DO NOT FIGHT THE LAST WAR

THE GUERRILLA-WAR-OF-THE-MIND STRATEGY

What most often weighs you down and brings you misery is the past, in the form of unnecessary attachments, repetitions of tired formulas, and the memory of old victories and defeats. You must consciously wage war against the past and force yourself to react to the present moment. Be ruthless on yourself; do not repeat the same tired methods. Sometimes you must force yourself to strike out in new directions, even if they involve risk. What you may lose in comfort and security, you will gain in surprise, making it harder for your enemies to tell what you will do. Wage guerrilla war on your mind, allowing no static lines of defense, no exposed citadels--make everything fluid and mobile.

> *Theory cannot equip the mind with formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie by planting a hedge of principles on either side. But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action. There the mind can use its innate talents to capacity, combining them all so as to seize on what is right and true as though this were a single idea formed by their concentrated pressure--as though it were a response to the immediate challenge rather than a product of thought.*
>
> *ON WAR*, CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, 1780-1831

THE LAST WAR

No one has risen to power faster than Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). In 1793 he went from captain in the French revolutionary army to brigadier general. In 1796 he became the leader of the French force in Italy fighting the Austrians, whom he crushed that year and again three years later. He became first consul of France in 1801, emperor in 1804. In 1805 he humiliated the Austrian and Russian armies at the Battle of Austerlitz.

For many, Napoleon was more than a great general; he was a genius, a god of war. Not everyone was impressed, though: there were Prussian generals who thought he had merely been lucky. Where Napoleon was rash and aggressive, they believed, his opponents had been timid and weak. If he ever faced the

Prussians, he would be revealed as a great fake.

Among these Prussian generals was Friedrich Ludwig, prince of Hohenlohe-Ingelfingen (1746-1818). Hohenlohe came from one of Germany's oldest aristocratic families, one with an illustrious military record. He had begun his career young, serving under Frederick the Great (1712-86) himself, the man who had single-handedly made Prussia a great power. Hohenlohe had risen through the ranks, becoming a general at fifty--young by Prussian standards.

To Hohenlohe success in war depended on organization, discipline, and the use of superior strategies developed by trained military minds. The Prussians exemplified all of these virtues. Prussian soldiers drilled relentlessly until they could perform elaborate maneuvers as precisely as a machine. Prussian generals intensely studied the victories of Frederick the Great; war for them was a mathematical affair, the application of timeless principles. To the generals Napoleon was a Corsican hothead leading an unruly citizens' army. Superior in knowledge and skill, they would outstrategize him. The French would panic and crumble in the face of the disciplined Prussians; the Napoleonic myth would lie in ruins, and Europe could return to its old ways.

In August 1806, Hohenlohe and his fellow generals finally got what they wanted: King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, tired of Napoleon's broken promises, decided to declare war on him in six weeks. In the meantime he asked his generals to come up with a plan to crush the French.

Hohenlohe was ecstatic. This campaign would be the climax of his career. He had been thinking for years about how to beat Napoleon, and he presented his plan at the generals' first strategy session: precise marches would place the army at the perfect angle from which to attack the French as they advanced through southern Prussia. An attack in oblique formation--Frederick the Great's favorite tactic--would deliver a devastating blow. The other generals, all in their sixties and seventies, presented their own plans, but these too were merely variants on the tactics of Frederick the Great. Discussion turned into argument; several weeks went by. Finally the king had to step in and create a compromise strategy that would satisfy all of his generals.

> *He* [*Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini*] *--often quite arbitrarily--presses* [*the deeds of Napoleon*] *into a system which he foists on Napoleon, and, in doing so, completely fails to see what, above all, really constitutes the greatness of this captain--namely, the reckless boldness of his operations, where, scoffing at all theory, he always tried to do what suited each occasion best.*
>
> FRIEDRICH VON BERNHARDI, 1849-1930

A feeling of exuberance swept the country, which would soon relive the glory years of Frederick the Great. The generals realized that Napoleon knew about their plans--he had excellent spies--but the Prussians had a head start, and once their war machine started to move, nothing could stop it.

