

Eye of the Storm Leadership

by Peter Adler, Ph.D.

Billed as “150 ideas, stories, quotes, and exercises on the art and politics of managing human conflicts”, Eye of the Storm Leadership is available online or on CD or DVD.

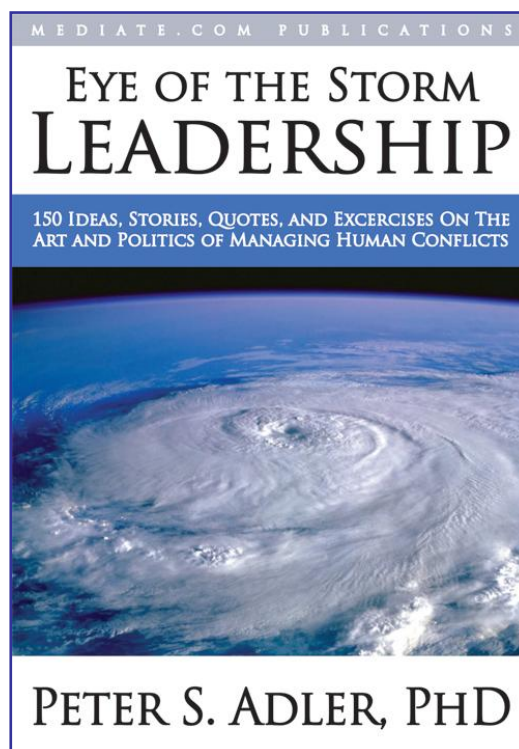
In the following pages, LEADR previews Chapter V, Practical Politics, to give you a taste of the content and style.

[Read a review by John Sautelle, Director of Performgroup and LEADR Advanced mediator >>](#)

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Excerpt

“The political eye of the storm is a peculiar vantage point, a center to things, a calm place where turbulence waxes and wanes around you, where gales arise and dissipate, where pyrotechnics terrify and energize, where harm and possibility occur in the same instance, where matters circulate for a time, and then fade away. The eye of the storm is not for everyone. If you practice being there or find comfort in it, you can use it to good ends and enjoy the intimacy of being part of the exercise of power. If not, find some other line of work.”



Peter S. Adler, PhD is President of The Keystone Center which builds applied, consensus-based solutions to complex energy, environmental and health-related problems. Prior to his appointment at Keystone, Adler held executive positions with the Hawaii Justice Foundation and the Hawaii Supreme Court. He served as President of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution, teaches and trains, and has authored numerous publications.

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V

Practical Politics



Storm at Glencoe Scotland. Credit: Paul Cosgrove

Starting Point / The Ghosts of Melos

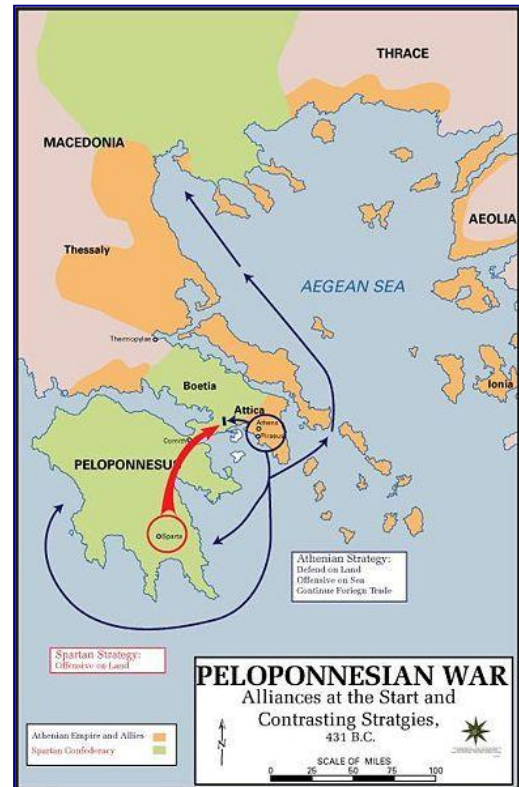
The Peloponnesian War was fought between 431 and 404 BC. It was the World War of its time, a vast play for political, commercial, and cultural supremacy of the Mediterranean. The protagonists were Athens and the Delian League on one side and Sparta and the Peloponnesian League on the other. The conflict, chronicled and passed along to us by Thucydides, forced every island and city-state to take sides. Melos, with ties to both combatants, tried to abstain from the fight and remain independent. Here is some of what they said:

