

Mission Ready

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Business Lessons from the War on Iraq

We trust the fans of Mission Ready will appreciate the practical lessons we can take from the prosecution of America's war against the Iraqi regime.

Have a Bold Vision. President Bush's vision for the entire Middle East went way beyond the current conflict. Rather than accepting the political "reality" of millions of people doomed to poverty and despotic rule, he saw the possibility of an entire region characterized by free and industrious nations, making use of their vast natural resources. The President did not accept the notion held by some that the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, have been conditioned by history to be slaves of one tyrannical regime after another. And certainly the spectacle of both populations rejoicing at their liberation seemed to vindicate his view of a universal longing for freedom.

Pick the Right Team. When the President chose Donald Rumsfeld as his Secretary of Defense, many pundits referred to him as a "retread from the Gerald Ford administration." Although all admitted to his qualifications, few believed this senior citizen had the capacity to think "out of the box" as he led our armed forces into the 21st century. Today, Rumsfeld is respected by every defense expert in the world—and feared by every journalist who has tried to trade quips with his intellect.

Take the Lead. When it became apparent that the United Nations Security Council did not have the determination to enforce no less than 17 UN resolutions against the regime of Saddam Hussein, President Bush, to the outcry of the national and international press, took the lead. The courageous nations which joined his Coalition of the Willing took an historically praiseworthy stance.

Be Flexible. While the news media assured the American people that hostilities would not begin for weeks to come, President Bush authorized an attack upon a sudden target of opportunity, thereby opening the war with a completely unexpected missile attack upon the Iraqi leadership.

Once Committed, Don't Stop to Answer the Critics. Many congressional leaders and prominent celebrities warned of the reaction from "the Arab street;" which would invigorate millions of Arabs to active resistance; they warned of the desert heat, which would impede our troops; they predicted vicious "house to house" fighting which would send thousands home in body bags. The news media grew concerned that, after barely one week; we had "underestimated" the Iraqi will to fight. Through it all, General Tommy Franks kept to his plan, undistracted.

Delegate. Many journalists, attending the White House press briefings, expressed surprise at President Bush's deferring authority to prosecute the war to the experts. They thought a President should have a more "hands on" approach to war, and were stunned at Bush's answer to the question of when the war will be over. He replied, "The war will be over when Tommy Franks tells me that the mission he has been charged with has been accomplished."

Give Your People the Tools to Do the Job. One of the reasons there were so few allied casualties in this war, was the buildup of men and material that preceded the assault. Our troops had everything they needed, and more, to achieve victory. The President and his team did not try to win the war "on the cheap."

All of these leadership principles can be applied to our business organizations and to our careers.