On October 5, a few days before the king was to declare war, disturbing news reached the generals. A reconnaissance mission revealed that divisions of Napoleon's army, which they had believed was dispersed, had marched east, merged, and was massing deep in southern Prussia. The captain who had led the scouting mission reported that the French soldiers were marching with packs on their backs: where the Prussians used slow-moving wagons to provision their troops, the French carried their own supplies and moved with astonishing speed and mobility.

Before the generals had time to adjust their plans, Napoleon's army suddenly wheeled north, heading straight for Berlin, the heart of Prussia. The generals argued and dithered, moving their troops here and there, trying to decide where to attack. A mood of panic set in. Finally the king ordered a retreat: the troops would reassemble to the north and attack Napoleon's flank as he advanced toward Berlin. Hohenlohe was in charge of the rear guard, protecting the Prussians' retreat.

On October 14, near the town of Jena, Napoleon caught up with Hohenlohe, who finally faced the battle he had wanted so desperately. The numbers on both sides were equal, but while the French were an unruly force, fighting pell-mell and on the run, Hohenlohe kept his troops in tight order, orchestrating them like a corps de ballet. The fighting went back and forth until finally the French captured the village of Vierzehnheiligen.

Hohenlohe ordered his troops to retake the village. In a ritual dating back to Frederick the Great, a drum major beat out a cadence and the Prussian soldiers, their colors flying, reformed their positions in perfect parade order, preparing to advance. They were in an open plain, though, and Napoleon's men were behind garden walls and on the house roofs. The Prussians fell like ninepins to the French marksmen. Confused, Hohenlohe ordered his soldiers to halt and change formation. The drums beat again, the Prussians marched with magnificent precision, always a sight to behold--but the French kept shooting, decimating the Prussian line.

Never had Hohenlohe seen such an army. The French soldiers were like demons. Unlike his disciplined soldiers, they moved on their own, yet there was method to their madness. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, they rushed forward on both sides, threatening to surround the Prussians. The prince ordered a retreat. The Battle of Jena was over.

Like a house of cards, the Prussians quickly crumbled, one fortress falling after another. The king fled east. In a matter of days, virtually nothing remained of the once mighty Prussian army.

THE BAT AND THE HOUSE-FERRETS

A bat fell to the ground and was caught by a house-ferret. Realizing that she was on the point of being killed, she begged for her life. The house-ferret said to her that she couldn't let her go, for ferrets were supposed to be natural enemies to all birds. The bat replied that she herself was not a bird, but a mouse. She managed to extricate herself from her danger by this means. Eventually, falling a second time, the bat was caught by another house-ferret. Again she pleaded to the ferret not to eat her. The second ferret declared that she absolutely detested all mice. But the bat positively affirmed that she was not a mouse but a bat. And so she was released again. And that was how she saved herself from death twice by a mere change of name. This fable shows that it is not always necessary to confine ourselves to the same tactics. But, on the contrary, if we are adaptable to circumstances we can better escape danger.

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

Interpretation

The reality facing the Prussians in 1806 was simple: they had fallen fifty years behind the times. Their generals were old, and instead of responding to present circumstances, they were repeating formulas that had worked in the past. Their army moved slowly, and their soldiers were automatons on parade. The Prussian generals had many signs to warn them of disaster: their army had not performed well in its recent engagements, a number of Prussian officers had preached reform, and, last but not least, they had had ten years to study Napoleon--his innovative strategies and the speed and fluidity with which his armies converged on the enemy. Reality was staring them in the face, yet they chose to ignore it. Indeed, they told themselves that Napoleon was the one who was doomed.

You might find the Prussian army just an interesting historical example, but in fact you are likely marching in the same direction yourself. What limits individuals as well as nations is the inability to confront reality, to see things for what they are. As we grow older, we become more rooted in the past. Habit takes over. Something that has worked for us before becomes a doctrine, a shell to protect us from reality. Repetition replaces creativity. We rarely realize we're

doing this, because it is almost impossible for us to see it happening in our own minds. Then suddenly a young Napoleon crosses our path, a person who does not respect tradition, who fights in a new way. Only then do we see that our ways of thinking and responding have fallen behind the times.

Never take it for granted that your past successes will continue into the future. Actually, your past successes are your biggest obstacle: every battle, every war, is different, and you cannot assume that what worked before will work today. You must cut yourself loose from the past and open your eyes to the present. Your tendency to fight the last war may lead to your final war.

