



LEAD LIKE

IKE

TEN BUSINESS STRATEGIES
FROM THE CEO OF D-DAY

GEOFF LOFTUS



“Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower
Order of the Day: June 6, 1944 — D-Day

“The most difficult and complicated operation ever to take place.”

Winston S. Churchill

“The history of warfare knows no other like undertaking from the point of view of its scale, its vast conception, and its masterly execution. . . . History will record this deed as an achievement of the highest order.”

Josef Stalin

“Nothing like it had ever been seen before, or would again.”

Stephen E. Ambrose, author,
*Eisenhower:
Soldier and President*

**Introduction:
The World's Most Daunting Business Initiative**

As I write this, in the midst of the 2007-2009 recession, the global economy is, to put it mildly, a mess. Everywhere you look, top management is operating under the most extreme pressure. Corporations' stock values have been shredded, the balance sheets only seem to come in the color red, it seems like forever since the credit markets functioned properly, jobs are disappearing at the fastest rate in decades. Again and again, economists, businessmen and women, politicians and the average American (whoever he or she may be) all say that the only time that was worse was the Great Depression. And many people think that even after the current recession finally ends, we will find ourselves mired in an economic environment that is radically different than the pre-recession economy. It will be a long time before the future looks bright again.

So, why write a book treating General Dwight D. Eisenhower as a CEO? How is that supposed to help Corporate America's executives do their jobs? Because he *was* the chief executive of the company that pulled off the most daunting *business* project in history: Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. He *was* the chief executive of the company that operated under the greatest pressure any executive has ever seen. Ever.

Overlord required years of strategic and tactical planning. The

manufacturing and inventory of the necessary supplies consumed the majority of Corporate America's industrial capacity. The supply chain stretched across an ocean. The workforce was multinational, trained in many countries and several languages, then transported to England where training continued, then transported to work in its destination market.

Like any well-run company, Ike's had a mission statement: Force the unconditional surrender of its competitor, Nazi Germany. Eisenhower's success wasn't measured by his achieving a certain predefined portion of market share — it was defined by his seizing complete control of the market and eliminating the competition. The first phase of that mission involved the successful penetration of the competitor's territory. The second phase meant that Ike had to stretch the supply chain even farther, build or acquire local infrastructure, and increase the workforce on the ground. Continued strategic and tactical planning were necessities, along with the ability to improvise when conditions shifted suddenly.

All of this planning, training, and execution of plans had to occur in the toughest competitive environment on earth: not a battle of market share and bottomlines but human lives. Talk about "skin in the game"

How often have you sat in a business meeting and listened as the military and sports metaphors fly? Eisenhower loved to use sports

metaphors, especially football metaphors in his strategic sessions with his commanders. *Lead Like Ike* takes the military-metaphor-for-business model a large step forward and analyzes military operations as business operations, analyzes the commanding general as CEO.

It examines Eisenhower's relationship with:

- His board of directors (Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Josef Stalin, and the chiefs of staff of the American and British armies and navies),
- His C-level staff (the senior commanders like Generals Omar Bradley and George Patton and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery),
- His affiliated organizations (the Free French, Polish forces in exile in England), and
- His stakeholders (the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied forces in Europe; the citizens and taxpayers of the United States and Great Britain; and the millions of victims of Hitler's insanity).

Lead Like Ike draws analogies to contemporary business enterprises and delineates the strategic lessons to be learned.

Strategy, as defined in Merriam-Webster, comes from the Greek word *stratēgia*, meaning generalship. The definition itself: "the science

and art of military command exercised to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions.” Secondary definitions include: “a careful plan or method; the art of devising or employing plans toward a goal.” The primary definition sounds very high-level and potentially long-term — the kind of “science and art” that’s exercised at a lofty executive level. The secondary definitions — a careful plan or method; the devising or employing plans toward a goal — seem closer to frontline managers, the folks who actually make things happen. In fact, strategy in this sense seems awfully close to the word “tactics.”

Tactics, again as defined by Merriam-Webster, is originally derived from the Greek word *tassein*, meaning to arrange, to place in battle formation. The definitions are: “the science and art of disposing and maneuvering forces in combat; the art or skill of employing available means to accomplish an end; a system or mode of procedure.” Strategy’s “employing a plan toward a goal” is almost the same as tactics’ “employing available means to accomplish an end.”

The paragraphs above aren’t just a semantic exercise for my personal verbal amusement, although I find the blurry overlap of the definitions pretty interesting. The real point is that defining the word “strategy” can be a dicey affair. So can actually defining organizational strategy. And once a company has a strategy in place, implementing it can be even tougher.

Fortunately, Eisenhower's career as D-Day's CEO provides an encyclopedic case study for designing and implementing organizational strategies. *Lead Like Ike* is that case study, with strategic lessons broken out in sidebars along the way, each one illustrating one or more strategies. These strategies are unlikely to come as a surprise to you, but that makes them no less valid or vital:

- 1) **Mission** — This is the ultimate goal of your organization, the purpose, the very reason it exists. Some people will quibble that an organization's mission is not a strategy in and of itself — and they're right — but without a well defined mission, there's no need for strategy. You can't have a constructive conversation about strategy without talking about mission, so it's included here at the top of the list. Besides, giving this book a subtitle of *One Mission and Nine Business Strategies from the CEO of D-Day* is pretty lame, don't you think? In Ike's case, the mission was very simple: Beat the Germans.
- 2) **Plan for Success** — How you're going to achieve your mission. High-level, overarching planning.
- 3) **Stay Focused** — Know and get what you need to succeed at your mission. Don't wander into interesting but non-mission-critical territory.

