

Episode 79: What is Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War'?

'The Art of War' is an ancient Chinese military treatise that is attributed to Sun Tzu. It is often said to be the best, if not definitive, work on military strategies. Today we are looking at Chapter 1, known as Laying Plans and The Calculations. Good leaders calculate their own strengths and weaknesses before battle, so let us explore his 5 factors.

1. The Way

This relates to the leadership ability of getting the troops to be united in mind and spirit. For those of us in business, this is about shared goals and objectives. If you don't have your team focused and committed to the same thing, you can't win.

2. The Heaven

Heaven to Sun Tzu was about weather and time. For us it's about understanding your business conditions and timing. Starting a fight at the wrong time is as poor a decision as not being ready to fight.

3. The Ground

Often thought of as The Terrain, how does the ground look for a fight? Think about how competitive your product or solution is. Are you going up against a stronger company or brand? To be clear about your group you need to do a SWOT analysis of your situation.

4. The General

Sun Tzu says, "General is wisdom, credibility, benevolence, courage, and discipline." In other words, your leadership skills and the way you manage the team. It's both what you say and what you do. There's a need to both reward and punish – your people will see you do both.

5. The Law

Law is organization, the chain of command, logistics and the control of expenses. In other words, every endeavor needs processes. War, or your business, needs the same. As a leader you need to take time not only to build but to synchronize processes.

Bottom Line: What Sun Tzu tells us in chapter 1 is that a general who does not make calculations, and does not use them, will surely be defeated.