Athenians: "... you will not think it dishonorable to submit to the greatest city in Hellas, when it makes you the moderate offer of becoming its tributary ally, without ceasing to enjoy the country that belongs to you; nor when you have the choice given you between war and security, will you be so blinded as to choose the worse. And it is certain that those who do not yield to their equals, who keep terms with their superiors, and are moderate towards their inferiors, on the whole succeed best."

Melians: "Our resolution, Athenians, is the same as it was at first. We will not in a moment deprive of freedom a city that has been inhabited these seven hundred years; but we put our trust in the fortune by which the gods have preserved it until now, and in the help of men, that is, of the Lacedaemonians; and so we will try and save ourselves. Meanwhile we invite you to allow us to be friends to you and foes to neither party, and to retire from our country after making such a treaty as shall seem fit to us both."ⁱ

The Athenians, inventors of Western democracy, starved the island into submission, killed the men, and sold every Melian woman and child into slavery.

In the greater sweep of the 27-year Peloponnesian War, the incident at Melos was minor. Melos was in the way of rampaging elephants. With subtlety and nuance,



*Alliances in the Peloponnesian War, 431 B.C.
Credit: Wikimedia Commons.*

however, Thucydides' long dialogue records the Melian's naïve bewilderment at the choices presented by the Athenians: slavery or death, small numbers confronting superior strength, neutrality versus cooptation. What the Athenians ultimately said to the Melians was this: might will always make right, the strong will always do what is in their power to do, the weak must ultimately submit, and if you are not with us you must be against us.



Swiss Federal Council, 2008. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

The ghosts of Melos are still around. The Melian dialogue is a central tenet of the realist school of international affairs and a much studied text by American neoconservatives. But there are other examples of non-aligned politics that could also be studied to better effect. Switzerland, with its 650,000-man defense force and airplanes ready to launch from mouse-hole tunnels in the Alps, has also gone to great lengths to protect its independent status in the community of nations. Their policies have served them well, financially and politically. Switzerland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and has a population of 7 million. Via referendum, 100,000 Swiss can demand that their Constitution be revised. A new

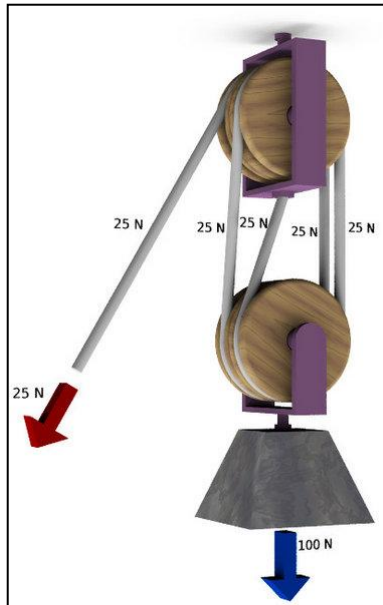
president of Switzerland is elected every year from the seven members of the Swiss Federal Council. The president of Switzerland in 1999 was a woman and Jewish. Her name is Ruth Dreifuss.ⁱⁱ

The origins of the Swiss approach to domestic and foreign affairs date back 400 years. Before it was a country, Switzerland was a loose federation of cities, states, and cantonments without a central government. The Charter of Wil, concluded in 1647, created a joint defense for the common good and the country's first declaration of neutrality. It was a bulwark against the predations and disputes of larger neighbors and, equally important, a way of managing its internal politics in a democratic manner.

In contrast, Melos, the small Mediterranean city-state, was a weak pawn pleading the moral high ground of non-alignment in the face of overwhelming and brutal forces. Their eloquent arguments were ignored and they were crushed. Switzerland, with its defensive hedgehog strategy, suggests another approach, more muscular in its impartiality, and one grudgingly respected by others who are in every way bigger and stronger.

