AVOID THE SNARES OF GROUPTHINK

THE COMMAND-AND-CONTROL STRATEGY

The problem in leading any group is that people inevitably have their own agendas. If you are too authoritarian, they will resent you and rebel in silent ways. If you are too easygoing, they will revert to their natural selfishness and you will lose control. You have to create a chain of command in which people do not feel constrained by your influence yet follow your lead. Put the right people in place--people who will enact the spirit of your ideas without being automatons. Make your commands clear and inspiring, focusing attention on the team, not the leader. Create a sense of participation, but do not fall into Groupthink--the irrationality of collective decision making. Make yourself look like a paragon of fairness, but never relinquish unity of command.

> *How very different is the cohesion between that of an army rallying around one flag carried into battle at the personal command of one general and that of an allied military force extending 50 or 100 leagues, or even on different sides of the theater! In the first case, cohesion is at its strongest and unity at its closest. In the second case, the unity is very remote, often consisting of no more than a shared political intention, and therefore only scanty and imperfect, while the cohesion of the parts is mostly weak and often no more than an illusion.*
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> *ON WAR*, CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

THE BROKEN CHAIN

World War I began in August 1914, and by the end of that year, all along the Western Front, the British and French were caught in a deadly stalemate with the Germans. Meanwhile, though, on the Eastern Front, Germany was badly beating the Russians, allies of Britain and France. Britain's military leaders had to try a new strategy, and their plan, backed by First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill and others, was to stage an attack on Gallipoli, a peninsula on Turkey's Dardanelles Strait. Turkey was an ally of Germany's, and the Dardanelles was the gateway to Constantinople, the Turkish capital (present-day Istanbul). If the Allies could take Gallipoli, Constantinople would follow, and Turkey would have to leave the war. In addition, using bases in Turkey and the Balkans, the

Allies could attack Germany from the southeast, dividing its armies and weakening its ability to fight on the Western Front. They would also have a clear supply line to Russia. Victory at Gallipoli would change the course of the war.

The plan was approved, and in March 1915, General Sir Ian Hamilton was named to lead the campaign. Hamilton, at sixty-two, was an able strategist and an experienced commander. He and Churchill felt certain that their forces, including Australians and New Zealanders, would out-match the Turks. Churchill's orders were simple: take Constantinople. He left the details to the general.

Hamilton's plan was to land at three points on the southwestern tip of the Gallipoli peninsula, secure the beaches, and sweep north. The landings took place on April 27. From the beginning almost everything went wrong: the army's maps were inaccurate, its troops landed in the wrong places, the beaches were much narrower than expected. Worst of all, the Turks fought back unexpectedly fiercely and well. At the end of the first day, most of the Allies' 70,000 men had landed, but they were unable to advance beyond the beaches, where the Turks would hold them pinned down for several weeks. It was another stalemate; Gallipoli had become a disaster.

All seemed lost, but in June, Churchill convinced the government to send more troops and Hamilton devised a new plan. He would land 20,000 men at Suvla Bay, some twenty miles to the north. Suvla was a vulnerable target: it had a large harbor, the terrain was lowlying and easy, and it was defended by only a handful of Turks. An invasion here would force the Turks to divide their forces, freeing up the Allied armies to the south. The stalemate would be broken, and Gallipoli would fall.

To command the Suvla operation Hamilton was forced to accept the most senior Englishman available for the job, Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Stopford. Under him, Major General Frederick Hammersley would lead the Eleventh Division. Neither of these men was Hamilton's first choice. Stopford, a sixty-one-year-old military teacher, had never led troops in war and saw artillery bombardment as the only way to win a battle; he was also in poor health. Hammersley, for his part, had suffered a nervous breakdown the previous year.

In war it is not men, but the man, that counts.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, 1769-1821

Hamilton's style was to tell his officers the purpose of an upcoming battle but leave it to them how to bring it about. He was a gentleman, never blunt or forceful. At one of their first meetings, for example, Stopford requested changes

in the landing plans to reduce risk. Hamilton politely deferred to him.