> *When in 1806 the Prussian generals...plunged into the open jaws of disaster by using Frederick the Great's oblique order of battle, it was not just a case of a style that had outlived its usefulness but the most extreme poverty of the imagination to which routine has ever led. The result was that the Prussian army under Hohenlohe was ruined more completely than any army has ever been ruined on the battlefield.*
>
> --*Carl von Clausewitz,* ON WAR *(1780-1831)*

THE PRESENT WAR

In 1605, Miyamoto Musashi, a samurai who had made a name for himself as a swordsman at the young age of twenty-one, was challenged to a duel. The challenger, a young man named Matashichiro, came from the Yoshioka family, a clan itself renowned for swordsmanship. Earlier that year Musashi had defeated Matashichiro's father, Genzaemon, in a duel. Days later he had killed Genzaemon's younger brother in another duel. The Yoshioka family wanted revenge.

> *I never read any treatises on strategy.... When we fight, we do not take any books with us.*
>
> MAO TSE-TUNG, 1893-1976

Musashi's friends smelled a trap in Matashichiro's challenge and offered to accompany him to the duel, but Musashi went alone. In his earlier fights with the Yoshiokas, he had angered them by showing up hours late; this time, though, he came early and hid in the trees. Matashichiro arrived with a small army. Musashi would "arrive way behind schedule as usual," one of them said, "but that trick won't work with us anymore!" Confident in their ambush, Matashichiro's men lay down and hid in the grass. Suddenly Musashi leaped out from behind his tree and shouted, "I've been waiting long enough. Draw your sword!" In one swift

stroke, he killed Matashichiro, then took a position at an angle to the other men. All of them jumped to their feet, but they were caught off guard and startled, and instead of surrounding him, they stood in a broken line. Musashi simply ran down the line, killing the dazed men one after another in a matter of seconds.

Musashi's victory sealed his reputation as one of Japan's greatest swordsmen. He now roamed the country looking for suitable challenges. In one town he heard of an undefeated warrior named Baiken whose weapons were a sickle and a long chain with a steel ball at the end of it. Musashi wanted to see these weapons in action, but Baiken refused: the only way he could see them work, Baiken said, was by fighting a duel.

> *REFRESHING THE MIND When you and your opponent are engaged in combat which is dragging on with no end in sight, it is crucial that you should come up with a completely different technique. By refreshing your mind and techniques as you continue to fight your opponent, you will find an appropriate rhythm-timing with which to defeat him. Whenever you and your opponent become stagnant, you must immediately employ a different method of dealing with him in order to overcome him.*
>
> *THE BOOK OF FIVE RINGS*, MIYAMOTO MUSASHI, 1584-1645

Once again Musashi's friends chose the safe route: they urged him to walk away. No one had come close to defeating Baiken, whose weapons were unbeatable: swinging his ball in the air to build up momentum, he would force his victim backward with a relentless charge, then hurl the ball at the man's face. His opponent would have to fend off the ball and chain, and while his sword arm was occupied, in that brief instant Baiken would slash him with the sickle across his neck.

Ignoring the warnings of his friends, Musashi challenged Baiken and showed up at the man's tent with two swords, one long, one short. Baiken had never seen someone fight with two swords. Also, instead of letting Baiken charge him, Musashi charged first, pushing his foe back on his heels. Baiken hesitated to throw the ball, for Musashi could parry it with one sword and strike him with the other. As he looked for an opening, Musashi suddenly knocked him off balance with a blow of the short sword and then, in a split second, followed with a thrust of the long one, stabbing him through and killing the once undefeated master Baiken.

A few years later, Musashi heard about a great samurai named Sasaki Ganryu, who fought with a very long sword--a startlingly beautiful weapon, which seemed possessed of some warlike spirit. This fight would be Musashi's

ultimate test. Ganryu accepted his challenge; the duel would take place on a little island near the samurai's home.

It is a disease to be obsessed by the thought of winning. It is also a disease to be obsessed by the thought of employing your swordsmanship. So it is to be obsessed by the thought of using everything you have learned, and to be obsessed by the thought of attacking. It is also a disease to be obsessed and stuck with the thought of ridding yourself of any of these diseases. A disease here is an obsessed mind that dwells on one thing. Because all these diseases are in your mind, you must get rid of them to put your mind in order.