- 4) **Prioritize** — Do what you need to do for the success of your mission — nothing else, no matter how productive, matters. You're wasting your resources if you do.
- 5) **Plan to Implement** — Train your people, equip your people, arrange your support logistics.
- 6) **Communicate** — To your people, and to your markets. If you can't communicate, you can't implement.
- 7) **Motivate Your People** — This is where leadership comes into play: Getting your people to commit to your organization's mission as completely as you do. You need to model the behavior you want and expect from your executives and frontline workforce.
- 8) **Manage Your People** — Discovering and developing talent, rewarding your solid performers, and handling the prima donnas. (Unfortunately, everyone has prima donnas.)
- 9) **Set Expectations – Avoid Project Creep** — Closely connected to staying focused and prioritizing. Project Creep is insidious. During an operation, things develop that relate closely to the mission, so closely that you can easily confuse them with mission necessities. Let's say you're building a better mousetrap and you realize that if you just modify the design slightly, you can create a

second product that will be a better rattrap. But the redesign and retooling for manufacture of this second product will delay the launch of the first product. And the better mousetrap is desperately needed on schedule to match up with your company's fall marketing campaign. What to do . . . ? Avoid project creep. Build and sell the better mousetrap on time, and then go back and utilize your work and ideas on the mousetrap to create the rattrap as a brand new, second product.

10) **Be Honest** — With yourself, with your bosses, executive team, employees, shareholders, and the markets at large. It's one of the oldest and most exhausted of clichés but true nonetheless: Honesty is the best policy.

These strategic lessons will be analyzed in a summary chapter at the end of the book. Don't worry, you won't be quizzed on the material. At least not by me. I can't make any promises concerning the business environment and how it will test you. . . .

Decades after that cataclysmic D-Day, it's easy to take Operation Overload's success for granted. We know that the Allied forces were able to gain a beachhead and eventually to push their way through France, over the Rhine, and into Germany itself. We know that Hitler, faced by his own

moment of defeat, was incapable of taking responsibility and instead escaped through suicide. But on June 5, 1944, all of those events were still in the future, all of the results of Overlord were unknown.

On June 5 the entire world waited for the launching of this project.

In the early hours of the morning, more than 150,000 men in more than 5,000 ships and 11,000 airplanes waited. Around the world, the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, and the absolute leader of the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin, waited. In Berlin, Adolf Hitler watched and wondered, and along the northern shores of France, the German Wehrmacht was ready with miles of barb wire, machine-gun nests and artillery emplacements. The occupied nations of Europe and millions of Jews imprisoned in death camps waited, desperately hoping.

The fate of the world hinged on the decision of one man, living in a small trailer, drinking too much coffee, smoking too many cigarettes, sleeping too little. A far cry from the corner office.

This one man had already decided to postpone the project, Operation Overlord, from May to June. Only 24 hours earlier, he had decided to postpone again, for a day. And he had already decided that it was *necessary* to send some of his very best young men into what one of his commanders described as “futile slaughter.”

Now, at about 4:00 A.M. local time in England, surrounded by his

C-level executives (the senior commanders of the American and British armies, navies and air forces), Dwight D. Eisenhower had to make one last decision on the massive project: Gamble on the weather and the English Channel tides and hurl those thousands of young men at the Germans on the far side of the Normandy beaches. Or delay again — forcing a wait of two weeks for the next operational window, condemning the victims of Nazi tyranny to more oppression and slaughter, and postponing the eventual defeat of Adolf Hitler.

Eisenhower expressed his decision quietly and clearly, “Okay, let’s go.”

With those three words, Eisenhower set into motion what author Cornelius Ryan called *The Longest Day*. Ike’s C-level staff moved into action immediately, setting the invasion into motion. Eisenhower visited some of the troops who would be leaving for France within a matter of hours.

He met with the press and casually announced that the invasion was on — unlike most modern CEOs, Eisenhower was pretty damn sure the press was on his side. After talking with the reporters, Eisenhower performed an astounding feat of leadership in the face of extraordinary stress: He wrote the following “just in case” press release *before* the troops had landed, *before* the results were known:

“Our landings . . . have failed to gain a

satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. . . . The troops, the air and the Navy did all that Bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.”

“It is mine alone.” That’s leadership. On June 5, Eisenhower stared into the abyss of complete catastrophe and did not blink.

His career as D-Day’s CEO has much to teach us.

This book examines Eisenhower’s extraordinary management of a gigantic organization operating at the absolute extreme. The focus is on Ike’s designing, building and leading this organization under intense pressure because that’s where the strategic business lessons are to be learned. But analyzing D-Day in this way is not meant to diminish the sacrifice of the men and women who were part of that titanic effort.

They gave their all and saved the world.

1: The Pressure Cooker — Start-Up

Let's start with a hypothetical case: Your company, Hypothetical Inc., has been plugging along in the good ole USA for decades. Most of your shareholders have been holding their stock quietly for years and seem to be perfectly content with the steady, if small, dividends. Since you have no substantial domestic competition, all is bliss. Until a fearsome competitor looms over the Atlantic from Europe: A German-based company has emerged with global designs, a super-aggressive business plan and complete control of the European market. This German company hasn't jumped the ocean yet to go after your market, but it's pretty damn clear it will as soon as it has consolidated its gains in Europe. Remember: The German company has global ambitions.

