

## Civil War Book Review

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Article 1

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### Lee & Grant: Profiles in Leadership From the Battlefields of Virginia

Charles R. Bowery Jr.

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## **Interview**

### **LEE & GRANT:PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP FROM THE BATTLEFIELDS OF VIRGINIA**

**Bowery Jr., Charles R.**

**Summer 2005**

#### The Civil War and the Corporate World

#### Learning Business Management from Lee and Grant

Adding to the growing pile of business management gimmicks, this debut book by an active duty U.S. Army officer is a rather ordinary knock-off of the current trend in creating business and management leadership lessons from historical events.

In this case, author Charles Bowery uses the Civil War actions of Generals Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant in the 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia to show how battlefield leadership can be applied to corporate boardroom leadership. This is by no means an original idea. At least two other authors have already written books about Civil War leadership lessons as they apply to business.

Tom Wheeler's *Leadership Lessons from the Civil War: Winning Strategies for Today's Managers* (Doubleday, 1999) is probably the most informative, useful, entertaining, and well-written of these books. Al Kaltman's *Cigars, Whiskey, & Winning: Leadership Lessons From General Ulysses S. Grant* (Prentic Hall, 1998) is long on anecdotal history about Grant, but short on utility.

Bowery is an Army major, a helicopter pilot who has taught history at the United States Military Academy, and is a Civil War buff. His effort here is an uneven mix of Civil War history and analysis, U.S. Army leadership manual jargon, and short lectures on how to be a better manager.

Bowery has selected the 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia as the period that best illustrates the leadership qualities of the Civil War's two best generals,

Grant and Lee. He describes the strategic, operational, and tactical decision-making of both men as they maneuvered large armies and fought some of the war's bloodiest battles.

The horrific battles of the Wilderness (5-6 May), Spotsylvania (8-21 May), North Anna (23-26 May) and Cold Harbor (31 May-3 June) are featured, as Bowery analyzes Grant's and Lee's leadership techniques, both good and bad (and there were plenty of bad decisions made by both men). Each chapter provides the historical background of each battle and highlights the generals' thoughts, decisions, and actions relating to resources, personnel, objectives, intent, command relationships, subordinates, communications, and the grisly results.

Occasionally, Bowery adds a modern day business anecdote to illustrate a point, and each chapter concludes with a recap of the leadership lessons discussed in that chapter. With Grant and Lee as his examples he explains the U.S. Army's definitions of leadership styles, skills, and activities, using frequent sidebars taken right out of Army leadership manuals. There are lots of lists and pithy quotes, as well as the predictable and uninspired Do's and Don't's (Stay the course, Turn vision into action, etc.).

As a business/management primer this book offers nothing new. The corporate connections are too pat, too obvious, and too fundamental to be of much use or interest to anyone with any business experience at all. Other books on the leadership lessons of Attila the Hun, Jesus, and Star Trek are cute gimmicks, too, and are just about as useful.

However, that said, Bowery does an excellent job with his portrayals of the leadership styles of both Grant and Lee, especially his descriptions of how they handled (or mishandled) subordinates who did not measure up. Lee, for example, was not a screamer: "When a man makes a mistake, I call him to my tent, talk to him, and use the authority of my position to make him do the right thing the next time." Bowery also dramatically describes the commanders' necessary and frequent shifts between directing, delegating, and participatory leadership.

He smartly points out how by 1864 the war had changed significantly from the heady days of victory and defeat of 1861-1862. Both generals recognized this and had to adapt their leadership styles to very different circumstances (Lee had to deal with less competent subordinates, and Grant had to adopt a more strategic

approach to his thinking). Bowery also refreshingly discusses the uncharacteristic leadership mistakes each man made, mistakes that denied them victories. Bowery uses the Wilderness to show how Grant had a good plan that was poorly executed, and Lee had a bad plan that was brilliantly executed. The result was an indecisive and bloody slugfest.

Despite being poorly served by sorry reproductions of barely legible maps, the historical Civil War narrative is vivid and crisply written, and its leadership lessons would be better understood and most applicable to a military audience.

For more reading on Civil War leadership, command, and staff functioning, see R. Steven Jones's *The Right Hand of Command: Use & Disuse of Personal Staffs in the Civil War*, Steven E. Woodworth's *No Band of Brothers: Problems of the Rebel High Command*, and J. Boone Bartholomees's *Buff Facings and Gilt Buttons: Staff and Headquarters Operations in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865*.

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