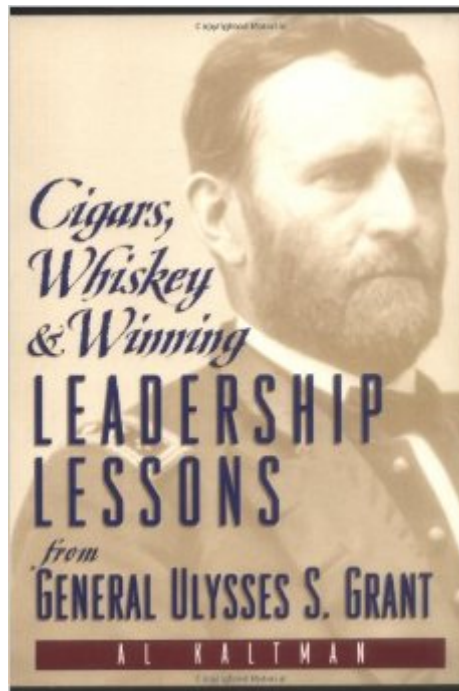


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Cigars, Whiskey And Winning: Leadership Lessons From General Ulysses S. Grant



Synopsis

Long before leadership became identified as the catalyst for corporate success, the Civil War's winning general was showing the world how dynamic leadership is the crucial determinant of victory or defeat. Ulysses S. Grant never sought fame or glory, nor did he try to tie his performance to personal reward. Instead, he concentrated on contribution and service. He looked upon being given increased responsibility not as increasing his power, but as increasing his ability to get the job done. "The great thing about Grant...is his perfect correctness and persistency of purpose." (Abraham Lincoln) In this masterful retelling of Grant's story, Al Kaltman draws on Grant's writings and life experiences to present a series of practical lessons on how to get superior performance from the troops. Going beyond mere "how-to's", Cigars, Whiskey & Winning deals with character traits, core beliefs, and fundamental values to reveal the secrets to becoming a winning leader that are as much about "who to be" as "what to do". And there isn't a chart, table, or checklist in sight—just a handy index of lessons for ready inspiration on demand.

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Customer Reviews

Here is another of the "leadership lessons from" volumes which seem to be published in an ever-increasing number. I was curious to know what Kaltman had to say about one of our nation's most successful generals who is also generally viewed as one of our least successful Presidents. The bulk of the book focuses on Grant the general but Kaltman adds a brief section in which he attempts to place Grant the President within an appropriate historical context. The material is

organized within 11 chapters, ranging from "Seize Opportunities: April 1822-August 1848" to "Always Do What's Right: February-December 1865." Kaltman then provides a Conclusion ("The Quintessential Grant") and an Addendum (The aforereferened "Grant's Mismanaged Presidency"). The net result is much more than a portrait of Grant. Indeed, Kaltman has carefully examined all manner of primary sources from which he has selected what he considers to be those "leadership lessons" which are most relevant to our own time. (I wish he had included a Bibliography.) At the heart of this book is an essential paradox: the same leadership principles and strategies which enabled Grant the general to achieve great success are precisely the same which (for various reasons which Kaltman suggests) Grant rejected or failed to use while serving for two terms as President. I am among those who consider Grant's Personal Memoirs a literary masterpiece as well as one of the most valuable historical accounts of the American Civil War. Therefore I was not in any way surprised by the eloquence of Grant's remarks which Kaltman generously and skillfully includes together with appropriate comments by others best-qualified to comment on Grant, both in terms of his military leadership and qualities of personal character.

In many ways, this is an outstanding book. It occasionally veers off to give bad advice for business leaders (never coopeate with the competition), or I would have given it a five star rating. Unless you believe that the best way to learn is to make your own mistakes, you will find this book a useful guide to learning from Grant's errors, those of his opponents, superiors, and subordinates. As one CEO told me, "I don't get much out of all those books about perfect performance. I like to read about what can and does go wrong, and how to avoid it." This is that kind of book. I normally avoid books about the leadership lessons of some famous person. I usually find such books to be too generalized from a slim factual base, incorrectly analyzed, or simply too narrow. Why not read a book about what all the best leaders do? I made an exception for this book because it came as a gift from a man I admire greatly who has been a big success both as a military and as a business leader. That was all the recommendation that I needed. I am glad that he chose to share the book with me. If there ever was a successful leader with feet of clay, it was Ulysses S. Grant. In 1861, he was working as a clerk in his father's leather goods store in Illinois, after having failed in his first military career. In 1865, he was leading a million men under arms. Later, he became a two-term president in an administration wracked with scandal. Throughout his life, he was dogged by rumors of being an overimbiber in whiskey. Caught with a cigar in his hand in a famous photograph, admirers sent him thousands of cigars. He may have smoked more of them than he should, since he died at 63 of throat cancer.

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