Hypothetical Inc.'s board of directors decides that the only way to counter the German company's plans is to form an alliance with companies in Britain and Russia and create a jointly owned subsidiary, based in England, to compete directly with the Germans for control of the European market. Hypothetical's board names you as the CEO of this subsidiary and sends you to London with these goals:

- Build an organization from scratch that will compete successfully with an existing, very successful

company that has absolute control of its market.

- Create a management structure for your brand-new organization.
- Oversee the hiring and training of a massive, multicultural and multilingual workforce — eventually numbering more than 3,000,000.
- Do all of the above in 12 months — if it takes longer, Hypothetical Inc. may not survive.

This is a daunting set of challenges, but you head off to England fully committed to delivering on them because you, like your board, are absolutely convinced that the very survival of your company is dependent on your success. Urgent as these problems are, they are not the worst aspects of your job as CEO:

- If you succeed in building this subsidiary in the severely limited timeframe, you will be rewarded with . . . a demotion.
- Before leaving the United States, it was made clear to you that a star executive from the parent company in the United States will replace you once the organization is ready. He will lead the effort

against the German company — he will reap the fame and glory.

Even the prospect of getting to watch someone else succeed thanks to all of your hard work under extreme pressure is not the worst of your problems as CEO of Hypothetical's European subsidiary. You could be forgiven if you think that your worst problem is your competition itself: incredibly well organized, highly innovative, and years of successful experience in executing its often daring strategies.

However, formidable as your competition is, it's still not your worst problem. Your worst problem is: your board of directors who are:

- A collection of overpowering personalities.
- In complete disagreement about strategy.
- Not deciding and will not decide where and how to implement Hypothetical's plan of direct competition with the Germans.

If you are a normal human being, at this point in your career as CEO of Hypothetical's European subsidiary, you are well on your way to an ulcer or a drinking problem. Remember: You believe (as does your board) that if you fail, Hypothetical will go out of business. The value of

company stock will disappear, devastating your large body of shareholders. There will be massive job losses, not only for your employees but those of your alliance partners in England and Russia. The ripple effect in the economies of your country and your alliance partners (loss of tax revenues, increase in social services from the government) could be disastrous. No wonder that, as you head to London to take your post as the European subsidiary's CEO, you are feeling more than a little anxiety.

This hypothetical case more or less describes what faced Dwight D. Eisenhower as he became the CEO of an organization that, for simplicity's sake, we'll call D-Day Inc. Approximately 50 years after Ike went to London to become CEO, business books and news articles were filled with suggestions that executives needed to tackle their problems with urgency — that they needed “to have skin in the game.” Only by being at risk, having exposed skin, could executives rise to their absolute best performances.

No executive in history has ever had more skin in the game than Eisenhower.

If he failed in creating D-Day Inc., the failure would not be measured in devalued stock and unemployment. Failure would result in hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of deaths.

On June 24, 1942, Dwight D. Eisenhower, CEO of D-Day Inc., arrived in England to start his new job.

It's hard to imagine any executive ever taking over a company with more pressure than Ike had at that time. The organization he was taking over was much more of a concept than an operational reality, but that didn't stop Ike's board from giving him a 12-month deadline for launching the most ambitious business project ever: The cross-Channel invasion of the competition's territory. No organization had ever attempted such a large scale project. No organization had ever faced tougher competition: The Germans had complete control of their European territory, short supply lines, and a robust industrial base supplying their operations. They had a large, well-trained, well-equipped, experienced workforce already in the field.

Failure, however, was not an option. If D-Day Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of the U.S. military, failed at its mission, the failure would be measured in human life not lost share value.

Despite the pressure, Eisenhower had to build an organization that could succeed at this unprecedented operation. He also had to build it despite amazingly low expectations for his personal success. Eisenhower was a few months shy of his 52nd birthday when he became CEO for the first time. His entire career with his company (the U.S. Army) had been

spent in middle management. As you might expect from a career middle-manager, Ike was seen as the perfect staff man despite decades of experience and rave reviews from all of his superiors. It had taken 30 years of being a dutiful company man before Ike was named CEO. But now that he had reached the top spot of D-Day Inc., he was expected to build the organization *and then* hand over the job to the organization's next CEO — someone higher up in the parent company who would take over D-Day Inc. once it was ready to launch operations. Someone more suited to the glories of successfully completing the most daunting business project ever. Someone who could benefit from Ike's astounding feat of strategic planning; organizing; managing logistics and supplies; training a multinational, multilingual workforce; and assembling a world-class staff of C-level officers.

Eisenhower's appointment to CEO of D-Day Inc. was largely due to his excellent staff work: Ike was the master designer of the plans for the organization. Those plans demonstrated his clear thinking, his total grasp of the mission, and his strategic planning abilities. He was the perfect man to execute the plans and to create D-Day Inc. out of what was then known as the European Theater, an operating subsidiary of its parent company that existed more in theory than in reality. Because Ike was seen as a planner and an organizer, he was not considered true top-executive

material — hence the handoff of the CEO’s job when the organization was ready to launch its major project. Eisenhower was aware of all this and went into the job knowing that the glory would go to someone else. He didn’t care. His focus — his only focus — was to build an organization capable of penetrating the competition’s territory and then taking every bit of it away.

