
From The Iliad, Gilgamesh, and The Art of War, the Roles of Leadership

The Iliad, Gilgamesh, and The Art of War are set in different time periods. The Art of War posits that good leadership is a matter of life and death, a road to either safety or ruin. Master Sun Tzu does everything he can including extreme violence to gain implicit obedience among his subjects, but due to their unwillingness to learn and listen, he must take drastic measures to get his point across such as beheading two of the favored concubines. In the next two stories, the death of a companion is the turning point in the life and leadership of our two heroes. Both Gilgamesh and Achilles experienced aspirations and entitlement to greatness and glory and this is heightened by the fact that both have minor goddesses for a mother and a mortal father. Both will eventually recognize their humanity. Gilgamesh and Achilles are in such grief from the loss of their friends that they attempt to push human limits. Gilgamesh is a tyrant and his lack of mercy for his people brings a lack of mercy for himself as evidenced by his people appealing to the God's for action against him. Achilles' grieving results in his rage overtaking his life and almost leading to ruin. His mother tells him, "it is fated that if he kills Hector, he will himself die soon after" (Wilson, 38). One leader will eventually learn from others and his mortality to become a successful leader while the other dooms himself.

Leadership is the ability to govern and direct those who will follow. There are some attributes that most great leaders have, such as, patience, wisdom gained from experience and selflessness. One writer defines leadership as "a ruler who respects the traditional rights and practices of his people and defends them" (Vulpe 280). Leaders do not always have all these traits, but they usually have some. The kings in our stories become intoxicated with the desire for greatness more so than the desire to sacrifice self for the good of others.

Gilgamesh builds the city of Uruk and becomes the king. He acts like a god before men and recognizes no force able to resist him. He makes a mockery of the rights of the people. He uses his power and authority as a ruler to indulge only himself and his emotional and carnal desires including the right to be the first to sleep with a new bride before her husband. The sons and daughters of the citizens are also at risk because of his sexual appetite. Unfortunately, a lot of people in a place of authority use their clout to obtain things they want. Gilgamesh turns into such a cruel, self-centered, and stubborn ruler, the people of the city rebel against his rule and call on the gods to help them. They say, "Your people now come to you for help. Gilgamesh arrogantly leaves no son to his father, Yet he should be the shepherd of the city" (Getty and Kwon 78). The people do not see him as a shepherd of the city or any kind of caring leader.

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Since Gilgamesh is two-thirds divine, and one-third human he believes himself to be all knowing, the master of wisdom, and immortal. He goes on a journey in search of everlasting life but after witnessing death, he gets scared and as they approach danger, Gilgamesh says to his young friend Enkidu, “Who, my friend, can scale heaven? Only the gods live forever under the sun. As for mankind, numbered are their days; Whatever they achieve is but wind... Should I fall, I shall have made me a name: ‘Gilgamesh’—they will say— ‘against fierce Huwawa has fallen.’... (Wilson 27). As they start to the Cedar Forest to defeat Humbaba, Gilgamesh, in an effort to be a good leader, tells Enkidu, “But since you are now dreading death, offering nothing of your courage—I, I’ll be your protector, marching in front of you! Your own mouth shall tell others that you feared the onslaught of battle, Whereas I, if I should fall, will have established my name forever” (Getty and Kwon 84). This does show one trait of a good king by showing the skills of a leader and the ability to conquer his fears. “His meeting with Enkidu teaches Gilgamesh that his power is not unlimited and ultimately will play a role effectively ending his tyranny in Uruk” (Vulpe 280). He has had close fellowship and love with a human friend and has learned how valuable that is. By the end of the story, Gilgamesh has changed when he kills Humbaba. He saves the city and sees the limits of his control over events. He realizes he is also dependent on time.

After Gilgamesh travels to Utnapishtim to find everlasting life, Utnapishtim tells him: “Does anyone build a house that will stand forever, or sign a contract for all time? The dead are alike, and Death makes no distinction between Servant and master, when they have reached their full span allotted” (Getty and Kwon 94). Then Utnapishtim speaks to Gilgamesh, saying: “Gilgamesh, you have labored long. What now shall I give you before you return to your country?” (Getty and Kwon 99). He tells him about a plant which resembles a buckthorn that will give him back the vigor of his youth. His past does not change, but he is beginning to change when he departs from his selfish ways and chooses to take the plant-of life back to his people rather than eat it immediately himself. He struggles through several challenges trying to get the plant back to Uruk. Even though Gilgamesh fails in his quest, because the serpent took the plant away from him, he has the welfare of his people at heart.