Hamilton did have one request. Once the Turks knew of the landings at Suvla, they would rush in reinforcements. As soon as the Allies were ashore, then, Hamilton wanted them to advance immediately to a range of hills four miles inland, called Tekke Tepe, and to get there before the Turks. From Tekke Tepe the Allies would dominate the peninsula. The order was simple enough, but Hamilton, so as not to offend his subordinate, expressed it in the most general terms. Most crucially, he specified no time frame. He was sufficiently vague that Stopford completely misinterpreted him: instead of trying to reach Tekke Tepe "as soon as possible," Stopford thought he should advance to the hills "if possible." That was the order he gave Hammersley. And as Hammersley, nervous about the whole campaign, passed it down to his colonels, the order became less urgent and vaguer still.

Also, despite his deference to Stopford, Hamilton overruled the lieutenant general in one respect: he denied a request for more artillery bombardments to loosen up the Turks. Stopford's troops would outnumber the Turks at Suvla ten to one, Hamilton replied; more artillery was superfluous.

The attack began in the early morning of August 7. Once again much turned bad: Stopford's changes in the landing plans made a mess. As his officers came ashore, they began to argue, uncertain about their positions and objectives. They sent messengers to ask their next step: Advance? Consolidate? Hammersley had no answers. Stopford had stayed on a boat offshore, from which to control the battlefield--but on that boat he was impossible to reach quickly enough to get prompt orders from him. Hamilton was on an island still farther away. The day was frittered away in argument and the endless relaying of messages.

The next morning Hamilton began to sense that something had gone very wrong. From reconnaissance aircraft he knew that the flat land around Suvla was essentially empty and undefended; the way to Tekke Tepe was open--the troops had only to march--but they were staying where they were. Hamilton decided to visit the front himself. Reaching Stopford's boat late that afternoon, he found the general in a self-congratulatory mood: all 20,000 men had gotten ashore. No, he had not yet ordered the troops to advance to the hills; without artillery he was afraid the Turks might counterattack, and he needed the day to consolidate his positions and to land supplies. Hamilton strained to control himself: he had heard an hour earlier that Turkish reinforcements had been seen hurrying toward Suvla. The Allies would have to secure Tekke Tepe this evening, he said--but Stopford was against a night march. Too dangerous. Hamilton retained his cool and politely excused himself.

Any army is like a horse, in that it reflects the temper and the spirit of its rider. If there is an uneasiness and an uncertainty, it transmits itself through the reins, and the horse feels uneasy and uncertain.

LONE STAR PREACHER, COLONEL JOHN W. THOMASON, JR., 1941

In near panic, Hamilton decided to visit Hammersley at Suvla. Much to his dismay, he found the army lounging on the beach as if it were a bank holiday. He finally located Hammersley--he was at the far end of the bay, busily supervising the building of his temporary headquarters. Asked why he had failed to secure the hills, Hammersley replied that he had sent several brigades for the purpose, but they had encountered Turkish artillery and his colonels had told him they could not advance without more instructions. Communications between Hammersley, Stopford, and the colonels in the field were taking forever, and when Stopford had finally been reached, he had sent the message back to Hammersley to proceed cautiously, rest his men, and wait to advance until the next day. Hamilton could control himself no longer: a handful of Turks with a few guns were holding up an army of 20,000 men from marching a mere four miles! Tomorrow morning would be too late; the Turkish reinforcements were on their way. Although it was already night, Hamilton ordered Hammersley to send a brigade immediately to Tekke Tepe. It would be a race to the finish.

Hamilton returned to a boat in the harbor to monitor the situation. At sunrise the next morning, he watched the battlefield through binoculars--and saw, to his horror, the Allied troops in headlong retreat to Suvla. A large Turkish force had arrived at Tekke Tepe thirty minutes before them. In the next few days, the Turks managed to regain the flats around Suvla and to pin Hamilton's army on the beach. Some four months later, the Allies gave up their attack on Gallipoli and evacuated their troops.

Interpretation

In planning the invasion at Suvla, Hamilton thought of everything. He understood the need for surprise, deceiving the Turks about the landing site. He mastered the logistical details of a complex amphibious assault. Locating the key point--Tekke Tepe--from which the Allies could break the stalemate in Gallipoli, he crafted an excellent strategy to get there. He even tried to prepare for the kind of unexpected contingencies that can always happen in battle. But he ignored the one thing closest to him: the chain of command, and the circuit of communications by which orders, information, and decisions would circulate back and forth. He was dependent on that circuit to give him control of the situation and allow him to execute his strategy.

The first links in the chain of command were Stopford and Hammersley. Both men were terrified of risk, and Hamilton failed to adapt himself to their weakness: his order to reach Tekke Tepe was polite, civilized, and unforceful, and Stopford and Hammersley interpreted it according to their fears. They saw Tekke Tepe as a possible goal to aim for once the beaches were secured.