The organization would have different names and a number of major projects, but the ultimate mission of this company was to pull Europe away from Germany. Most of Ike’s board of directors believed that the only way to accomplish the mission was to launch an invasion across the English Channel into northern France. This invasion came to be known as Operation Overlord. After Overlord, D-Day Inc. would push through France, Belgium, and Holland into Germany itself.¹

**STRATEGIES:
MISSION, PLAN FOR SUCCESS**

LESSON LEARNED:

- **Attack the competition’s core:**
Maybe it’s possible to nibble your competition to death. But if you compete with them straight up, delivering better value, you’ll win bigger.

However, D-Day Inc.’s board wasn’t unanimous about the best path to success. Some of the Brits, including Winston Churchill (who,

¹ There were smaller projects — D-Days for the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, and Italy — in advance of the French invasion but all were part of the organization’s build-up to the final D-Day. That’s why, instead of worrying about the military’s terminology and organizational names, we’ll call Eisenhower’s organization D-Day Inc.

from Ike's viewpoint, functioned as the lead director of the board) thought going into northern France was the wrong way to compete with the Germans. Churchill didn't completely buy into Operation Overlord until the final weeks before D-Day. Many of the senior British commanders agreed with Churchill. Given that D-Day Inc. was more of a shadow than a reality, they felt that a gigantic cross-Channel project was out of the question. Better to launch smaller projects as soon as D-Day Inc.'s workforce could handle them. These smaller projects would be followed up cautiously, and Germany would be beaten through a course of slow and steady progress. Eisenhower felt that doing smaller projects was a distraction and would delay the organization's completion of its true mission: Seizing Europe from the Germans, which was only doable, in Ike's mind, by going through northern France.

The Germans could afford to lose territory in North Africa or Italy or even in southern France. He considered Churchill's oft-mentioned plans of going through the Balkans to be a waste of time. Ike and the Americans on his board of directors believed that if you want to take down the competition, you have to attack the core of the business not take out satellite operations that are not essential to the competition's survival. That meant that D-Day Inc. had to go through northern France — the shortest route — into the industrial heartland of its German competitor.

When Eisenhower arrived to take charge of D-Day Inc., his board

had given him a mixed set of directions: Prepare to go through northern France in a year (1943), but also get ready to launch a suicide initiative almost immediately (September 1942). Why the suicide project? FDR, Churchill and the senior American and British commanders had one overriding fear regarding all of their operations competing with the Germans: Their alliance with the Soviet Union would collapse at any moment.

Since June 1941, only the Soviets were competing directly with the Germans for territory in Europe. A massive share of America's industrial output, and that of Britain's as well, was going to support the Soviet effort. Everyone at D-Day Inc., from FDR on down, believed that the Germans would get stronger if the Russians ceased to compete — and the Americans and Brits were aware that the Russians had signed a non-compete agreement with the Germans before the war (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939) and that at the rate the Soviets were suffering now, if the Germans offered a new noncompete agreement, there was a high likelihood of Soviet acceptance.

This fear of a Soviet collapse is what drove the creation of the suicide project, the delicately named Operation Sledgehammer. If the Soviets suffered too many setbacks between Eisenhower's arrival in England in June and September, Ike was supposed to launch Sledgehammer to divert pressure from the Soviets and keep their massive workforce in direct competition with the Germans.

STRATEGIES:

PLAN FOR SUCCESS, STAY FOCUSED, MANAGE YOUR PEOPLE (BOTH UP AND DOWN)

LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Fight distractions:**
In other words, avoid "mission creep" like the plague. It's just as deadly as the dreaded disease, even when it's forced on you by senior management or your board.
- **Give in gracefully:**
If it becomes apparent that mission creep is unavoidable, give in. You may get lucky and factors outside your control may keep you on track — as they did for Ike with Sledgehammer. (Making sacrifices to pagan gods might not be a bad idea . . .)

The only problem with Sledgehammer was that almost no one believed in it:

- It was almost impossible that Ike could launch anything three months after taking the CEO's job.
- The Americans and Brits didn't have sufficient resources — in personnel or supplies.

- Even if Sledgehammer was launched, there was no guarantee the Soviets wouldn't sign a noncompete anyway.
- Sledgehammer, if activated, would cause unforeseeable delay in the main mission: the invasion of France.

Like many executives, Eisenhower found himself saddled with a directive that he had to accept and, at least, create a semblance of doing. His only hope was that the competitive situation in Europe would never reach the point that it required him to launch Sledgehammer. (It didn't.)

Eisenhower arrived in England in late June 1942 with his mixed set of directives (go into France but get ready to launch Sledgehammer, too!); without the actual, in-place resources to accomplish his mission; and with an aggressively ambitious timeline for launching the project.

Ike set the tone he wanted for the organization on his first day on the job. He met with the American staff he was inheriting — remember, the organization was more a theory than a reality — and immediately stated their mission:

Build D-Day Inc. to be ready to go into France in a year's time.