41 Power

[“Power corrupts. Knowledge is power. Study hard. Be evil.” Anon \(Wikiquote\)](#)



In physics, power is a measure of work done or energy transferred. In the political world, it is the ability to impose your will. In both arenas, power is an input, something you use to accomplish bigger things. If people aren't using it for larger ends, they are squandering it. In the 1960s and 70s, Saul Alinsky, a brilliant Chicago-based community organizer, used to tell his people that power is not just what you have, but what your enemy thinks you have. He was a master of gaining and using leverage. As he demonstrated over and over, power is rarely a blunt instrument. It is a set of diverse paintbrushes: economic power; human capital mobilization power; legal power; expert and information power; bureaucratic power and the ability to gate-keep and control choke points; the power of personality, integrity, tenacity, patience, and charisma; the power of the press and a good story; legal fire power and the ability to compel. You need power but the more demanding questions center on what you plan to do with it. ⁱⁱⁱ

Power is "Work Done" - Energy Transfer in a Pulley. Credit:

www.ck12.org



42 Open Lines

“I didn’t miss the rat race, but I kinda missed the rats.” *Jerry Nachman*

Always keep channels of communication open between adversaries. Nelson Mandela gets all the credit for turning South Africa around. He is a genuine hero, but there were two of them working the problem from different ends of the continuum. In his early career as Minister of National Education, F.W. de Klerk toed the cultural and political party line of a “White South Africa.” In fact, he aggressively championed segregated universities. Mandela’s agitations helped set the stage for ousting the arch-conservative administration of P.W. Botha. A member of Botha’s cabinet, de Klerk helped engineer a political coup and succeeded him. Then, shuttling Mandela in and out of prison for secret talks, de Klerk, a life-long conservative, and Mandela, a life long radical, negotiated the end of apartheid.

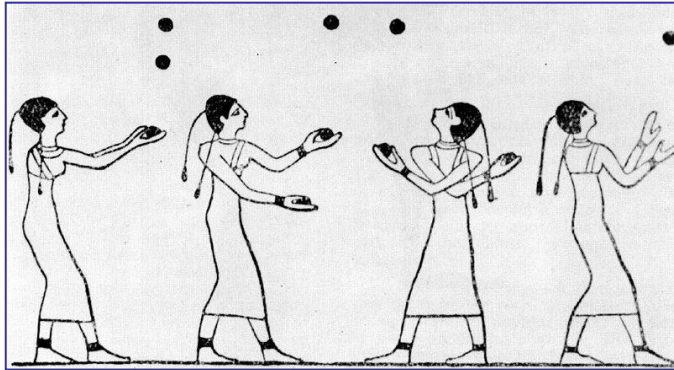


F.W. de Klerk. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



43 High Touch

“Always be on time. Do as little talking as humanly possible. Remember to lean back in the parade car so everyone can see the president. Be sure not to get too fat, because you’ll have to sit three in the backseat.” *Eleanor Roosevelt*



Ancient Egyptian Wall Hanging Depicting Jugglers. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

It sounds counter-intuitive, but issues aren't actually that important. Process is. Many issues rise to prominence because there isn't enough to go around, hence a dog fight for limited resources. Others are a collision of principles and philosophies. Sometimes it's a confrontation of venal and self-serving behaviors. Sometimes it's all three. If you become a master of good process, you will learn patience, courtesy, good humor, and timing. You always need to earn your right to play in the game but chips can come through respect, track record, and friendships. Most of all you

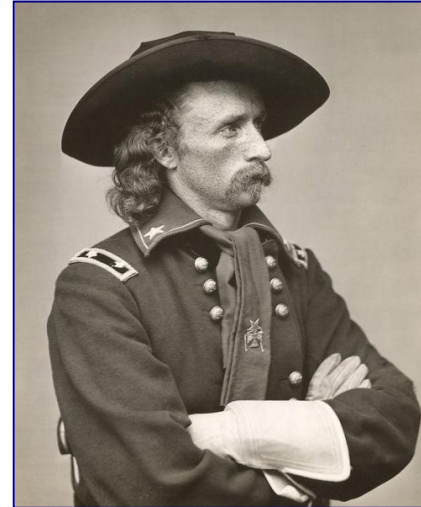
will have to be a good juggler. Start with one ball thrown up to eye level in an arc. Add a second ball when the first ball is at eye level. Don't throw both balls at the same time and don't step into the juggle. Practice this over and over. Add a third ball. Graduate to comfortably spinning more than three disks on sticks, tossing swords, throwing burning torches in the air, and keeping five bowling pins juggled while riding a unicycle, all effortlessly and without being out of breath.^{iv}