The next links in the chain were the colonels who were to lead the assault on Tekke Tepe. They had no contact with Hamilton on his island or with Stopford on his boat, and Hammersley was too overwhelmed to lead them. They themselves were terrified of acting on their own and maybe messing up a plan they had never understood; they hesitated at every step. Below the colonels were officers and soldiers who, without leadership, were left wandering on the beach like lost ants. Vagueness at the top turned into confusion and lethargy at the bottom. Success depended on the speed with which information could pass in both directions along the chain of command, so that Hamilton could understand what was happening and adapt faster than the enemy. The chain was broken, and Gallipoli was lost.

When a failure like this happens, when a golden opportunity slips through your fingers, you naturally look for a cause. Maybe you blame your incompetent officers, your faulty technology, your flawed intelligence. But that is to look at the world backward; it ensures more failure. The truth is that everything starts from the top. What determines your failure or success is your style of leadership and the chain of command that you design. If your orders are vague and halfhearted, by the time they reach the field they will be meaningless. Let people work unsupervised and they will revert to their natural selfishness: they will see in your orders what they want to see, and their behavior will promote their own interests.

Unless you adapt your leadership style to the weaknesses of the people in your group, you will almost certainly end up with a break in the chain of command. Information in the field will reach you too slowly. A proper chain of command, and the control it brings you, is not an accident; it is your creation, a work of art that requires constant attention and care. Ignore it at your peril.

For what the leaders are, that, as a rule, will the men below them be.

--Xenophon (430?-355? B.C.)

REMOTE CONTROL

In the late 1930s, U.S. Brigadier General George C. Marshall (1880-1958) preached the need for major military reform. The army had too few soldiers, they were badly trained, current doctrine was ill suited to modern technology--

the list of problems went on. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had to select his next army chief of staff. The appointment was critical: World War II had begun in Europe, and Roosevelt believed that the United States was sure to get involved. He understood the need for military reform, so he bypassed generals with more seniority and experience and chose Marshall for the job.

The appointment was a curse in disguise, for the War Department was hopelessly dysfunctional. Many of its generals had monstrous egos and the power to impose their way of doing things. Senior officers, instead of retiring, took jobs in the department, amassing power bases and fiefdoms that they did everything they could to protect. A place of feuds, waste, communication breakdowns, and overlapping jobs, the department was a mess. How could Marshall revamp the army for global war if he could not control it? How could he create order and efficiency?

> *What must be the result of an operation which is but partially understood by the commander, since it is not his own conception? I have undergone a pitiable experience as prompter at headquarters, and no one has a better appreciation of the value of such services than myself; and it is particularly in a council of war that such a part is absurd. The greater the number and the higher the rank of the military officers who compose the council, the more difficult will it be to accomplish the triumph of truth and reason, however small be the amount of dissent. What would have been the action of a council of war to which Napoleon proposed the movement of Arcola, the crossing of the Saint-Bernard, the maneuver at Ulm, or that at Gera and Jena? The timid would have regarded them as rash, even to madness, others would have seen a thousand difficulties of execution, and all would have concurred in rejecting them; and if, on the contrary, they had been adopted, and had been executed by any one but Napoleon, would they not certainly have proved failures?*
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> BARON ANTOINE-HENRI DE JOMINI, 1779-1869

Some ten years earlier, Marshall had served as the assistant commander of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he had trained many officers. Throughout his time there, he had kept a notebook in which he recorded the names of promising young men. Soon after becoming chief of staff, Marshall began to retire the older officers in the War Department and replace them with these younger men whom he had personally trained. These officers were ambitious, they shared his desire for reform, and he encouraged them to speak their minds and show initiative. They included men like Omar Bradley and Mark Clark, who would be crucial in World War II, but no one was more important

than the protege Marshall spent the most time on: Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The relationship began a few days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, when Marshall asked Eisenhower, then a colonel, to prepare a report on what should be done in the Far East. The report showed Marshall that Eisenhower shared his ideas on how to run the war. For the next few months, he kept Eisenhower in the War Plans Division and watched him closely: the two men met every day, and in that time Eisenhower soaked up Marshall's style of leadership, his way of getting things done. Marshall tested Eisenhower's patience by indicating that he planned to keep him in Washington instead of giving him the field assignment that he desperately wanted. The colonel passed the test. Much like Marshall himself, he got along well with other officers yet was quietly forceful.

