

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

Don't Lose Sight of the Big Picture

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An important quality good leaders share is the ability to see the “big picture” especially during a crisis. And it is during a crisis that many leaders fall down and lose sight of the big picture - getting too caught up in the weeds and not providing the kind of oversight, guidance and leadership necessary for their team and their organization.

A graphic example of a leader losing sight of the big picture is Confederate Brigadier General Charles S. Winder at the Civil War Battle of Cedar Mountain. Fought in Culpepper, VA on August 9, 1862, the Battle of Cedar Mountain pitted some 27,000 Confederate troops under Lieutenant General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson against about 14,000 Union troops under Major General Nathaniel Banks (a former Speaker of the House).

General Winder commanded a division (about 6,000 men) under Jackson. The morning of the battle Winder was riding in an ambulance - sick with fever. But when he heard a battle was brewing he mounted his horse and joined his division - against the advice of his doctor. Upon reaching the battlefield Winder saw that his artillery was involved in a fierce duel with their Union counterparts. Winder - a former artilleryman - could not resist the temptation to revert back to his younger days as an artilleryman. For several precious minutes Winder got off his horse and personally directed the fire of one of the artillery pieces - leaving the brigades under his command leaderless at a critical junction in the battle.



Tragically, Winder paid for his poor judgment with his life. In the midst of the artillery duel, a piece of shrapnel tore through Winder's side. He died shortly after being hit. Because Winder was preoccupied with his artillery, his division floundered leaderless around the battlefield. Eventually, a portion of his division was flanked and surprised by an aggressive Union attack, and nearly routed from

the field.

While Jackson and the Confederates ultimately prevailed at Cedar Mountain, General Winder's inability to "see the big picture" nearly led to disaster for Jackson's army.

What is the lesson here?

The temptation in any crisis is to roll up your sleeves and "get into the trenches" with your team. But the exact opposite is needed. Your organization and your team need you to do your job as leader and direct the actions of everyone on your team — keeping a close eye on the overall objective.

When reading about General Winder personally working that artillery piece at Cedar Mountain, I am reminded of the poignant picture of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon trying to assist the injured on September 11, 2001. While admirable at one level, it was an example of a leader losing sight of the big picture. In the midst of a crisis as urgent and massive as 9/11, the Secretary of Defense's proper place was at a secure location in close contact with the military and civilian leadership — not performing the job of an EMT.



It is in times of crisis that good leaders need to lead - and lead in the proper fashion. Sometimes that means delegating tasks - even important ones - to trained subordinates, and focusing your efforts on making sure everyone member of the team is doing their jobs, communicating with superiors and keeping all efforts geared toward a defined goal (the big picture).

To learn more about how you and your team can benefit from the leadership lessons of the American history, check out Ox Hill Leadership Tours at www.oxhilltours.com or contact them directly at 703-531-8837 or info@oxhilltours.com.