He explained to his fellow Americans that they had to present an attitude of “determined enthusiasm and optimism.”^{vi} Ike made it clear that pessimism was out — any officer who couldn’t handle the challenges without talking of defeat should leave. Ike also changed a fundamental way of doing business: From that moment on, the staff would take complete responsibility for solving its own problems instead of referring them to Washington. As he reported to his boss, General George C. Marshall, “No alibis or excuses will be acceptable.”ⁱⁱ

As a young officer, Eisenhower had spent a great deal of time coaching football teams on Army posts, and he emphasized the most important lesson of his football experience once he became the top executive: team first. He wanted a coordinated effort, not star turns. In his experience, successful teams were the ones who pulled together with the players selflessly supporting each other. Stars and prima donnas were often successful through sheer brilliance, but brilliant performances are about as

STRATEGIES:

MOTIVATE YOUR PEOPLE, BE HONEST

LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Start the way you mean to finish:**
If you believe that optimism and enthusiasm are necessary to achieve success — you need to model those attitudes, constantly and consistently.
- **Take responsibility:**
You help no one by shoving problems off to others. And there is absolutely no better way to push for success than taking on responsibility.

predictable, and as dependable, as the weather. A strong team or organization could absorb occasional setbacks and poor performances by individuals — but a “me-first” organization was only as good as the “me” on any specific day. If the specific day was a bad day. . . .

Despite his clarity on the themes of optimism and team first, Ike found that the staff in London was not particularly adaptive. The staff members were entrenched middle management — they heard what Eisenhower said, but like lots of middle managers who’ve survived a change in executive management, they weren’t particularly impressed. And Eisenhower — perceived by everyone (including himself) as an interim executive in charge of setting up the project and then handing it over to the “real” boss — didn’t have the pull to fire and hire the people he wanted. He couldn’t build the staff he needed. When officers left or were added to his staff, it was due to the normal course of rotation within the organization. Personnel decisions were being made for Ike thousands of miles away in Washington.

As Stephen Ambrose wrote “Eisenhower forcibly impressed his presence on the staff,” but Ike wasn’t sure that that wasn’t part of the problem, saying, “Too many staff officers are merely pushing paper”ⁱⁱⁱ and coming to him for decisions. Eisenhower couldn’t get the staff to stop pushing paper and decisions toward him, but he could take steps to make sure that his time was spent focused on the invasion project. He dumped

almost all of the administration duties onto the extremely able Major General John C.H. Lee and freed himself to focus on strategy and building D-Day Inc. so that it would be capable of succeeding at its mission. There would be plenty of tiny details that Ike needed to consider as he strived to meet his project's daunting one-year deadline, but he wanted to be sure that they were the crucial details involved in executing the project, not the adminis-trivia of it.

In his first months on the job, Ike fought the perception of his being a weak interim CEO and struggled mightily to get the

STRATEGIES:

STAY FOCUSED, PRIORITIZE

LESSON LEARNED:

- **Keep your focus:**
Everything you do should further your mission, whether it's employee morale or press relations. Everything.

British and the Americans back home to take his position seriously. Sure there was ego involved, but mostly Eisenhower was convinced he couldn't do the job properly if no one respected him. He even told off superiors in Washington when he felt that they were being dismissive. It took time, but with consistent and rational arguments, Ike began to convince one and all that the CEO of D-Day Inc. was a dead-earnest, serious position.

Of course, arriving with a one-year deadline, Ike couldn't just focus on his own position and his staff. The British Isles were about to be inundated with American servicemen, who would require housing and training facilities and a massive supply chain. On top of the impending

flood of Americans, the strategic direction of D-Day Inc. had not been settled at the time Ike landed in England. But with a 12-month time frame, there was no time to waste.

One area presented Eisenhower with an opportunity for quick success and that success would have immense impact on almost all the other phases of his work: public relations. If Ike could generate favorable publicity, he would increase his credibility with his allies and with the folks back home and that would help with the perception of his job and with the strategic decisions that were coming, and it would help American and British morale as the Yank workforce “invaded” England.

Ike didn’t waste any time before leaping into the public relations arena — on June 25, 1942, his second day in England, he held a press conference. Before the conference he was an anonymous staff man; in Stephen Ambrose’s words: “. . . his role was more that of an administrator than a commander. . . .” After the conference, the spotlight remained intensely trained on him. His appointment as CEO was front-page news in Britain — the English needed no convincing that no organization was more important than D-Day Inc. for successful competition with the Germans. And the man himself was a natural: He was blunt about the difficulties facing the organization but always optimistic. He let his passion for the project show — no one was in any doubt that he meant to beat the Germans completely and totally. And, hard as it is to believe in

our modern era of “gotcha journalism,” Ike trusted the press, referring to them as “quasi members of my staff.”^{iv}

There was one more important ingredient in Eisenhower’s successful public relations plan: There was no ego in it. He spent no time on self-aggrandizing. Ike was committed to beating his competition, and he believed that the only way to do that was with an Allied organization. He knew that when D-Day itself came, Americans wouldn’t be the only ones going into German territory. Success was utterly dependent on allies, and Ike used the press to push Allied unity constantly. The press couldn’t get enough stories on him, and almost every single story had a positive angle on the Allies because Eisenhower beat the drum constantly on the importance of Allies.