In July 1942, as the Americans prepared to enter the war by fighting alongside the British in North Africa, Marshall surprised one and all by naming Eisenhower commander in the European Theater of Operations. Eisenhower was by this time a lieutenant general but was still relatively unknown, and in his first few months in the job, as the Americans fared poorly in North Africa, the British clamored for a replacement. But Marshall stood by his man, offering him advice and encouragement. One key suggestion was for Eisenhower to develop a protege, much as Marshall had with him--a kind of roving deputy who thought the way he did and would act as his go-between with subordinates. Marshall's suggestion for the post was Major General Bradley, a man he knew well; Eisenhower accepted the idea, essentially duplicating the staff structure that Marshall had created in the War Department. With Bradley in place, Marshall left Eisenhower alone.

Marshall positioned his proteges throughout the War Department, where they quietly spread his way of doing things. To make the task easier, he cut the waste in the department with utter ruthlessness, reducing from sixty to six the number of deputies who reported to him. Marshall hated excess; his reports to Roosevelt made him famous for his ability to summarize a complex situation in a few pages. The six men who reported to him found that any report that lasted a page too long simply went unread. He would listen to their oral presentations with rapt attention, but the minute they wandered from the topic or said something not thought through, he would look away, bored, uninterested. It was an expression they dreaded: without saying a word, he had made it known that they had displeased him and it was time for them to leave. Marshall's six deputies began to think like him and to demand from those who reported to them the efficiency and streamlined communications style he demanded of them. The speed of the information flow up and down the line was now quadrupled.

"Do you think every Greek here can be a king? It's no good having a carload of commanders. We need One commander, one king, the one to whom Zeus, Son of Cronus the crooked, has given the staff And the right to make decisions for his people." And so Odysseus mastered the army. The men all Streamed back from their ships and huts and assembled With a roar.

THE ILIAD, HOMER, CIRCA NINTH CENTURY B.C.

Marshall exuded authority but never yelled and never challenged men frontally. He had a knack for communicating his wishes indirectly--a skill that was all the more effective since it made his officers think about what he meant. Brigadier General Leslie R. Groves, the military director of the project to develop the atom bomb, once came to Marshall's office to get him to sign off on $100 million in expenditures. Finding the chief of staff engrossed in paperwork, he waited while Marshall diligently compared documents and made notes. Finally Marshall put down his pen, examined the $100 million request, signed it, and returned it to Groves without a word. The general thanked him and was turning to leave when Marshall finally spoke: "It may interest you to know what I was doing: I was writing the check for $3.52 for grass seed for my lawn."

The thousands who worked under Marshall, whether in the War Department or abroad in the field, did not have to see him personally to feel his presence. They felt it in the terse but insightful reports that reached them from his deputies, in the speed of the responses to their questions and requests, in the department's efficiency and team spirit. They felt it in the leadership style of men like Eisenhower, who had absorbed Marshall's diplomatic yet forceful way of doing things. In a few short years, Marshall transformed the War Department and the U.S. Army. Few really understood how he had done it.

Interpretation

When Marshall became chief of staff, he knew that he would have to hold himself back. The temptation was to do combat with everyone in every problem area: the recalcitrance of the generals, the political feuds, the layers of waste. But Marshall was too smart to give in to that temptation. First, there were too many battles to fight, and they would exhaust him. He'd get frustrated, lose time, and probably give himself a heart attack. Second, by trying to micromanage the department, he would become embroiled in petty entanglements and lose sight of the larger picture. And finally he would come across as a bully. The only way to slay this many-headed monster, Marshall knew, was to step back. He had to rule

indirectly through others, controlling with such a light touch that no one would realize how thoroughly he dominated.

