

Moments in Leadership - October 2015

Change is in the Air by Paul Marcone

For the men of the Iron Brigade, something had changed.

It was the morning of July 1, 1863 and the Iron Brigade was marching into a small Pennsylvania town called Gettysburg. To the northwest the men could hear the sounds of battle - a desperate struggle between Union cavalry and the lead elements of the Confederate army.

The Iron Brigade - men from Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin - was perhaps the best brigade in the Union Army of the Potomac. But their bravery and hard fighting could not overcome a deficit in leadership that had become a hallmark of that army. For the first two years of the war the Army of the Potomac had experienced one disaster after another. From the plains of Manassas to the killing fields of Fredericksburg to the tangled Wilderness of Chancellorsville, the Army of the Potomac had been out-led and humiliated by Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The main reason: senior leadership was plagued by infighting and political gamesmanship.

There were some glimmers of hope, however. Despite the dysfunction among its senior leadership, there were some senior generals and many colonels (mid-level managers if you will) in the Army of the Potomac who were talented, courageous, decisive and most important - fed up with the culture of losing and defeatism that had infected the army.

One thing was clear to the men in the ranks: when it came to bravery and fighting ability, the men of the Army of the Potomac were more than equal to their Rebel counterparts. The missing ingredient was decisive leadership.

So when the mid-westerners of the Iron Brigade found themselves marching towards the sounds of battle — counter-attacking instead of retreating — they knew instinctively that something had changed. Their feelings were correct. On that fateful morning key leaders took decisive and courageous action that changed not just the losing culture of the Army of the Potomac - but the course of history.

The Battle of Gettysburg marked the culmination of Robert E. Lee's invasion of the north at the midway point of the American Civil War. Lee was trying to win

the war in one bold stroke.

Soldiers in both armies knew what was at stake at Gettysburg.

None more so than Union Generals John Buford and John Reynolds. These two men made the fateful decision to fight it out with the invading Confederates on the hills and fields surrounding Gettysburg. Rather than retreat to fight another day, these two men decided to make a stand. Their decision to stay and fight at Gettysburg resulted in a bloody, three-day battle that ended in victory for the Union. It was a victory that marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy.

So, as the soldiers of the Iron Brigade were ordered to leave the turnpike and run cross-country to meet the enemy head-on just west of Gettysburg, as they loaded their rifled muskets on the run, and as they charged into the Confederates on McPherson's Ridge they knew that something big had changed.

They knew that they finally had the leadership they deserved. They knew that they finally had leaders willing to fight, willing to take calculated risks, willing to make good use of the brave soldiers in the army, willing to do what was necessary to win.

And it was that leadership that allowed the Union to triumph at Gettysburg and, ultimately win the Civil War.

Often, it takes just a handful of courageous leaders to make a difference in a dysfunctional organization. A few leaders who work together and make a conscious effort to change the culture and the work environment. And as leaders take decisive ACTION to break the cycle of dysfunction, change **will** be in the air and everyone in the organization will feel it.

To learn more about how you and your team can benefit from the leadership lessons of the Civil War, call 703-531-8834 or visit www.oxhilltours.com.