His commitment to being part of an alliance wasn’t just for public consumption — it was part of Ike’s core beliefs. Even when his actions weren’t visible to the press, Eisenhower was dedicated to making the alliance between the Brits and Americans work. Two stories circulated through the Allied organization that impressed everyone:

In the first story, Eisenhower fired an officer for making the drunken boast that the Americans would show the British how to fight. Ike angrily declared, “I’ll make the son of a bitch swim back to America.”^v

In the second instance, Eisenhower reduced an American officer’s rank and sent him back to the States (no word on whether this gentleman

was directed to swim) for insulting a British officer. The Brit defended the officer to Ike, saying that the American had called him a “son of a bitch” but that the Brit understood that Americans sometimes used the expression “almost as a term of endearment.” Eisenhower wasn’t swayed — “I am informed that he called you a *British* son of a bitch.”^{vi}

Just as Ike’s commitment to Allies was more than savvy press relations, his optimism was something that went to the core of his being. Whether he was dealing with the press, speaking at a public function, or managing his staff, he exuded confidence about the ultimate success of D-Day Inc. When he complained — and he had an astounding number of opportunities and reasons to complain — it was focused and constructive, usually coupled with proposed solutions. He avoided sounding defeatist or depressed to everyone but a very small circle of close friends and family. Very small, as in miniscule. Given the massive pressure, meager resources and tight deadlines Eisenhower was dealing with, it would have been understandable if he occasionally showed his worried side. But — except for the tiny group noted above — he was calm and confident. And he urged and pushed everyone who worked for him to show the same kind of attitude to the world. Success would be driven in large part by attitude, and Ike knew that attitude had to radiate out from his position.

Over the first few months of Eisenhower’s tenure, his attitude and energy took hold, and the organization began moving his way. In August, after months of trying, Ike finally secured the most crucial appointment to his staff: Brigadier General Walter Bedell Smith, known to almost everyone as “Beetle” (a play on his middle

<p>STRATEGIES: PRIORITIZE, MANAGE YOUR PEOPLE</p> <p>LESSON LEARNED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get the right guy to work for you: Does this really need an explanation?

name). Beetle Smith had been serving as Secretary to the General Staff at the War Department in Washington, but Ike knew he was the perfect man to become Chief of Staff for D-Day Inc. Beetle could be Ike’s “No” man; and he had a thorough grasp of details as well as the major issues confronting the organization. Possibly his most important attribute was his toughness (which became legendary throughout the Allied organization in Europe). Ike characterized him as “strong in character and abrupt by instinct.”^{vii}

<p>STRATEGIES: MANAGE YOUR PEOPLE, MOTIVATE YOUR PEOPLE</p> <p>LESSON LEARNED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk isn’t enough — take action: If you don’t like something, change it. Don’t wait for someone else to do it. If you want something done, or want your executive team to behave a particular way — show them what you mean.

Once Beetle Smith became Chief of Staff, Ike was freed up to run the organization on a strategic level. Their teamwork was so good that

Beetle remained Chief of Staff throughout the war.

As problematic as some of Ike's early staffing issues were, they paled in comparison to the larger human resources problem. When he arrived in June of 1942, his workforce numbered less than 50,000. But D-Day Inc.'s plans called for a massive buildup of personnel — by the time the Allies launched Overlord, scheduled to take place 12 months later, the workforce would be 3,000,000. Slightly more than half of that were American, most of the remainder were British or Canadian. But there were also Australians and sizeable, non-English speaking contingents from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Norway, and Poland.^{viii} The entire workforce had to be maintained in the field, forcing the Allies to confront massive housing needs, feeding and medical issues, and equipment challenges. The supply chain and inventory control necessary to feed, clothe and equip this multi-million man force was a gigantic challenge in and of itself.

But the key personnel issue was training.

All of Ike's American workforce had

STRATEGIES:
MOTIVATE YOUR PEOPLE, BE HONEST

LESSON LEARNED:

- **Stay positive:**
Be honest, but STAY positive. If you need to vent, do it in private.

basic training when they arrived in England. However, the multicultural,

multilingual Allies had to learn to work together, and the mission called for many specialized functions that this mostly new workforce didn't have as it assembled in England.

Ike pushed for training and practice and more training and more practice and large-scale rehearsals. He was well aware that improper training would result in massive loss of life — something a lot more daunting than loss of sales.

Assembling an Allied workforce for a brand new operation would be the equivalent of launching an express delivery company with a bunch of people with regular drivers licenses, which allow them to drive cars. You'd need to train them for their commercial licenses, so they'd be ready to handle large trucks. And teach them to use your computerized, mobile package-tracking systems — something that very few “regular” drivers would ever need.

Or imagine creating a new bit of software and finding your crack team of programmers was incredibly adept at Visual Basic but not Javascript, and your need for both is acute. You'd probably hire more programmers — Ike was receiving new men all the time — but you'd also train some of your existing guys. Either way, you'd need to add specialized training for your workforce.

The analogies are almost endless, but the important point is that Ike recognized that the only way his personnel were going to be able to

meet the almost overwhelming challenge that faced them was if they were properly trained. There was no substitute for on-the-job experience, but intense training was the next best thing.

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HOW IMPORTANT IS TRAINING?

In 2000, Best Buy's managers realized that they were losing customers because their sales force couldn't do their jobs properly; they were unable to explain the products for sale.

According to a December 12, 2005 story on Forbes.com, the solution to increasing sales was: training for new sales employees. By the time the article appeared on the Forbes website, Best Buy was spending more on employee training than any other retailer, relative to sales.

Best Buy setup classroom work and Web-based training, and the sales force had to pass exams. But, just as Ike knew that training was no substitute for combat, Best Buy realized that the only way to give a person sales experience was to get them out on the retail floor. Rookie salespeople shadowed experienced colleagues until the rookies were ready to be let loose on customers. Afterward, there were monthly product-training sessions to keep everyone up to date.