> *Reports gathered and presented by the General Staff, on the one hand, and by the Statistical Bureau, on the other, thus constituted the most important sources of information at Napoleon's disposal. Climbing through the chain of command, however, such reports tend to become less and less specific; the more numerous the stages through which they pass and the more standardized the form in which they are presented, the greater the danger that they will become so heavily profiled (and possibly sugar-coated or merely distorted by the many summaries) as to become almost meaningless. To guard against this danger and to keep subordinates on their toes, a commander needs to have in addition a kind of directed telescope--the metaphor is an apt one--which he can direct, at will, at any part of the enemy's forces, the terrain, or his own army in order to bring in information that is not only less structured than that passed on by the normal channels but also tailored to meet his momentary (and specific) needs. Ideally, the regular reporting system should tell the commander which questions to ask, and the directed telescope should enable him to answer those questions. It was the two systems together, cutting across each other and wielded by Napoleon's masterful hand, which made the revolution in command possible.*
>
> *COMMAND IN WAR*, MARTIN VAN CREVELD, 1985

The key to Marshall's strategy was his selection, grooming, and placement of his proteges. He metaphorically cloned himself in these men, who enacted the spirit of his reforms on his behalf, saving him time and making him appear not as a manipulator but as a delegator. His cutting of waste was heavy-handed at first, but once he put his stamp on the department, it began to run efficiently on its own--fewer people to deal with, fewer irrelevant reports to read, less wasted time on every level. This streamlining achieved, Marshall could guide the machine with a lighter touch. The political types who were clogging the chain of command were either retired or joined in the team spirit he infused. His indirect style of communicating amused some of his staff, but it was actually a highly effective way of asserting his authority. An officer might go home chuckling about finding Marshall fussing over a gardening bill, but it would slowly dawn on him that if he wasted a penny, his boss would know.

Like the War Department that Marshall inherited, today's world is complex and chaotic. It is harder than ever to exercise control through a chain of command. You cannot supervise everything yourself; you cannot keep your eye

on everyone. Being seen as a dictator will do you harm, but if you submit to complexity and let go of the chain of command, chaos will consume you.

The solution is to do as Marshall did: operate through a kind of remote control. Hire deputies who share your vision but can think on their own, acting as you would in their place. Instead of wasting time negotiating with every difficult person, work on spreading a spirit of camaraderie and efficiency that becomes self-policing. Streamline the organization, cutting out waste--in staff, in the irrelevant reports on your desk, in pointless meetings. The less attention you spend on petty details, the more time you will have for the larger picture, for asserting your authority generally and indirectly. People will follow your lead without feeling bullied. That is the ultimate in control.

Madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups.
--Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

KEYS TO WARFARE

Now more than ever, effective leadership requires a deft and subtle touch. The reason is simple: we have grown more distrustful of authority. At the same time, almost all of us imagine ourselves as authorities in our own right--officers, not foot soldiers. Feeling the need to assert themselves, people today put their own interests before the team. Group unity is fragile and can easily crack.

These trends affect leaders in ways they barely know. The tendency is to give more power to the group: wanting to seem democratic, leaders poll the whole staff for opinions, let the group make decisions, give subordinates input into the crafting of an overall strategy. Without realizing it, these leaders are letting the politics of the day seduce them into violating one of the most important rules of warfare and leadership: unity of command. Before it is too late, learn the lessons of war: divided leadership is a recipe for disaster, the cause of the greatest military defeats in history.

Among the foremost of these defeats was the Battle of Cannae, in 216 B.C., between the Romans and the Carthaginians led by Hannibal. The Romans outnumbered the Carthaginians two to one but were virtually annihilated in a perfectly executed strategic envelopment. Hannibal, of course, was a military genius, but the Romans take much of the blame for their own defeat: they had a faulty command system, with two tribunes sharing leadership of the army. Disagreeing over how to fight Hannibal, these men fought each other as much as they fought him, and they made a mess of things.

Nearly two thousand years later, Frederick the Great, king of Prussia and leader of its army, outfought and outlasted the five great powers aligned against

him in the Seven Years' War partly because he made decisions so much faster than the alliance generals, who had to consult each other in every move they made. In World War II, General Marshall was well aware of the dangers of divided leadership and insisted that one supreme commander should lead the Allied armies. Without his victory in this battle, Eisenhower could not have succeeded in Europe. In the Vietnam War, the unity of command enjoyed by the North Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap gave him a tremendous advantage over the Americans, whose strategy was crafted by a crowd of politicians and generals.

Divided leadership is dangerous because people in groups often think and act in ways that are illogical and ineffective--call it Groupthink. People in groups are political: they say and do things that they think will help their image within the group. They aim to please others, to promote themselves, rather than to see things dispassionately. Where an individual can be bold and creative, a group is often afraid of risk. The need to find a compromise among all the different egos kills creativity. The group has a mind of its own, and that mind is cautious, slow to decide, unimaginative, and sometimes downright irrational.

