

# The Prince Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Prince is a 16th century political treatise, famous for condoning, even encouraging evil behavior amongst political rulers, in order for them to stay in power.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Have you ever read the word “Machiavellian” in the news somewhere? It pops up all the time. Here are some headlines from the past few months: “Will Machiavellian tactics prevail?” “Leaked Soros foundation docs reveal Machiavellian agenda” and “Erdogan, the Machiavellian ‘Prince’ of Istanbul.”

For years I didn’t know what it meant, just that it had some kind of negative connotation and that it was often mentioned when talking about political tyrants. I remembered hearing it a lot during my 2Pac music phase in 2007. Today I learned what it’s *really* about.

The term goes back to 16th century philosopher, politician, historian and writer Niccolò Machiavelli, who wrote a book in 1513 entitled *The Prince*, in which he describes how political rulers can use both good and evil to rule their principalities. Over time his last name has been turned into an adjective to describe unscrupulous and immoral political behavior. The reason 2Pac adopted it as his rap name, ‘Makaveli,’ is that he studied the book extensively in prison.

However, the book isn’t all evil, that’s an exaggeration. To make the lessons from it more useful, I picked some that are more positive and can be translated to business today.

Here are 3 lessons from *The Prince*:

1. Countries can be easy to conquer, but hard to rule, or vice versa – and markets are the same.

2. To protect a country it needs its own army, not mercenaries. The same holds true for businesses.
3. If you want to run a business, you have to assemble your advisors and know when to listen to them.

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## Lesson 1: Countries that are easy to conquer are hard to rule and the other way around – so are modern markets.

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This distinction is interesting and I'd never thought of it that way.

Machiavelli describes the example of Persia, which, in 323 BC when Alexander the Great died, had no governing ruler. One of his generals soon took over, but the Macedonians expected to lose control of the country they'd previously conquered quite quickly. In the end, they maintained power for another five decades.

This was due to the *ruler-servant system* in place in Persia before, because Darius III had crushed all political enemies in the country and gotten institutions and leaders to become loyal followers. This made the country very hard to conquer, but once Alexander had control, there were no autonomous regions or rulers left to challenge him for the throne.

Thinking the other way around, a country like France with a *ruler-baron system*, where the king relies on barons running municipalities is inherently unstable and thus easy to conquer – but hard to rule.

**Transferring this lesson to business, you can see the similarity to modern markets.** A new market with very few players is easier to dominate, but it's very hard to keep this dominance, because of all the competition that comes after you, once they've discovered it's a good market.

On the other hand, if you enter a very competitive market, it's hard to become the industry leader – but once you do, you'll likely stay ahead for longer, because less new parties enter after you.

## Lesson 2: For a country to be properly protected it must have its own army, just like businesses need their own employees.

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There are lots of ways to build an army and Machiavelli explains why some are better than others.

For example, hiring mercenaries – soldiers that simply fight for the money you pay them – might be an okay solution for conquering other countries, but not for protecting your own. Since all they care about is money they'll run away quite fast when things get tough, because even the best salary isn't worth dying for. A capable mercenary general, who *can* lead his troops into

tough battle, however, might realize he can just as well lead them to fight against *you*. Since mercenaries are loyal only to money, they'll empty your pockets in times of peace and be useless in times of war.

The same holds true for auxiliary troops from fellow states, who tend to occupy your country after a victory in battle against a common enemy. What good are an ally's helping troops if they never leave?

**Just like a good country, a good business needs its own army** . Many businesses today try to rely only on freelancers and temp workers – but those aren't very invested in your business. If you really want to build something for the long term, you need to commit by hiring for it, and your employees will commit to you too.

### Lesson 3: To be a good business leader, pick your advisors well and know when to listen and when to ignore them.

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Nobody knows everything. Every leader needs advisors to complement the areas in which he lacks skills. As a CEO who's good in finance and strategy, it's your job to pick great advisors in marketing and sales. You know what you're good at, so only you can pick the right people to help with those things you can't do.

You'll also have to keep an eye on your advisors. While it's important to reward those who honestly and loyally serve you, sometimes advisors start scheming their way into power if your interests aren't aligned any longer.

But **the most important part about having advisors is getting them to honestly speak their minds and knowing when to ignore them.**

If all they do is schmooze you or avoid speaking up, there's something going on. In the same vein, you can't just constantly take advice, for soon everyone will think they can make your decisions. Sometimes even the best advice needs to be ignored.

Having a board of directors and advisors is important – but ultimately you call the shots.

## The Prince Review

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I don't think this book is all bad. After reading the summary on Blinkist, it seems to me that most of the advice is actually very balanced – people just exaggerate it to the negative side. Yes, the practices *The Prince* describes are somewhat questionable, but nobody said it was a how-to book. Think of it as a description and criticism of the status quo at the time and you won't run the risk of becoming a "Machiavellian prince" yourself.

[Read full summary on Blinkist >>](#)

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why all princes must make their people feel valued and protected
- How both luck and courage are useless without one another
- What makes cruelty more efficient than being popular, but why the latter is much more sustainable
- Why all leaders must master the art of war
- The reason rulers should be stingy with money
- How fear can help you stay in power, but mustn't get you hated
- Why it's better to have true friends and clear enemies than something in-between
- How much of your "fate" is really up to you

## Who would I recommend The Prince summary to?

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The 22 year old politics major, the 31 year old startup founder, and anyone who loves 2Pac's music.