

Leadership & Strategy Review

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A biweekly collection of articles, comments and opinion pieces from popular media and the blogosphere, thematically reflecting the spirit of George C. Marshall's enduring legacy of leadership and strategic vision.

A new grand strategy

By Charles Hill

The greater Mideast is being transformed. Now the United States must transform its Mideast policy just as dramatically.

"What are the range of options open to the United States, and other powers, in the face of the large-scale violence that the Assad regime has unleashed on the Syrian people?"

Reporters covering the Obama administration's foreign policy have provided the answer: "the United States sees few good options in Syria," pronounced the *Washington Post*. Those living in a time of revolution, it has been said, often don't realize it. Washington does not seem to understand that what is going on in the Middle East is a world-historical (not merely regional) event.

Whatever is to be done or not done about Syria has to start with the recognition that the United States must now devise a new foreign policy, or grand strategy, toward the entire Middle East; nothing can make much sense outside a new departure of that magnitude.

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How strategists lead

Harvard Business School Professor Cynthia Montgomery, writing in *The McKinsey Quarterly*, reflects on what she has learned from senior executives about the unique value that strategic leaders can bring to their companies.

"I've been struck by how often executives, even experienced ones, get tripped up: they become so interested in the potential of new ventures, for example, that they underestimate harsh competitive realities or overlook how interrelated strategy and execution are....All of this learning speaks to the role of the strategist -- as a meaning maker for companies, as a voice of reason, and as an operator. The richness of these roles, and their deep inter-connections, underscore the fact that strategy is much more than a detached analytical exercise. Analysis has merit, to be sure, but it will never make strategy the vibrant core that animates everything a company is and does."

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Business leaders get strong results

Despite the dramatic decline in trust, there is good news in *Building Trust 2012* -- with important data tracking to an economy struggling to grow stronger.

The 2012 results show a clear, explicit connection between companies that achieve strong business results and high ratings in trust, leadership and collaboration. Additionally, leaders of high performing companies are more focused on employee involvement -- including the notion of shared responsibility for success as a key driver of business results.

"Trust is at rock bottom, but if leaders want to drive trust levels higher, we say: focus on openness, transparency, and involving employees," said Linda Stewart, CEO of Interaction Associates.

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Talent is a strategic asset

"Many business leaders talk about treating human capital as a strategic asset, but few companies put the idea into practice. For many years, this was especially true in the oil and gas industry, where HR strategy -- including recruiting, training, career development and succession planning -- was not seen as a top priority. More recently, however, the HR function in many energy companies has begun struggling to fill positions....Now, as turnover rates rise and competitors lure away skilled engineers, this talent gap means that human capital capabilities have been strained for nearly every company in the industry," writes Christopher Click at strategy-business.com.

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Ten leadership lessons from the military

By James Petter

I've found there are a few lessons from my time as an army officer that offer helpful insight into the practicalities of business leadership.

1. To lead is to serve.

The leader in a business is responsible for everything within his or her organization: for the development of the proposition; for the success and well-being of the staff; for every challenge, trial and tribulation. In order to keep up the respect and motivation of your staff, it's important to maintain a mindset of responsibility and care for your team at all times.

2. Never give an order you couldn't follow yourself.

3. Play people to their strengths.

Military hierarchy serves a very specific function: to allocate resources in line with expertise. When anything sub-optimal can cost lives, there is no room for patronage or politics. There's no room for them in business either.

4. Prepare for the worst, hope for the best.

5. Never retreat but, occasionally, advance in another direction.

Confidence in business is vital, but over-confidence is a curse. A change of tactics or shift in strategy is always preferable to a total U-turn later on -- or a bone-headed persistence.

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The private, non-profit, independent George C. Marshall Foundation, located in Lexington, Virginia, seeks to change the way emerging leaders in military service, foreign service, public administration and business are prepared in the essentials of vision, strategy and leadership.

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