This is the game you must play: Do whatever you can to preserve unity of command. Keep the strings to be pulled in your hands; the over-arching strategic vision must come from you and you alone. At the same time, hide your tracks. Work behind the scenes; make the group feel involved in your decisions. Seek their advice, incorporating their good ideas, politely deflecting their bad ones. If necessary, make minor, cosmetic strategy changes to assuage the insecure political animals in the group, but ultimately trust your own vision. Remember the dangers of group decision making. The first rule of effective leadership is never to relinquish your unity of command.

> *Tomorrow at dawn you depart* [*from St. Cloud*] *and travel to Worms, cross the Rhine there, and make sure that all preparations for the crossing of the river by my guard are being made there. You will then proceed to Kassel and make sure that the place is being put in a state of defense and provisioned. Taking due security precautions, you will visit the fortress of Hanau. Can it be secured by a coup de main? If necessary, you will visit the citadel of Marburg too. You will then travel on to Kassel and report to me by way of my charge d'affaires at that place, making sure that he is in fact there. The voyage from Frankfurt to Kassel is not to take place by night, for you are to observe anything that might interest me. From Kassel you are to travel, also by day, by the shortest way to Koln. The land between Wesel, Mainz, Kassel, and Koln is to be reconnoitered. What roads and good communications exist*

there? Gather information about communications between Kassel and Paderborn. What is the significance of Kassel? Is the place armed and capable of resistance? Evaluate the forces of the Prince Elector in regard to their present state, their artillery, militia, strong places. From Koln you will travel to meet me at Mainz; you are to keep to the right bank on the Rhine and submit a short appreciation of the country around Dusseldorf, Wesel, and Kassel. I shall be at Mainz on the 29th in order to receive your report. You can see for yourself how important it is for the beginning of the campaign and its progress that you should have the country well imprinted on your memory.

NAPOLEON'S WRITTEN INSTRUCTIONS TO FIELD GENERAL,
QUOTED IN *COMMAND IN WAR*, MARTIN VAN CREVELD, 1985

Control is an elusive phenomenon. Often, the harder you tug at people, the less control you have over them. Leadership is more than just barking out orders; it takes subtlety.

Early in his career, the great Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman was often overwhelmed with frustration. He had visions of the films he wanted to make, but the work of being a director was so taxing and the pressure so immense that he would lash out at his cast and crew, shouting orders and attacking them for not giving him what he wanted. Some would stew with resentment at his dictatorial ways, others became obedient automatons. With almost every new film, Bergman would have to start again with a new cast and crew, which only made things worse. But eventually he put together a team of the finest cinematographers, editors, art directors, and actors in Sweden, people who shared his high standards and whom he trusted. That let him loosen the reins of command; with actors like Max von Sydow, he could just suggest what he had in mind and watch as the great actor brought his ideas to life. Greater control could now come from letting go.

A critical step in creating an efficient chain of command is assembling a skilled team that shares your goals and values. That team gives you many advantages: spirited, motivated people who can think on their own; an image as a delegator, a fair and democratic leader; and a saving in your own valuable energy, which you can redirect toward the larger picture.

In creating this team, you are looking for people who make up for your deficiencies, who have the skills you lack. In the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln had a strategy for defeating the South, but he had no military background and was disdained by his generals. What good was a strategy if he could not realize it? But Lincoln soon found his teammate in General Ulysses S.

Grant, who shared his belief in offensive warfare and who did not have an oversize ego. Once Lincoln discovered Grant, he latched on to him, put him in command, and let him run the war as he saw fit.

Be careful in assembling this team that you are not seduced by expertise and intelligence. Character, the ability to work under you and with the rest of the team, and the capacity to accept responsibility and think independently are equally key. That is why Marshall tested Eisenhower for so long. You may not have as much time to spare, but never choose a man merely by his glittering resume. Look beyond his skills to his psychological makeup.

Rely on the team you have assembled, but do not be its prisoner or give it undue influence. Franklin D. Roosevelt had his infamous "brain trust," the advisers and cabinet members on whom he depended for their ideas and opinions, but he never let them in on the actual decision making, and he kept them from building up their own power base within the administration. He saw them simply as tools, extending his own abilities and saving him valuable time. He understood unity of command and was never seduced into violating it.

