

*“A first-class primer on
the elusive subject of leadership,
punctuated with stirring examples
from both the military and civilian worlds.”*

GENERAL H. NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF, USA (RET.)

The Stuff of

HEROES

*The Eight
Universal Laws
of Leadership*

WILLIAM A. COHEN, PH.D., MAJOR GENERAL, USAFR,



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HEROES

*“A must-read by aspiring leaders
in and out of uniform.”*

GENERAL ALEXANDER HAIG, JR.,
FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF, U.S. AIR FORCE

What does it take to be an outstanding leader? Creative genius? A tough image? Charismatic charm? No, it's much simpler. But it's also much harder.

In *The Stuff of Heroes*, Dr. William A. Cohen takes an eye-opening look at how the difficult lessons learned by leaders in combat yield dramatic results in the business world. Dr. Cohen finds military leaders invariably use eight basic principles from their battlefield experience to achieve extraordinary success in their business careers.

Do you have what it takes? Are you willing to do what is right even when no one is looking? That's the essence of universal law number one – what Peter Drucker calls Cohen's “root law.” *Integrity* is a simple concept, but Dr. Cohen brings it to dramatic life with stirring tales from combat, and he demonstrates its complexity in the real life of business.

This book will show you how to develop and put to use principles such as “know your stuff,” “declare your expectations,” “show uncommon commitment,” “expect positive results,” and “get out in front.” Let Dr. Cohen's practical advice and pointed anecdotes from leaders who have passed the test inspire and engage you. The benefits to both your organization and your personal and professional life will be tremendous.







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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALL THOSE WHO
PRACTICE THE STUFF OF HEROES, WHETHER
THEY PRACTICE IT IN UNIFORM OR IN
CIVILIAN DRESS.**



FOREWORD

GENERAL RONALD R. FOGLEMAN, USAF (Ret.)
Former Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

I am normally very suspicious of the whole genre of short special-topic books purporting to distill very complex subjects into a few basic laws or principles. So many of these books have been written on the subject of leadership that producing a first-rate, innovative, and substantive work would be a major challenge for anyone. With *The Stuff of Heroes*, Dr. Bill Cohen succeeds in not only producing a great primer on “the eight universal laws of leadership,” but through his methodology and presentation the book becomes a well-told story of great adventure. From both successes and failures on the battlefield come revelations applicable to the modern corporate world.

Having been exposed to this work in draft form, I could not wait for it to be completed. I have been using material from the draft in speeches and presentations for the past six months. At the same time, I am not sure whether eight is the precise number of laws of leadership one needs to study and practice. Depending on how you might package the principles or laws, the number will vary. However, Dr. Cohen has done a meticulous job of researching the subject and certainly addresses the key elements in a comprehensive way. There is no doubt that his listing of integrity as the first principle is right on target. The demonstration of absolute integrity in professional relationships remains the singularly defining attribute of any leader. Leaders with integrity may come up short on one or another of the laws and still succeed, but nothing will undermine an organization more quickly than to have its leader be found wanting in the area of integrity. From the introduction through the epilogue the reader and/or student is exposed to each of the eight laws in a refreshing way that should have a lasting impact.

Moreover, Cohen does not stop at stating and explaining the laws he has uncovered or in dramatizing their application through real business and military examples. He takes that

important extra step and tells the reader exactly how to follow each law. For the crucial law of maintaining absolute integrity, he explains four ways to do this: keep your word, chase the harder right over the easier wrong, guard your principles, and do the right thing. To know your stuff, he shows how this means knowing your people, learning from the bottom up, learning from every experience, learning from your subordinates, and never ceasing to learn. He shows us six ways to declare our expectations, five ways to show uncommon commitment, four ways to expect positive results, five ways to take care of our people, five ways to put duty before self, and five ways to get out in front. That's thirty-nine separate lessons on implementing the eight universal laws. The professor has served up a full course of instruction for the most demanding palate!

In earlier works, Dr. Cohen demonstrated how military leadership principles could be applied to all organizations. In this book he goes to the next level by examining not just what was successful for any given military leader, but what traits and actions provided the foundation for that success throughout the history of warfare. His use of the combination of survey and interviews resulted in the conclusions he presents in the book. Because of his background as a professional airman-scholar, Bill Cohen is uniquely qualified to interpret and present the findings. The richness of his research and details of his narrative will make this book a valuable addition to any aspiring leader's library and a superb tool in any case study presentation of the subject.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE STUFF OF HEROES IS ALL ABOUT

No man is a leader until his appointment is ratified in the minds and hearts of his men.

—Anonymous, *The Infantry Journal*

There are many books on leadership. And many books based on leadership in battle. But this one is different. Unlike others, this is not a “business is war” book. Like my earlier book, *The Art of the Leader* (Prentice Hall, 1990), it is a “swords into plowshares” book. In *The Art of the Leader*, I explain how to take various military leadership techniques and apply them to all organizations.

I wrote that book just before Operation Desert Storm. Even then, it was far from the first book on military leadership. Thirty years earlier, my professor, friend, and mentor Peter F. Drucker wrote that the first systematic book on leadership was written by Xenophon two thousand years earlier and was still the best on the subject.¹ Xenophon described leadership during a five-month campaign in which he and others led ten thousand men in a retreat from Babylon to the Black Sea, though surrounded by a hostile and numerically superior foe.

If a book describing military leadership written more than two thousand years ago is so powerful that it attracts the recommendation of probably the greatest management thinker of our time, the subject is worthy of deeper exploration. But why? Conventional wisdom is that military leadership is bad, not good. However, as Peter Drucker is so fond of saying, “What everybody knows is usually wrong.”

The battlefield probably represents the greatest challenge for any leader. In combat, conditions are severe. There are terrible hazards. There are poor “working conditions.” There is probably greater uncertainty than in any other type of human activity.

As Drucker pointed out to me at a recent meeting, “In no other type of leadership must the leader make decisions based on less, or less reliable, information.”² “Workers” may need to perform their duties with little food and irregular sleep. All must take great risks. Most followers and leaders alike would prefer to be somewhere else and doing something else.

While there are true military geniuses in battle, the vast majority, as in most organizations, are ordinary men and women. Not all are suited to their jobs. Professional or amateur, all are stressed far more than in any civilian situation or occupation. Moreover, leaders must not only carry out the mission, but do their best to protect the lives of those they lead at the same time. So battle probably represents a “worst-case” condition. No wonder such traditional motivators as high pay, good benefits, and job security aren’t much good. There is no “business as usual” on the battlefield.

To some, military leadership is not something to emulate. It means running around shouting orders as in a Hollywood movie. It means obeying stupid orders simply because someone else is in authority. But those who have been there know better. Sure, as in any organization, there are some combat leaders who do a poor job. They operate as martinets and provide the models for those who seek to ridicule anything military. However, the vast majority of combat leaders are not of that mold. Instead, these leader-heroes enable ordinary people to routinely accomplish the extraordinary. In battle situations, leaders help their followers reach difficult goals and complete arduous tasks. People in combat cannot be managed. They must be led. And in leading under terrible conditions, successful combat leaders have built amazing organizations that have gotten things done ethically, honestly, and for the most part humanely.

Although I appreciate the value of what I personally learned about leadership in battle, which formed the basis of most of my recommendations in my first book on leadership, I wondered whether there were underlying principles or lessons of warfare that were at the root of all leadership success.

Without question, such lessons are desperately need