44 Bravado

“She ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to B.” *Dorothy Parker*

Words spoken in the spotlight during big moments are often filled with audacity, bluster, and belligerence. They also get remembered. Napoleon Bonaparte, at breakfast with his generals on the morning of Waterloo, said: “I tell you Wellington is a bad general, the English are bad soldiers and we will settle this matter by lunch time.” George Custer, heading to Little Big Horn, pronounced: “There are not enough Indians in the world to defeat the Seventh Calvary.” And Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forrest who reputedly had 30 horses shot out from under him and personally killed 31 people, said: “I was a horse ahead at the end.” People in the political crosshairs say ridiculous, often regrettable, things. Modesty works better. Keep your own rhetoric down. Help others back off their own mistakes. Get others to brush off the sting of insults as best as possible. Those remarks may be forgiven but they will never be forgotten.

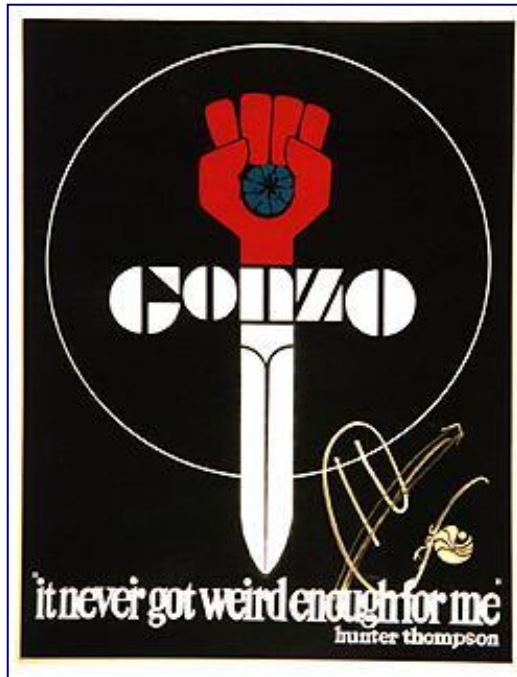


George Armstrong Custer. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



45 Media

“Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.” *Mark Twain*



There's a story, fictional no doubt, about a successful international stock broker who used to call his people in Hong Kong and tell them to sell. Then he would call his people in New York and tell them to buy because the people in Hong Kong were selling. He made money at both ends. Newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and blogs are willingly complicit in this. They love buying and selling conflict. They thrive on fights. They make money on them. They love expanding and widening them to keep stories juicy and longer running. Politicians use this all the time to their great advantage. They go on offense to stir things up. They play defense to try and stop things in their tracks. You can do either of those, but there is also a third way: offering sage and encouraging words that seek to find resolution and common ground. At the right moment, media also likes the new idea, the different involvement, and the fresh face that could lead to closure.

One of Hunter S. Thompson's "Gonzo Journalism" Posters. Credit: Wikimedia



46 Enemies

“Be courteous to all, but intimate with few; and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence.” *George Washington*

Washington, DC is a notoriously tough and cynical town. So are lots of other towns as well as the head offices of most private, academic, and non-profit organizations. After Harry Truman became president and took up residence in the White House, someone asked him if he had made any new friends and he reputedly said: “In DC if you want a friend, get a dog.” The hard truth of it is this: the longer you are in the game the more you will acquire acquaintances, flatterers, supplicants, sycophants, and contacts. You will also accrue enemies. Yet, in politics, there are no permanent enemies or friends. The general rule of thumb is to keep your friends close and your enemies closer. A corollary is to never surprise your friends. A third is to find, create, and maintain allies. You can use all three rules for your own work and to help others sort out their political problems.



