

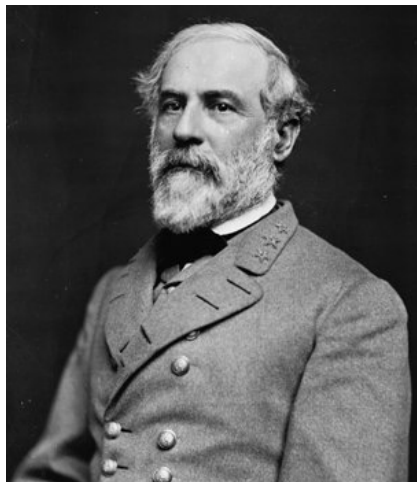
MOMENTS IN HISTORY

Leadership and “Calculated Boldness”

August 2016

by Paul Marcone, President, Ox Hill Leadership Tours

A trademark of most successful leaders is the willingness to take and embrace calculated risks to achieve goals. That is as true today as it was during the American Civil War (1861-1865). One of the best examples of “calculated boldness” by a leader is Confederate General Robert E. Lee.



Throughout his time as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee displayed an aggressiveness and boldness that established his reputation as one of history’s greatest military leaders. That fighting spirit was borne, in part, out of necessity.

Throughout the war, Lee faced significant odds. In battle, his troops were outnumbered consistently; and his opponents were better equipped and supplied. For these reasons, Lee knew that time was not on the side of the Confederacy. Lee calculated that the South’s best hope for victory lay in scoring a decisive knockout blow on the

battlefield - one that would turn public opinion in the North against the war and force the North’s political leadership to sue for peace (which would lead to Southern independence).

The military and political realities facing Lee, combined with Lee’s natural aggressiveness and his innate ability to see the big picture, to produce a leader who was willing to take risks and eager to exploit circumstances to maximum advantage.

Lee never hesitated to take bold action, but he was neither reckless nor careless.

He took calculated risks - designed to achieve specific goals. In his opinion, he had no choice but to take bold, unanticipated actions. As a result, his first year in command produced a series of stunning victories. Lee's "calculated boldness" was never more effective than at the Battle of Chancellorsville in early May of 1863. Outnumbered more than two to one, Lee divided his small army, exploited a weakness in the Union line and achieved a stunning and improbable victory.

Lee's boldness did not always lead to victory. Just two months after Chancellorsville, he invaded the North - seeking the final knockout blow that would end the war. For three days his army slugged it out with the Northern Army of the Potomac on the fields surrounding Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. But, rather than risk further damage to his battered army, Lee withdrew to the relative safety of Virginia. Still, the losses his army incurred in 1862 and 1863 would compromise his ability to go on the offensive for the remainder of the war.

Lee exemplified a leader who was constantly weighing the odds of every possible option available to him. Whenever feasible, Lee always chose the boldest option. More often than not, it produced great success. It is for this reason that Lee is considered one of the great military leaders of all time.

What lessons can today's leaders learn from General Lee? Both in the private and public sectors there definitely is a need for calculated boldness - not rash, shoot-from-the-hip leadership; but bold action based on sound analysis and reasoning. The willingness of a leader to take bold action, frequently is the difference between mediocrity and smashing success.

When confronted with an opportunity to take a safe course or bold action, a leader must always practice due diligence. That means careful analysis, study and honest review of possible outcomes. Ultimately, a leader must always remember that great success is directly linked to a willingness to take calculated risks.

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.