Both Achilles and Gilgamesh are influenced by a relationship with a friend and they are reluctant to accept the death of Enkidu and Patroclus. Achilles’ is the bravest, most handsome, and greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War. His father had said, “to be always most valiant and superior to the rest” (Wilson 27) but his anger has manifested itself and he becomes obsessed with revenge. After Achilles refuses further service in the war, Patroclus goes to the battlefield disguised in Achille’s armor. It never enters their mind that Patroclus could be killed. The blame for his death should be put on Achilles for letting Patroclus impersonate him on the battlefield. Achilles’ grief and rage when Patroclus’s body is brought to him can only be copied by animal imagery. So many times, this speaks to the nature of humanity.

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Achilles' leadership starts out with honor and glory, but this bypasses him when grief overtakes his sanity. He ignores his physical needs when he decides to not sleep, rest or eat because of his grief. Achilles can only focus on vindicating himself for the loss of Patroclus and by doing this, he wants to kill as many Trojans as possible. He becomes a different person and shows dark, obsessive and menacing behaviors causing him to do horrific things to Hector's body by boastfully dragging it around the city. Achilles looks for greatness and notability, but he destroys this with his hatred and grief. He must come back from the place that his unbearable loss has put him in. But Achilles does not understand that the revenge he is seeking will only ensure his own death. Achilles cannot be a good commander when he is so consumed with revenge, anger, hatred, and emotion. He knows he does not have any choice in the matter when his mother tells him to stop shortening his life. Achilles finally agrees and says, "so be it" (Wilson 40). Achilles returns from the deep depression and sadness he found himself in, and it ends in a victory for humane feelings.

Master Sun said, "The Way of War is A Way of Deception" (Tzu and Minford 8). By this, he means there is deception at every turn. You cannot let the enemy know your strengths and weaknesses and you must be ready to address whatever tactics you are faced with. You must be able to make changes in your plans when you see it is necessary for victory. This works in many situations throughout life. That is why you must be a focused leader and a presenter to your subjects or people. When he is demonstrating his method of warfare and military training, Master Sun has problems when he cannot get his army to listen to him. The two concubines placed as leaders of the army do not know they will be an example. He has both killed to get the point across that they need to act in accordance with the orders of their superiors. The Art of War produces a military style of leadership that can aid in a war or life in general. That is why this process is still studied in many areas around the world for military and other necessities.

Master Sun tells you to follow your advantage and you can master your opportunity which is great advice. Being the opposite of what the enemy envisions, gives a great advantage. "Ultimate excellence lies Not in winning Every battle, But in defeating the enemy Without ever fighting" (Minford and Tzu 10). It is always better to defeat someone you are at odds with by breaking their resistance without confrontation. If a general is not structured enough to send his troops out in coordination without deaths, it will be a calamity if the city is not taken. Master Sun states there are five steps for victory, "Know when to fight, And when not to fight; Understand how to deploy Large and small Numbers; Have officers and men who Share a single will; Be ready For the unexpected; Have a capable general Unhampered by his sovereign" (Minford and Tzu 12-13). Master Sun has the ability to turn people that are in charge into leaders. He does not accept silliness or laziness but strict conformance and requires everyone to be of one mind. His people will watch him for guidance and will follow him into battle. After reading Master Sun's directives for victory, you will understand what he focuses on when it comes to a leader. He firmly believes and has proven that strict discipline and structure is imperative to have a

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good and successful military.

The leaders in these stories want popularity, fame, and glory. Gilgamesh wants immortality and feels like he must live forever to accomplish his goals and obtain excellence. The turning point for Gilgamesh is losing Enkidu and realizing he is not immortal. Even as Achilles is mourning the loss of his friend Patroclus, he would rather die young and have greatness than to live a long life and be little known. Sun Tzu was the one who had the knowledge and experience to lay out the plan for great leadership and victory.

In the Bible, Matthew 21:28-32 "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not': but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir'; and went not" (The Holy Bible 1097). Which one did what his father wanted? Gilgamesh started out as a terrible ruler but became a good ruler because of the love and companionship of a human friend, Enkidu. He realizes he is mortal and must die like every man does. Achilles, on the other hand, starts as a good leader but lets his grief and his desire for revenge lead him to do horrible things to Hector's body thus losing respect and honor.

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