*Want a Friend? Get s Dog.
Credit: Wikimedia Commons.*



47 Grapevine

“Ninety percent of the politicians give the other ten percent a bad name.” [Henry Kissinger](#)



Official channels, press conferences, and media releases tell you very little. Many of them are ceremonial and the messages tend to be cooked, spun, and served up so as to make someone look especially good or bad. Half the time you already know what is about to be said. Politics is a circuit board, a patchwork of interconnected networks transmitting many sorts of information. If you keep your ear close to the ground and listen for chatter on the “coconut wireless” you will learn more and know it sooner. You may also be able to correct some of the gossip, noise, and exaggeration that always wafts its way around political circles. Trust the grapevine. Stay wary of official pronouncements.

Trust the Grapevine.

Credit: Wikimedia



48 Bureaucracy

“If the world should blow itself up, the last audible voice would be that of an expert saying it can’t be done.” *Peter Ustinov*

Bureaucracies have lives of their own. The bureaucratic ethos seeks stability. It values hierarchy, obedience, procedures, and the application of narrow ranges of specialty and expertise. This makes collaboration within and between bureaucracies inherently difficult.



Web Site for Canadian Government Jobs. Credit: <http://www.bureaucrat.ca>

The ethos of collaboration is about making deals and building consensus. Its predicates are equality, adaptability, discretion, and results. To get practical things done at any level of scale you must enlist the bureaucracy, bypass it, or change it. However, the bureaucratic and collaborative impulses share one mutually-valued quality: trust. Both prize reliability and the confidence that people will do what they say. Trust, in turn, is built on recognition (being heard and acknowledged); commitment (agreeing to reciprocal behaviors); and accountability (being “predictable” and doing what you say). These are the linkages between and within bureaucracies and those who need to work with them.



49 Loyalty

“When the water reaches the upper level, follow the rats.” *Claude Swanson, Secretary of the Navy*



*Plains Apache. Credit:
Wikimedia Commons.*

Even through dry seasons, floods, and unexpected blockages, politics is a navigable river. Two of its strongest undercurrents are loyalty and identity. The two run close together and form sandbars, eddies, and bends. Despite all the rational facts that attend an issue, “identity politics” is often the real play. Tip O’Neil’s famous aphorism that “all politics are local” was actually an understatement. They are tribal. Organizations, companies, cities, villages, neighborhoods, and organized political units are the tribes. People will defend their tribes and engage in complex fights to further their tribe’s interests. Loyalty is the currency we pay and receive for membership in our tribe. It can’t be bought or sold. It must be honored, recognized, and acknowledged as part of any agreement or deal.



50 Reputation

“How far would Moses have gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt?” *Harry S. Truman*

People, issues, and alliances change, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. You will need more than one political face to navigate with. History teaches us you will have several of them anyway. Henry Clay, John Calhoun, and Daniel Webster were powerful advocates for their separate causes but they forged the Compromise of 1850 that helped delay the Civil War for seven years. Menachem Begin, Yasser Arafat, Nelson Mandela, and George Washington were all considered terrorists before they became statesmen. You will be fiercely competitive and just as fiercely cooperative. You will be coolly analytic, warmly considerate, bluntly practical, and highly ethical. Sometimes you will be all of these at once. Other times you may need to leap from one to another. There will be costs. The really enduring traits that you see are reputational: being well-prepared, being realistic, being self-controlled in the face of high emotion, and being absolutely reliable when you have given your word.



An Early American Terrorist: George Washington. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.



Exercises

- ✚ On the conflict you are tracking, make a list of all the players and who might be allied with whom.
- ✚ Name their “tribal” allegiances.
- ✚ Describe the way people prefer to talk within each tribe.
- ✚ Describe the quality and quantity of communication, past and current, among the parties.
- ✚ What regrettable things have been said and by whom? What was the effect?
- ✚ What role has the media played and what is the history of public pronouncements?

ⁱ See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, The Melian Dialogue (Book 5, Chapter 17), Translated by Richard Crawley, electronic text from the Internet Classics Archive at MIT:
<http://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.5.fifth.html>.

ⁱⁱ See John McPhee’s *La Place de la Concorde Suisse* (1984).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Saul Alinsky’s *Rules For Radicals*, New York: Random House (1971).

^{iv} See “The Instant Juggler’s Manual” at <http://www.yoyoguy.com/info/ball/index2.html>.