TAKUAN, JAPAN, 1573-1645

On the morning of the duel, the island was packed. A fight between such warriors was unprecedented. Ganryu arrived on time, but Musashi was late, very late. An hour went by, then two; Ganryu was furious. Finally a boat was spotted approaching the island. Its passenger was lying down, half asleep, it seemed, whittling at a long wooden oar. It was Musashi. He seemed lost in thought, staring into the clouds. When the boat came to shore, he tied a dirty towel around his head and jumped out of the boat, brandishing the long oar--longer than Ganryu's famous sword. This strange man had come to the biggest fight of his life with an oar for a sword and a towel for a headband.

Ganryu called out angrily, "Are you so frightened of me that you have broken your promise to be here by eight?" Musashi said nothing but stepped closer. Ganryu drew his magnificent sword and threw the sheath onto the sand. Musashi smiled: "Sasaki, you have just sealed your doom." "Me? Defeated? Impossible!" "What victor on earth," replied Musashi, "would abandon his sheath to the sea?" This enigmatic remark only made Ganryu angrier.

Then Musashi charged, aiming his sharpened oar straight for his enemy's eyes. Ganryu quickly raised his sword and struck at Musashi's head but missed, only cutting the towel headband in two. He had never missed before. In almost the same instant, Musashi brought down his wooden sword, knocking Ganryu off his feet. The spectators gasped. As Ganryu struggled up, Musashi killed him with a blow to the head. Then, after bowing politely to the men officiating over the duel, he got back into the boat and left as calmly as he had arrived.

From that moment on, Musashi was considered a swordsman without peer.

Anyone can plan a campaign, but few are capable of waging war, because only a true military genius can handle the developments and circumstances.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, 1769-1821

Interpretation

Miyamoto Musashi, author of *The Book of Five Rings*, won all his duels for one reason: in each instance he adapted his strategy to his opponent and to the circumstances of the moment. With Matashichiro he decided it was time to arrive early, which he hadn't done in his previous fights. Victory against superior numbers depended on surprise, so he leaped up when his opponents lay down; then, once he had killed their leader, he set himself at an angle that invited them to charge at him instead of surrounding him, which would have been much more dangerous for him. With Baiken it was simply a matter of using two swords and then crowding his space, giving him no time to react intelligently to this novelty. With Ganryu he set out to infuriate and humiliate his haughty opponent--the wooden sword, the nonchalant attitude, the dirty-towel headband, the enigmatic remark, the charge at the eyes.

Musashi's opponents depended on brilliant technique, flashy swords, and unorthodox weapons. That is the same as fighting the last war: instead of responding to the moment, they relied on training, technology, and what had worked before. Musashi, who had grasped the essence of strategy when he was still very young, turned their rigidity into their downfall. His first thought was of the gambit that would take this particular opponent most by surprise. Then he would anchor himself in the moment: having set his opponent off balance with something unexpected, he would watch carefully, then respond with another action, usually improvised, that would turn mere disequilibrium into defeat and death.

> *Thunder and wind: the image of DURATION. Thus the superior man stands firm And does not change his direction. Thunder rolls, and the wind blows; both are examples of extreme mobility and so are seemingly the very opposite of duration, but the laws governing their appearance and subsidence, their coming and going, endure. In the same way the independence of the superior man is not based on rigidity and immobility of character. He always keeps abreast of the time and changes with it. What endures is the unswerving directive, the inner law of his being, which determines all his actions.*

THE I CHING, CHINA, CIRCA EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

In preparing yourself for war, you must rid yourself of myths and misconceptions. Strategy is not a question of learning a series of moves or ideas to follow like a recipe; victory has no magic formula. Ideas are merely nutrients

for the soil: they lie in your brain as possibilities, so that in the heat of the moment they can inspire a direction, an appropriate and creative response. Let go of all fetishes--books, techniques, formulas, flashy weapons--and learn to become your own strategist.

Thus one's victories in battle cannot be repeated--they take their form in response to inexhaustibly changing circumstances.

--Sun-tzu (fourth century B.C.)

