leadership techniques and to teach those same techniques to others in our organizations.

There are hundreds if not thousands of books on leadership, and most have something valuable to communicate. As I participated in this powerful and valuable experience in Gettysburg, I realized that keeping things simple is the key to making ideas stick. So, if organizations can practice the three ***A's – Align, Argue, and Affirm***, by creating Group Alignment, by Arguing constructively and with respect, and Affirming future leaders by practicing succession readiness, they can be successful and will remain successful. 