A key function of any chain of command is to supply information rapidly from the trenches, letting you adapt fast to circumstances. The shorter and more streamlined the chain of command, the better for the flow of information. Even so, information is often diluted as it passes up the chain: the telling details that reveal so much become standardized and general as they are filtered through formal channels. Some on the chain, too, will interpret the information for you, filtering what you hear. To get more direct knowledge, you might occasionally want to visit the field yourself. Marshall would sometimes drop in on an army base incognito to see with his own eyes how his reforms were taking effect; he would also read letters from soldiers. But in these days of increasing complexity, this can consume far too much of your time.

What you need is what the military historian Martin van Creveld calls "a directed telescope": people in various parts of the chain, and elsewhere, to give you instant information from the battlefield. These people--an informal network of friends, allies, and spies--let you bypass the slow-moving chain. The master of this game was Napoleon, who created a kind of shadow brigade of younger officers in all areas of the military, men chosen for their loyalty, energy, and intelligence. At a moment's notice, he would send one of these men to a far-off front or garrison, or even to enemy headquarters (ostensibly as a diplomatic envoy), with secret instructions to gather the kind of information he could not get fast enough through normal channels. In general, it is important to cultivate these directed telescopes and plant them throughout the group. They give you flexibility in the chain, room to maneuver in a generally rigid environment.

The single greatest risk to your chain of command comes from the political animals in the group. People like this are inescapable; they spring up like weeds in any organization. Not only are they out for themselves, but they build factions to further their own agendas and fracture the cohesion you have built. Interpreting your commands for their own purposes, finding loopholes in any ambiguity, they create invisible breaks in the chain.

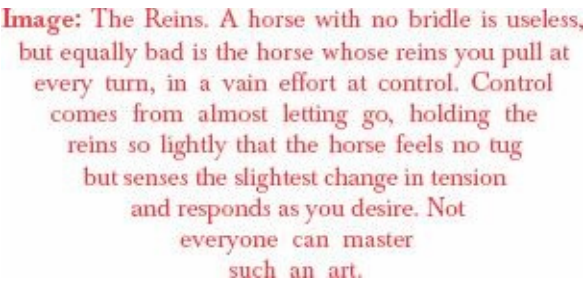
Try to weed them out before they arrive. In hiring your team, look at the candidates' histories: Are they restless? Do they often move from place to place? That is a sign of the kind of ambition that will keep them from fitting in. When people seem to share your ideas exactly, be wary: they are probably mirroring them to charm you. The court of Queen Elizabeth I of England was full of political types. Elizabeth's solution was to keep her opinions quiet; on any issue, no one outside her inner circle knew where she stood. That made it hard for people to mirror her, to disguise their intentions behind a front of perfect agreement. Hers was a wise strategy.

Another solution is to isolate the political moles--to give them no room to maneuver within the organization. Marshall accomplished this by infusing the group with his spirit of efficiency; disrupters of that spirit stood out and could quickly be isolated. In any event, do not be naive. Once you identify the moles in the group, you must act fast to stop them from building a power base from which to destroy your authority.

Finally, pay attention to the orders themselves--their form as well as their substance. Vague orders are worthless. As they pass from person to person, they are hopelessly altered, and your staff comes to see them as symbolizing uncertainty and indecision. It is critical that you yourself be clear about what you want before issuing your orders. On the other hand, if your commands are too specific and too narrow, you will encourage people to behave like automatons and stop thinking for themselves--which they must do when the situation requires it. Erring in neither direction is an art.

Here, as in so much else, Napoleon was the master. His orders were full of juicy details, which gave his officers a feel for how his mind worked while also allowing them interpretive leeway. He would often spell out possible contingencies, suggesting ways the officer could adapt his instructions if necessary. Most important, he made his orders inspiring. His language communicated the spirit of his desires. A beautifully worded order has extra power; instead of feeling like a minion, there only to execute the wishes of a distant emperor, the recipient becomes a participant in a great cause. Bland, bureaucratic orders filter down into listless activity and imprecise execution. Clear, concise, inspiring orders make officers feel in control and fill troops with

fighting spirit.



Authority: Better one bad general than two good ones.

--Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

REVERSAL

No good can ever come of divided leadership. If you are ever offered a position in which you will have to share command, turn it down, for the enterprise will fail and you will be held responsible. Better to take a lower position and let the other person have the job.

It is always wise, however, to take advantage of your opponent's faulty command structure. Never be intimidated by an alliance of forces against you: if they share leadership, if they are ruled by committee, your advantage is more than enough. In fact, do as Napoleon did and seek out enemies with that kind of command structure. You cannot fail to win.