KEYS TO WARFARE

In looking back on an unpleasant or disagreeable experience, the thought inevitably occurs to us: if only we had said or done *x* instead of *y*, if only we could do it over. Many a general has lost his head in the heat of battle and then, looking back, has thought of the one tactic, the one maneuver, that would have changed it all. Even Prince Hohenlohe, years later, could see how he had botched the retaking of Vierzehnheiligen. The problem, though, is not that we think of the solution only when it is too late. The problem is that we imagine that knowledge is what was lacking: if only we had known more, if only we had thought it through more thoroughly. That is precisely the wrong approach. What makes us go astray in the first place is that we are unattuned to the present moment, insensitive to the circumstances. We are listening to our own thoughts, reacting to things that happened in the past, applying theories and ideas that we digested long ago but that have nothing to do with our predicament in the present. More books, theories, and thinking only make the problem worse.

My policy is to have no policy.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1809-1865

Understand: the greatest generals, the most creative strategists, stand out not because they have more knowledge but because they are able, when necessary, to drop their preconceived notions and focus intensely on the present moment. That is how creativity is sparked and opportunities are seized. Knowledge, experience, and theory have limitations: no amount of thinking in advance can prepare you for the chaos of life, for the infinite possibilities of the moment. The great philosopher of war Carl von Clausewitz called this "friction": the difference between our plans and what actually happens. Since friction is inevitable, our minds have to be capable of keeping up with change and adapting to the unexpected. The better we can adapt our thoughts to changing circumstances, the more realistic our responses to them will be. The more we

lose ourselves in predigested theories and past experiences, the more inappropriate and delusional our response.

It can be valuable to analyze what went wrong in the past, but it is far more important to develop the capacity to think in the moment. In that way you will make far fewer mistakes to analyze.

> *If you put an empty gourd on the water and touch it, it will slip to one side. No matter how you try, it won't stay in one spot. The mind of someone who has reached the ultimate state does not stay with anything, even for a second. It is like an empty gourd on the water that is pushed around.*
>
> TAKUAN, JAPAN, 1573-1645

Think of the mind as a river: the faster it flows, the better it keeps up with the present and responds to change. The faster it flows, also the more it refreshes itself and the greater its energy. Obsessional thoughts, past experiences (whether traumas or successes), and preconceived notions are like boulders or mud in this river, settling and hardening there and damming it up. The river stops moving; stagnation sets in. You must wage constant war on this tendency in the mind.

The first step is simply to be aware of the process and of the need to fight it. The second is to adopt a few tactics that might help you to restore the mind's natural flow.

Reexamine all your cherished beliefs and principles. When Napoleon was asked what principles of war he followed, he replied that he followed none. His genius was his ability to respond to circumstances, to make the most of what he was given--he was the supreme opportunist. Your only principle, similarly, should be to have no principles. To believe that strategy has inexorable laws or timeless rules is to take up a rigid, static position that will be your undoing. Of course the study of history and theory can broaden your vision of the world, but you have to combat theory's tendency to harden into dogma. Be brutal with the past, with tradition, with the old ways of doing things. Declare war on sacred cows and voices of convention in your own head.

Our education is often a problem. During World War II, the British fighting the Germans in the deserts of North Africa were well trained in tank warfare; you might say they were indoctrinated with theories about it. Later in the campaign, they were joined by American troops who were much less educated in these tactics. Soon, though, the Americans began to fight in a way that was equal

if not superior to the British style; they adapted to the mobility of this new kind of desert combat. According to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel himself, the leader of the German army in North Africa, "The Americans...profited far more than the British from their experience in Africa, thus confirming the axiom that education is easier than reeducation."

What Rommel meant was that education tends to burn precepts into the mind that are hard to shake. In the midst of combat, the trained mind may fall a step behind--focusing more on learned rules than on the changing circumstances of battle. When you are faced with a new situation, it is often best to imagine that you know nothing and that you need to start learning all over again. Clearing your head of everything you thought you knew, even your most cherished ideas, will give you the mental space to be educated by your present experience--the best school of all. You will develop your own strategic muscles instead of depending on other people's theories and books.

Erase the memory of the last war. The last war you fought is a danger, even if you won it. It is fresh in your mind. If you were victorious, you will tend to repeat the strategies you just used, for success makes us lazy and complacent; if you lost, you may be skittish and indecisive. Do not think about the last war; you do not have the distance or the detachment. Instead do whatever you can to blot it from your mind. During the Vietnam War, the great North Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap had a simple rule of thumb: after a successful campaign, he would convince himself that it had actually been a failure. As a result he never got drunk on his success, and he never repeated the same strategy in the next battle. Rather he had to think through each situation anew.

