

Moments in Leadership

February 2015: Check Your Ego At The Door

by Paul Marcone

The first major battle of the American Civil War took place on July 21, 1861 at Manassas, Virginia. At the time, it was the largest and most costly battle in American history – with more than 900 killed and some 3,000 wounded.

The fledgling Confederate States of America won a clear cut victory at Manassas. One of the major reasons why the Confederates won the battle was the ability of the two



main Confederate field commanders, General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard and General Joseph E. Johnston, to put aside their ample egos and cooperate.

On the morning of July 21, 1861, the Confederate army was deployed along Bull Run Creek – protecting the key railroad depot at Manassas Junction a few miles away. The Confederate forces along Bull Run belonged mostly to General Beauregard's army. Throughout the past two days Beauregard was being reinforced by General Johnston's army in the Shenandoah Valley. Most of Johnston's forces arrived by railroad – the first time that a railroad was used to transport troops in warfare.

General Johnston, who outranked Beauregard, had arrived on the scene at midday on July 20th – less than 12 hours before the battle began. While Johnston formally assumed command of all the troops along Bull Run, he wisely allowed Beauregard to maintain operational control of troop movements. Johnston realized that Beauregard was more familiar with the terrain, troop dispositions and the strengths and weaknesses of subordinate officers in Beauregard's army. Uncharacteristic for him, Johnston kept his ego in check and allowed Beauregard to maintain operational control of the combined forces.

The next morning Beauregard's intricate attack plan fell apart when his orders were not delivered on-time and the Union army struck first - hitting the vulnerable Confederate left flank.

This is when Johnston and Beauregard both shined.

Instead of arguing over who was to command, they worked together to get units to the most threatened part of the battlefield. Johnston played a critical role in directing reinforcements to the battlefield as they disembarked from trains at Manassas Junction. Beauregard made sure that those troops were placed where needed most. Johnston and Beauregard were a formidable team – responding quickly to Union thrusts, rallying tired and dispirited troops, and maintaining the initiative throughout the battle. By late afternoon the Confederates were able to drive the Union army from the field in what became a disastrous rout for the Union.

In the moment of supreme crisis for the young Confederacy, Johnston and Beauregard put aside their egos, formed a coalition and worked together to get the job done. And, equally as important, they were able to get their respective leadership teams to work together.

The Johnston-Beauregard partnership is a powerful lesson for today's leaders.



It brings to mind one of the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) identified by the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM): **Building Coalitions**. In defining this ECQ, OPM uses terms such as:

- *The ability to build coalitions internally*
- *The ability to build strategic relationships and achieve common goals*
- *Perceives organizational and political reality and acts accordingly*
- *Gains cooperation from others to accomplish goals*

Without question, Johnston and Beauregard fully met the requirements for this important ECQ.

How about you as a leader?

One of the most difficult things for any leader is to check their ego at the door and be honest with themselves. Any leader that needs to work with other leaders in a

moment of crisis would be well served to keep in mind Generals Johnston and Beauregard at First Manassas.

Put aside your ego and get the job done!

For information on how your organization can learn the leadership lessons from the Civil War, contact Ox Hill Leadership Tours at 703-531-8837 and info@oxhilltours.com. Or visit our website at www.oxhilltours.com.