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Sun Tzu and the Art of Business: Six Strategic Principles for Managers

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Two millennia ago, the original author of Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* presumably never intended the work to be applied to the twenty-first-century global marketplace. However, Mark McNeilly has taken the liberty of doing so. In a novel approach, he has compiled a list of strategic concepts derived from the ancient military strategist and translated them into a lexicon for modern corporate capitalists. *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business* is a guidebook for business managers looking to increase profitability for the sake of their companies and their employees. The book was originally published in 1996 but has been revised to address the influence of globalization, the increased use of the Internet, the increase in cooperative alliances, and the economic rise of China.

McNeilly, a former infantry officer and corporate strategist, derives six principles from Sun Tzu’s philosophy that, if followed, will yield business success. The prescriptive list consists of winning without fighting—capturing your market without destroying it; avoiding strength, attacking weakness—striking where they least expect it; employing deception and foreknowledge—maximizing the power of market information; using speed and preparation—moving swiftly to overcome your competitors; shaping your opponent—employing strategy to master your opponent; and displaying character-based leadership—providing effective leadership in turbulent times.

McNeilly assumes there are natural parallels between ancient warfare and modern commerce. For example, battlefield victory is likened to market share and industry dominance. In order to validate his points, the author juxtaposes numerous business case studies with military history. While certainly engaging, some of the parallels seem oversimplified and lacking in critical analysis. The inclusion of so many case studies tends to minimize the complexities of each one, and when taken out of context, the case studies become almost trivialized. There is also little discussion on risk assessment or how one’s enemy or competitor may react to each of the principles outlined.

For those who want a simple approach to applying military strategy to the competitive marketplace, this book achieves that objective. It is an enjoyable and quick read, written in a style that is brisk and easy to follow. Included is a practical section designed to help readers develop and apply a business approach. What readers may find especially helpful is the inclusion of Samuel B. Griffith’s translation of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* and a list of references for further study. Overall, this work may appeal more to a general audience than to serious students of strategy.

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Howard Wiarda’s memoir of his time at the National War College is a startling book. During nearly a decade of teaching in the professional military