Ted Williams, perhaps baseball's greatest pure hitter, made a point of always trying to forget his last at-bat. Whether he'd gotten a home run or a strikeout, he put it behind him. No two at-bats are the same, even against the same pitcher, and Williams wanted an open mind. He would not wait for the next at-bat to start forgetting: the minute he got back to the dugout, he started focusing on what was happening in the game taking place. Attention to the details of the present is by far the best way to crowd out the past and forget the last war.

Keep the mind moving. When we were children, our minds never stopped. We were open to new experiences and absorbed as much of them as possible. We learned fast, because the world around us excited us. When we felt frustrated or

upset, we would find some creative way to get what we wanted and then quickly forget the problem as something new crossed our path.

All the greatest strategists--Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Musashi--were childlike in this respect. Sometimes, in fact, they even acted like children. The reason is simple: superior strategists see things as they are. They are highly sensitive to dangers and opportunities. Nothing stays the same in life, and keeping up with circumstances as they change requires a great deal of mental fluidity. Great strategists do not act according to preconceived ideas; they respond to the moment, like children. Their minds are always moving, and they are always excited and curious. They quickly forget the past--the present is much too interesting.

> *Defeat is bitter. Bitter to the common soldier, but trebly bitter to his general. The soldier may comfort himself with the thought that, whatever the result, he has done his duty faithfully and steadfastly, but the commander has failed in his duty if he has not won victory--for that is his duty. He has no other comparable to it. He will go over in his mind the events of the campaign. "Here," he will think, "I went wrong; here I took counsel of my fears when I should have been bold; there I should have waited to gather strength, not struck piecemeal; at such a moment I failed to grasp opportunity when it was presented to me." He will remember the soldiers whom he sent into the attack that failed and who did not come back. He will recall the look in the eyes of men who trusted him. "I have failed them," he will say to himself, "and failed my country!" He will see himself for what he is--a defeated general. In a dark hour he will turn in upon himself and question the very foundations of his leadership and manhood. And then he must stop! For if he is ever to command in battle again, he must shake off these regrets, and stamp on them, as they claw at his will and his self-confidence. He must beat off these attacks he delivers against himself, and cast out the doubts born of failure. Forget them, and remember only the lessons to be learned from defeat--they are more than from victory.*
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> *DEFEAT INTO VICTORY*, WILLIAM SLIM, 1897-1970

The Greek thinker Aristotle thought that life was defined by movement. What does not move is dead. What has speed and mobility has more possibilities, more life. We all start off with the mobile mind of a Napoleon, but as we get older, we tend to become more like the Prussians. You may think that what you'd like to recapture from your youth is your looks, your physical fitness, your simple pleasures, but what you really need is the fluidity of mind you once

possessed. Whenever you find your thoughts revolving around a particular subject or idea--an obsession, a resentment--force them past it. Distract yourself with something else. Like a child, find something new to be absorbed by, something worthy of concentrated attention. Do not waste time on things you cannot change or influence. Just keep moving.

Absorb the spirit of the times. Throughout the history of warfare, there have been classic battles in which the past has confronted the future in a hopeless mismatch. It happened in the seventh century, when the Persians and Byzantines confronted the invincible armies of Islam, with their new form of desert fighting; or in the first half of the thirteenth century, when the Mongols used relentless mobility to overwhelm the heavy armies of the Russians and Europeans; or in 1806, when Napoleon crushed the Prussians at Jena. In each case the conquering army developed a way of fighting that maximized a new form of technology or a new social order.

You can reproduce this effect on a smaller scale by attuning yourself to the spirit of the times. Developing antennae for the trends that have yet to crest takes work and study, as well as the flexibility to adapt to those trends. As you get older, it is best to periodically alter your style. In the golden age of Hollywood, most actresses had very short careers. But Joan Crawford fought the studio system and managed to have a remarkably long career by constantly changing her style, going from siren to noir heroine to cult queen. Instead of staying sentimentally attached to some fashion of days gone by, she was able to sense a rising trend and go with it. By constantly adapting and changing your style, you will avoid the pitfalls of your previous wars. Just when people feel they know you, you will change.