From 2000-2005, Best Buy's sales averaged 17 percent growth. In 2005, it generated \$897,000 in sales per employee versus \$235,000 for

competitor Circuit City. During 2000-2005 shares of Best Buy were up 215 percent versus 122 percent for Circuit City and a decrease of 11 percent for the S&P 500.

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Challenging as the day-to-day issues of starting up D-Day Inc. were, they were not Eisenhower's only large-scale problem. From the moment he started as CEO, he was entangled in a strategic debate at the highest levels of his parent organization. About the only thing FDR, Churchill, Stalin and the senior military chiefs of the Allies agreed on was that they were determined to beat Germany.

And there was the rub: Ike's board of directors argued bitterly over what strategy would accomplish that. With a 12-month deadline looming, it's hard to imagine that Eisenhower didn't want a strategic roadmap to follow — guidelines that he could use to shape D-Day Inc. to fulfill its purpose within the larger strategies his board was debating.

Winston Churchill functioned on Ike's board as the lead independent director. Churchill was the Prime Minister of England and had a long and impressive history: a combat soldier in the Boer War in South Africa at the end of the 19th century, a cabinet minister in Britain's World War I government, a member of Parliament for decades, and a successful writer and public speaker. There are no parallels to Churchill in modern Corporate America — it would be as if someone had been a

success at the highest levels of several corporations while writing a dozen or so best-selling, award-winning histories, writing large numbers of magazine and newspaper articles, and being in constant demand as a highly paid rubber-chicken dinner speaker à la a former U.S. president. While in the World War I cabinet, Churchill had been one of the men responsible for the tragic Gallipoli invasion (he probably took considerably more than his fair share of the blame), and as Prime Minister in 1940, he oversaw the retreat from Dunkirk — a reverse of D-Day. He was much better acquainted with the difficulties facing Eisenhower and D-Day Inc. than any other World War II leader.

Also Churchill was in London so he was able to collar Ike for face-to-face discussions, and he was a passionate force to be reckoned with whenever he believed he was right. And he believed absolutely that an invasion of northern France — direct, head-to-head competition with the Germans on territory that they controlled completely — was a plan for failure. “When I think of the beaches of Normandy choked with the flower of American and British youth, and when, in my mind’s eye, I see the tides running red with their blood,” Churchill said directly to Ike, “I have my doubts . . . I have my doubts.”^{ix}

Josef Stalin, another formidable presence on Ike’s board, wanted direct competition with Germany, and he wanted it immediately. The Germans and Russians were enveloped in a gargantuan struggle in the

Soviet heartland, competing along thousands of miles of territory, with combined workforces 8,000,000 fighting for control. Stalin wanted his American and British allies to relieve the pressure by starting up competition as soon as possible. He also knew that Churchill disliked the northern France idea and wanted to go into the Balkans — probably to establish a more competitive position with the Soviets after Germany was beaten. (Stalin was correct in this assessment — Churchill was focused on beating the Germans in the short term, but he believed this could be done in such a way as to setup effective long-term competition with the next opponent. Kind of like a pool player who sinks one ball with an eye for setting up a next shot.)

Stalin was every bit as difficult as Churchill. After all, Soviet Inc. was the only one in direct competition for territory with the Germans. His workforce was suffering massive losses, and Stalin had an ugly history of dealing with senior subordinates. Prior to the outbreak of the war, he had many senior officers of the Red Army killed, securing his position as the CEO and Chairman of Soviet Inc., but also wiping out huge resources of well-trained, highly educated, experienced personnel. [NOTE TO MODERN CEOs: Slaughtering your C-level officers, no matter how much you disagree with them or are threatened by them, is never a good idea.]

Most of the other members of the Eisenhower's board were senior commanders in the American and British armed services — all of whom

were senior to Ike, many of whom had combat experience from World War I. Combat experience was the *sine qua non* of military organizations, and Ike didn't have it. Even with the promotion he had received upon taking over D-Day Inc., he was still seen as a senior staff man — not a true CEO. This collection of experienced, powerful men formed a daunting obstacle for Ike as he sought strategic direction from his board. Like everyone else, he turned to the chairman of the board, the one man who would ultimately decide the mission of D-Day Inc. The last major player on Ike's board was the most powerful and simultaneously the most difficult to figure out: Franklin D. Roosevelt. To call him complex would be an understatement. Churchill once said of Russia: "It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" — he could have been describing Roosevelt.

FDR was a living contradiction in terms: In charge of the most potent organization on the planet, he was extremely reluctant to enter the competition, even though he acknowledged to his intimates that U.S. entry into the war was inevitable. He ran USA Inc., D-Day Inc.'s parent company — the one organization no one wanted to compete with in the early 1940s. Many historical documents show that both the German and Japanese high commands knew that once the United States entered into direct competition with them, there was no way to overcome its massive advantages of resources, manpower, and manufacturing prowess. Churchill

and Stalin were also aware that the United States' industrial muscle was crucial — Churchill admitted in his memoirs that the moment he knew the Allies would beat the Germans was the moment he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor. Yet, despite all this power, FDR did not choose his time and place of entering the global competition — he allowed events to dictate the terms of entry. Why? Because he was the master marketer; he understood the mindset of his constituency and knew that they would have to be pulled into the competition. He had the patience to wait for events to come to him. He also had the deviousness to create the necessary waiting period: FDR made many comments and campaign promises that the United States would not become embroiled in direct competition with Germany, even though he knew full well that, sooner or later, the competition would begin.

