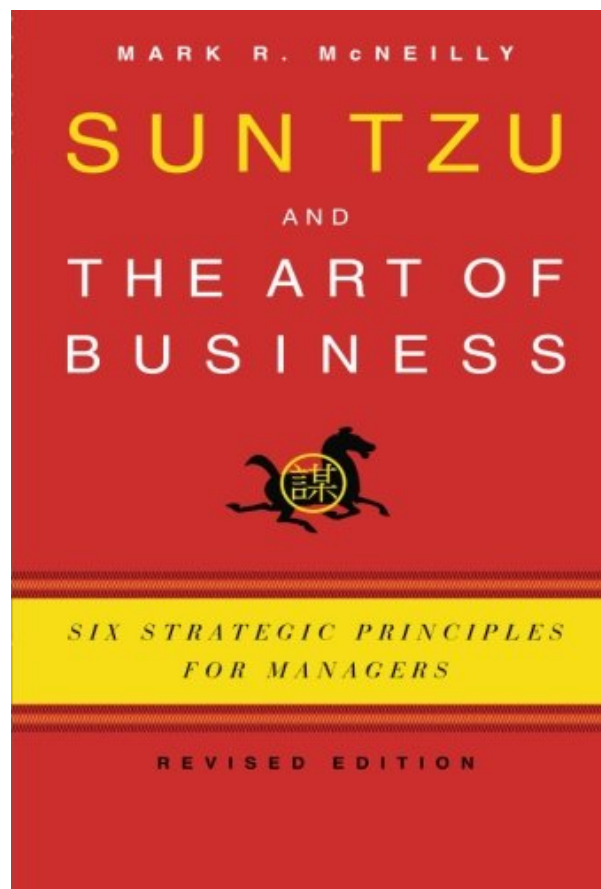


**SUN TZU AND THE ART OF BUSINESS: SIX
STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGERS
BY MARK R. MCNEILLY**



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MARK R. McNEILLY

SUN TZU

AND

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*SIX STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES
FOR MANAGERS*

REVISED EDITION

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Review

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About the Author

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More than two millennia ago the famous Chinese general Sun Tzu wrote the classic work on military strategy, *The Art of War*. Now, in a new edition of *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business*, Mark McNeilly shows how Sun Tzu's strategic principles can be applied to twenty-first century business. Here are two books in one: McNeilly's synthesis of Sun Tzu's ideas into six strategic principles for the business executive, plus the text of Samuel B. Griffith's popular translation of *The Art of War*. McNeilly explains how to gain market share without inciting competitive retaliation, how to attack competitors' weak points, and how to maximize market information for competitive advantage. He demonstrates the value of speed and preparation in throwing the competition off-balance, employing strategy to beat the competition, and the need for character in leaders. Lastly, McNeilly presents a practical method to put Sun Tzu's principles into practice. By using modern examples throughout the book from Google, Zappos, Amazon, Dyson, Aflac, Singapore Airlines, Best Buy, the NFL, Tata Motors, Starbucks, and many others, he illustrates how, by following the wisdom of history's most respected strategist, executives can avoid the pitfalls of management fads and achieve lasting competitive advantage.

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Most helpful customer reviews

79 of 80 people found the following review helpful.

Valuable Reinterpretation and Modernization of a Classic

By Donald Mitchell

Sun Tzu's, The Art of War, has been favorite reading of mine for 30 years. I was pleasantly surprised by the new and improved understanding I obtained of that book from reading this one.

Most military strategists agree that Sun Tzu's The Art of War (circa 400 B.C.) is essential reading. Since around 1960, many business strategists have felt the same way, through seeing his discussion of war as a metaphor for business competition. Since Sun Tzu did not write about business directly, this has made The Art of War a little less than fully accessible to many business people. This book presents a very successful rewriting of Sun Tzu's classic to make it more "about business" while keeping a military connection. This book also contains a full translation of The Art of War by Samuel B. Griffith so you can compare this reinterpreted material to the original. I found that comparison especially useful.

The author has developed six principles for managers from Sun Tzu's concepts:

- (1) Capture your market without destroying it or its profitability.
- (2) Attack competitors where and when they least expect it and are most vulnerable.
- (3) Make the best use of market information to develop advantages.
- (4) Move faster than your competitor to create maximum confusion and delay in response.
- (5) Pick strategies that will encourage your competitors to respond in ways favorable to you.
- (6) Emphasize leadership built upon good character.