Reverse course. The great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky suffered from epilepsy. Just before a seizure, he would experience a moment of intense ecstasy, which he described as a feeling of being suddenly flooded with reality, a momentary vision of the world exactly as it is. Later he would find himself getting depressed, as this vision was crowded out by the habits and routines of daily life. During these depressions, wanting to feel that closeness to reality again, he would go to the nearest casino and gamble away all his money. There reality would overwhelm him; comfort and routine would be gone, stale patterns broken. Having to rethink everything, he would get his creative energy back.

This was the closest he could deliberately come to the sense of ecstasy he got through epilepsy.

Dostoyevsky's method was a little extreme, but sometimes you have to shake yourself up, break free from the hold of the past. This can take the form of reversing your course, doing the opposite of what you would normally do in any given situation, putting yourself in some unusual circumstance, or literally starting over. In those situations the mind has to deal with a new reality, and it snaps to life. The change may be alarming, but it is also refreshing--even exhilarating.

> *To know that one is in a certain condition, in a certain state, is already a process of liberation; but a man who is not aware of his condition, of his struggle, tries to be something other than he is, which brings about habit. So, then, let us keep in mind that we want to examine what is, to observe and be aware of exactly what is the actual, without giving it any slant, without giving it an interpretation. It needs an extraordinarily astute mind, an extraordinarily pliable heart, to be aware of and to follow what is; because what is is constantly moving, constantly undergoing a transformation, and if the mind is tethered to belief, to knowledge, it ceases to pursue, it ceases to follow the swift movement of what is. What is is not static, surely--it is constantly moving, as you will see if you observe it very closely. To follow it, you need a very swift mind and a pliable heart--which are denied when the mind is static, fixed in a belief, in a prejudice, in an identification; and a mind and heart that are dry cannot follow easily, swiftly, that which is.*
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> JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI, 1895-1986

Relationships often develop a certain tiresome predictability. You do what you usually do, other people respond the way they usually do, and around it goes. If you reverse course, act in a novel manner, you alter the entire dynamic. Do this every so often to break up the relationship's stale patterns and open it to new possibilities.

Think of your mind as an army. Armies must adapt to the complexity and chaos of modern war by becoming more fluid and maneuverable. The ultimate extension of this evolution is guerrilla warfare, which exploits chaos by making disorder and unpredictability a strategy. The guerrilla army never stops to defend a particular place or town; it wins by always moving, staying one step ahead. By

following no set pattern, it gives the enemy no target. The guerrilla army never repeats the same tactic. It responds to the situation, the moment, the terrain where it happens to find itself. There is no front, no concrete line of communication or supply, no slow-moving wagon. The guerrilla army is pure mobility.

That is the model for your new way of thinking. Apply no tactic rigidly; do not let your mind settle into static positions, defending any particular place or idea, repeating the same lifeless maneuvers. Attack problems from new angles, adapting to the landscape and to what you're given. By staying in constant motion you show your enemies no target to aim at. You exploit the chaos of the world instead of succumbing to it.

Image: Water.
Adapting its shape
to wherever it
moves in
the stream,
pushing
rocks out of
its way, smoothing
boulders,
it never stops,
is never the same.
The faster it moves
the clearer
it gets.

Authority: Some of our generals failed because they worked out everything by rule. They knew what Frederick did at one place, and Napoleon at another. They were always thinking about what Napoleon would do. . . . I don't underrate the value of military knowledge, but if men make war in slavish observance to rules, they will fail. . . . War is progressive. —*Ulysses S. Grant (1822–85)*

REVERSAL

There is never any value in fighting the last war. But while you're eliminating that pernicious tendency, you must imagine that your enemy is trying to do the same--trying to learn from and adapt to the present. Some of history's worst military disasters have come not out of fighting the last war but out of assuming that that's what your opponent will do. When Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, he thought the United States had yet to recover from "Vietnam syndrome"--the fear of casualties and loss that had been so traumatic during the Vietnam period--and that it would either avoid war altogether or would fight in

the same way it had, trying to win the fight from the air instead of on the ground. He did not realize that the American military was ready for a new kind of war. Remember: the loser in any battle may be too traumatized to fight again but may also learn from the experience and move on. Err on the side of caution; be ready. Never let your enemy surprise you in war.