Roosevelt had astounding reserves of strength — he was crippled by polio when he was 39 years old, yet he never stopped trying to walk, became governor of New York State and then President. He is the only handicapped person ever to sit in the White House. Through the last decades of his life, this fantastic triumph over the adversity of polio was kept a secret.^x

FDR was the ultimate communicator. And the ultimate non-communicator. He was the first executive to understand modern communications technology, adroitly exploiting the possibilities of radio

to bypass the traditional media and Congress and speak directly to his constituency, the equivalent of his shareholders. And he was superb in dealing with people face-to-face. As journalist John Gunther described one of Roosevelt's earliest press conferences: "Mr. Roosevelt's features expressed amazement, curiosity, sympathy, decision, playfulness, dignity and surpassing charm. Yet he said almost nothing. Questions were deflected, diverted, diluted. Answers — when they did come — were concise and clear. But I never met anyone who showed greater capacity for avoiding a direct answer while giving the questioner a feeling that his question had been answered."^{xi} FDR avoided direct answers and left people satisfied, employing this talent with everyone: politicians, statesmen, admirals, and generals. Many who spoke with the president left his company believing they had received the answer or permission they needed, only to find out later that Roosevelt had made no such commitment.

This contradictory man held the key to the dispute over D-Day Inc.'s mission. Churchill was frightened of the consequences of failure — he had already lived through it at Gallipoli and Dunkirk. Stalin was desperate for relief that only the United States could supply. FDR's was the final, deciding vote because America would supply the majority of the workforce for D-Day Inc. as well as the vast majority of logistical support (manufacture and distribution of ships, airplanes, trucks, tanks and jeeps),

and the overwhelming majority of the supplies (everything from ammo and uniforms to food and cigarettes).

Roosevelt was sensitive to the concerns his lead directors had: Churchill and the British had been competing with the Germans and absorbing losses for longer than anyone else. But by 1942 the Russians were doing most of the heavy lifting involved in the competition, depleting the German resources and workforce on an unimaginable scale. In addition to these competing concerns, Roosevelt had two of his own:

- D-Day Inc. had almost no experience in this kind of competition. The executive team Ike was building hadn't actually handled a project of this scale, and the workforce (the American majority of it, anyway) had not gone head-to-head with an organization like their German competitor.
- The two men who were most important to D-Day Inc.'s operations, Eisenhower and George C. Marshall, the Army's CEO and a member of D-Day Inc.'s board were convinced that the only way to beat the Germans was by Operation Overlord — any other operations would prolong the competition and increase the Allies' losses. It was difficult to ignore their shared opinion.

Roosevelt's solution was as simple and brilliant as Alexander the Great's in cutting the Gordian Knot: He satisfied no one. His compromise was:

- D-Day Inc. would invade Northern Africa — giving the organization a chance to cut its teeth against a lesser opponent (The Americans would compete with Italians before they faced the Germans in Africa). This project was called Torch.
- If the Russians competition with the Germans took a seriously negative turn, the Americans would launch a “suicide” mission in France to alleviate the pressure.
- D-Day Inc. would continue to prepare for the northern France project.

FDR felt that by going into North Africa, he lessened the possibility of failure (assuaging Churchill's concerns), gave D-Day Inc. a chance to gain experience (alleviating his own concerns), created the opportunity to link up with British operations in North Africa (a bone to Churchill), and most importantly FDR could claim to be opening a second theater of competition to relieve pressure on the Russians (a concession to Stalin). Roosevelt's compromise worked: The major players on D-Day Inc.'s board weren't completely satisfied, but they weren't completely frustrated either.

Ike, the man who had to make this all happen, hated the decision. He thought that the day of the decision, July 22, 1942, could go down as the “blackest day in history.”^{xii} His absolute beliefs were:

- Competing in North Africa — Operation Torch — created a longer, more draining, mission for D-Day Inc.
- The losses would be measured in a higher total of deaths.

But the board had made its decision.

Ike quickly pulled himself together. His board’s vision for Torch required:

- An extraordinarily short timeline — Ike was expected to launch Torch in two months, by September 1942.
- Torch was a smaller scale project than Overlord, but still the largest of its kind in world history.
- A new process — much of his workforce would be coming directly across the Atlantic, reporting at the moment the project kicked off.
- Ike’s first combat command — the equivalent of an executive running his first revenue-producing business unit after decades of operational experience.

The 12-month timeline for Overlord was not being extended. While Ike was running Torch, he was also expected to make D-Day Inc. capable of launching Overlord. The pressure on Eisenhower had increased gigantically. He was now in charge of two projects whose scale exceeded anything ever done, with shortened deadlines, and utilizing a process never attempted before.

But that's what the D-Day Inc. board had ordered. Ike would succeed. Or else.

- ⁱ Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, p. 55.
- ⁱⁱ Eisenhower to Marshall, June 26, 1942, Eisenhower Papers (Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, p. 54.)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, p. 56.
- ^{iv} Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, p. 73.
- ^v *Ibid.*
- ^{vi} Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, p. 73 — quoting the *Memoirs* of General Hastings Ismay
- ^{vii} Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, p. 77.
- ^{viii} Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day*, p. 51.
- ^{ix} Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship*, p. 177.
- ^x The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum
- ^{xi} *The New York Times*, February 2, 2009, “Obama, F.D.R. and Taming the Press”
- ^{xii} Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, p. 73.