The author then goes a step further and proposes six implementation steps for employing these principles. I thought that these steps were especially valuable because some of them expand upon the principles in new ways that make them more business related:

- (1) "Prioritize markets and determine competitor focus"
- (2) "Develop attacks against competitor's weaknesses"
- (3) "War game and plan for surprises"
- (4) "Integrate best attacks to unbalance your competitor"
- (5) "Ready your attacks and release them"
- (6) "Reinforce success, starve failure"

The book is greatly improved by the many examples in it. The best military ones relate to Operation Desert Storm (discussed in much interesting detail) and the two world wars. The business examples are also good,

but not as good as the military ones. The business examples seem to lack a full understanding, and some chapters are noticeably lacking in successful business examples (such as chapter 1). The business examples were best in chapters 2 (Wal-mart, CNN, MTV, and Southwest Airlines), 4 (Southwest Airlines), 5 (Hewlett-Packard's patents and FedEx's magazine for office assistants), and 6 (Herb Kelleher at Southwest Airlines). Southwest Airlines is the obvious role model in this book for what a company should be doing.

I thought that chapters 6 (on character-based leadership) and 5 (on shaping your opponent) were outstanding. The author has some places where his writing is outstanding, as well. For example in chapter 1 he says, "In business, you should follow the philosophy of Go rather than chess. You should seek to control the most market territory with the smallest investment, not to destroy your competitor and your company with endless fighting." In chapter 6, he shows this same quality in a list of leadership characteristics such as "Build your character, not just your image," "Lead with actions, not just words," "Motivate emotionally, not just materially," and "Share employee's trials, not just their triumphs."

I reread Sun Tzu's original material after reading the reinterpretation, and found that the new examples and analogies in this book added richness to my understanding of that original text. I strongly encourage you to do the same, whether or not you have ever read Sun Tzu before.

After you have finished enjoying this fine book and applying its lessons, I suggest that you consider this same perspective in terms of accomplishing something for a nonprofit organization that you volunteer for. You may be able to accomplish much more good as a result.

Look for the unguarded way to find more health, happiness, peace, and prosperity!

39 of 39 people found the following review helpful.

Wisdom from the First Management Consultant

By Robert Morris

In recent years, a great deal of nonsense has been published concerning similarities between the military battlefield and the business world. Authors frequently invoke military terms such as "attack", "ambush", "pre-emptive strike", "blitzkrieg" (or "blitz"), "no man's land", "chain of command", "firepower", "guerrilla", "kamikazi", "overkill", and "scorched-earth policy." Amidst all the other books in which forced comparisons are made, Mark McNeilly has written *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business*. He includes in his book the original (and superb) translation of *The Art of War* by Samuel B. Griffith.

Time and again, McNeilly stresses (as does Sun Tzu) the absolute importance of personal character. Respect and trust are earned, not conferred by title or decree. It remains for leaders to formulate the correct strategies as well as those tactics needed to implement them. It remains for leaders to allocate resources only where they will achieve the greatest possible success at the lowest acceptable cost. Whether the competition is on a battlefield or in a marketplace, the six principles discussed by McNeilly are appropriate to whatever strategy or strategies may be needed. Historically, the most successful armies and the most successful companies have shared much in common: meticulous preparation, superb timing, speed, maximum use of resources where they will have the greatest impact, sufficient intelligence on opponents, mobility, flexibility, and (above all) resolve.

In *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business*, McNeilly provides a brilliant analysis of six specific principles (first set to writing almost 2,500 years ago) which, he correctly suggests, will enable all manner of organizations to formulate appropriate strategies for the New Millennium. This is a solid, eloquent, sharply-focused book. Unlike so many other authors who force analogies between war and business, McNeilly respects the basic (indeed obvious) differences between them while explaining how certain principles are relevant to both.

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

Pragmatic Look @ Sunzi's (Sun Tzu) Principles of Strategy.

By CARDINAL009

Mr. McNeilly book on Sunzi (Sun Tzu) is one of my favorite books on practical strategic application. ...

As a software developer-project management consultant, found his ["Six Strategic Principles"] to be pragmatically

effective in any strategic challenges. ...

Also, technically abstract enough where the reader(-implementer of the ["Six Strategic Principles"]) can devise their own spin to their own strategic challenges. ...

The examples that are introduced were efficient enough for me to understand. ...

Have successfully utilized [McNeilly's Six Principles] for different strategic scenarios (i.e., market research, product development, close quarters negotiation, etc.).

McNeilly's book is one of those few books that's worth re-reading once a year for a mental refresher course. ... (Yes! This Cardinal does re-read this book once per yr.)

Have recommend this book to my assoc(s). Also, given away many copies of this book to those who are interested in Sunzi Strategic Principles.

Overall, I find his writing to be extremely sharp; his ability to explain how to apply Sunzi (Sun Tzu) principles to military conflict and business is nothing short of extraordinary.

Recommend this book to anyone who is serious about strategy.

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