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Sun Tzu's 31 Best Pieces Of Leadership Advice

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There was no greater war leader and strategist than Chinese military general Sun Tzu. His philosophy on how to be a great leader and ensure you win in work, politics, and life is summed up in these 31 pieces of advice. They can all be applied by you in your next campaign, messaging effort, and/or lobbying activities. Pick and choose some or all from the list below.

1. A leader leads by example, not by force.
2. You have to believe in yourself.
3. Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak.
4. If your enemy is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him. If your opponent is temperamental, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. If sovereign and subject are in accord, put division between them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.
5. The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.
6. Supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.
7. If the mind is willing, the flesh could go on and on without many things.
8. Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.
9. To know your Enemy, you must become your Enemy.
10. Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.
11. Can you imagine what I would do if I could do all I can?
12. Even the finest sword plunged into salt water will eventually rust.
13. Engage people with what they expect; it is what they are able to discern and confirms their projections. It settles them into predictable patterns of response, occupying their minds while you wait for the extraordinary moment — that which they cannot anticipate.
14. If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.
15. Thus we may know that there are five essentials for victory:
 - A. He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.

- B. He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces.
 - C. He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.
 - D. He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared.
 - E. He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign.
16. Be extremely subtle, even to the point of formlessness. Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of the opponent's fate.
 17. Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.
 18. There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combinations of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard. There are not more than five primary colors, yet in combination they produce more hues than can ever been seen. There are not more than five cardinal tastes, yet combinations of them yield more flavors than can ever be tasted.
 19. Opportunities multiply as they are seized.
 20. When the enemy is relaxed, make them toil. When full, starve them. When settled, make them move.
 21. Know yourself and you will win all battles.
 22. Move swift as the Wind and closely-formed as the Wood. Attack like the Fire and be still as the Mountain.
 23. Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.
 24. When strong, avoid them. If of high morale, depress them. Seem humble to fill them with conceit. If at ease, exhaust them. If united, separate them. Attack their weaknesses. Emerge to their surprise.
 25. All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.
 26. There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.
 27. The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.
 28. Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons. And they will follow you into the deepest valley.
 29. Build your opponent a golden bridge to retreat across.
 30. All warfare is based on deception.
 31. When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard.