

Moments in Leadership

August 2015: Trusting Trained Subordinates

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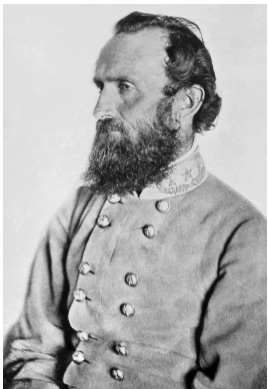
For many leaders, one of the most difficult challenges is delegating important tasks to subordinates. When it comes to delegating, I ask managers these critical questions:

- If you delegated an important task to a subordinate would the task get done properly (perhaps not quite the way you would do it, but would it get done properly)?

- Would the task get done in a timely fashion?

If the answer to the above two questions is “yes” - then there is no reason not to delegate. If the answer to these questions is “no” - then a leader needs to make sure that they have the right people working for them and that those people receive the right training.

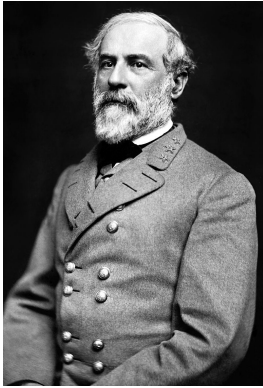
In this installment of Moments in Leadership I want to talk about the relationship between Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson. Between March of 1862 and May of 1863 Lee and Jackson forged a close relationship in which Jackson, as the talented subordinate, won victory after stunning victory.



Gen. Stonewall Jackson Lee's trust in Jackson would pay huge dividends for the Confederacy in one campaign after another. In the Shenandoah Campaign Jackson defeated three separate Union armies and sent panic throughout Washington, DC. In the Second Manassas Campaign Jackson's forces destroyed the huge Union supply depot at Manassas Junction and a month later during the Maryland Campaign, Jackson captured the entire Union garrison at Harpers Ferry. Given free rein by Lee, Jackson's audacity had brought the fledgling and outgunned Confederacy to the brink of victory.

The relationship between Lee and Jackson reached its zenith at the Battle of Chancellorsville in early May of 1863. In that battle, Lee's forces were outnumbered more than two to one by the Union Army of the Potomac (some 134,000 to 60,000). Despite being outnumbered, Lee boldly divided his army - giving Jackson almost half of his available force and directing Jackson to march through a tangled wilderness and attack the vulnerable Union right flank.

The moment of supreme crisis had arrived for Robert E. Lee.



His army faced annihilation. What I think is most instructive is that in this moment of crisis, Lee not only did not flinch, but delegated the key task of marching around the enemy and launching the flank attack to a trusted and experienced subordinate.

Gen. Robert E. LeeThe results of Jackson's flank attack are well known to Civil War historians. Jackson's force crumbled the Union right flank and so unnerved the Union commander that he ordered a retreat. Chancellorsville stands out as perhaps Lee's greatest victory.

Unfortunately for the Confederacy, the victory at Chancellorsville was a costly one as Stonewall Jackson was accidentally shot by his own troops on the evening of May 2, 1863. He would die eight days later.

Jackson's death notwithstanding, the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville stands out as a remarkable example of a leader (Lee) unhesitatingly delegating a major task to a trusted subordinate (Jackson) in the midst of a severe crisis.

Lee's faith in Jackson should echo through history as a reminder to today's leaders to not only surround themselves with talented and well-trained people, but to make good use of them - especially in a crisis.

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