

Lee & Grant: Profiles in Leadership from the Battlefields of Virginia

Major Charles R. Bowery Jr.

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After the dismal Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, Lee went south and fought the rest of the Civil War in the 1864 Overland Campaign, which historians have agreed was the “largest, hardest fought and most destructive military campaign ever waged on the North American continent...the opposing armies in combat on virtually a daily basis.” This book is not a history book, however; it is actually a textbook on leadership, filtered through the lens of the lives of two of history’s greatest generals as they endeavored for the survival or destruction of the United States during this campaign.

The author’s primary purpose in studying this specific campaign is to examine the leadership lessons it provides for people in the business world. His work is split into two distinct sections: the first is a study of the lessons that can be gleaned from the personal histories of Lee and Grant; the second is a dissection of the Overland Campaign. For example, Lee’s well-known ability to exercise absolute self-control, even in the face of battle, apparently was a positive reaction to watching his father fall into debt and lose control of the family finances. Bowery uses this example to highlight the ineffectiveness of losing one’s control in front of co-workers.

A chapter in the second section titled “Spotsylvania: Adapting Your Leadership Style to Changing Situations” examines three leadership styles: directive (leader-centric), delegating (subordinate-centric), and participating (team-centric.) Bowery explains in this chapter the reasons why a leader would shift between different styles to adapt to situations or make decisions. Both Lee and Grant had begun the Overland Campaign with the intention of using delegation leadership—trusting the abilities of their subordinate officers to achieve specific goals without micromanagement from higher ranks. The problems of the battle at Spotsylvania proved that Lee could not continue his delegation style and had to make the quick shift to directive leadership. On the other hand, Grant, now at the helm of the entire Union forces, should have been able to relax into the delegation style, but because of squabbles and confusion among his subordinate officers, had to continue to be directly involved in many decisions.

Bowery was a professor of history at West Point and writes for Civil War and military encyclopedias as well as historical publications, including *Gettysburg* and *Civil War History*. He concludes this book with several useful appendices, including a listing of the Order of Battle (how both the Union and Confederate forces were separated into divisions and the names of the commanding officers), suggestions for further reading including helpful primary sources, and “leadership laboratories” in which he gives advice on touring the battlegrounds of the Civil War and poses questions that can lead to discussion on leadership technique.

KRISTIN PUTCHINKSI (August 18, 2009)

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