

## **Book Review**

# **“The art of war Sun Tzu” foreword by James Clavell**

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### **AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Professor M.S.Rao has almost three decades of experience in leadership development. He is a trainer, teacher, author, speaker, mentor, researcher, consultant and leadership practitioner who conducts training programs for various corporate and educational institutions. He is a Success Coach and Motivational Speaker and delivers 'Guest Lectures' upon request. His areas of interest include Leadership, Learning and Development and Soft Skills.

Professor Rao is the Founder of MSR Leadership Consultants, India. He is the author of the books titled 'Spot Your Leadership Style – Build Your Leadership Brand' ISBN 978-81-8220-372-3 (Foreword by Norm Smallwood), 'Soft Skills – Enhancing Employability' ISBN 978-93-80578-38-5 (Foreword by Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, One of the Fifteen Most Influential Management Thinkers in the World), and 'Secrets for Success' ISBN 978-93-80856-16-2 (Foreword by Lenny Laskowski, International Professional Speaker). His fourth book titled 'Secrets of Your Leadership Success - The 11 Indispensable E's of a Leader' will be published shortly.

Professor Rao has published more than 150 papers and articles in international publications such as 'Personal Excellence', 'Chief Learning Officer Magazine', 'Emerald', 'Academic Leadership' (US), 'The Journal of Values Based Leadership' (US), 'International Journal of Professional Management' (UK), 'Career-Journal' (Germany), African Leadership Magazine (Africa) and Promota Magazine (UK) to name a few. He is a member of Emerald Literati Network, U.K. He is the Editorial Board Member of International Journal of Business Administration Canada, International Journal of Professional Management and Promota Magazine, UK, International Journal of Peace and Development Studies, African Leadership Magazine and Career-Journal.Com, Germany. He is the reviewer for various prestigious global journals including Journal of Coaching Education, Reston - US, International Journal of Training and Development - Blackwell Publishing, Emerald and Tata McGraw-Hill Education (India) Pvt. Ltd. He can be reached at: [profmsr7@gmail.com](mailto:profmsr7@gmail.com) and additionally maintains a popular Blog titled 'Where Knowledge is Wealth' - URL <http://profmsr.blogspot.com>.

*“If you know the enemy and know yourself, You need not fear the results of a hundred battles, If you know yourself but not the enemy, For every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, You will succumb in every battle.”—Sun Tzu*

Do you want to outsmart others? Do you like to stay different from others? Do you want to stand out from the pack of others? Do you want to get out of rat race? Do you want to achieve success through right rules and strategies? Then here is the book authored by Sun Tzu around 2500 years (foreword by James Clavell) that addresses all the above questions. It is a tiny thin book about the art of war providing leadership lessons to everybody. It contains several leadership lessons that are relevant even today and would be relevant tomorrow. The book equips you with secrets and strategies to face several challenges and succeed in this complex and competitive world. After reading this book, you will not brood over problems; rather you look at the solutions.

The book contains 13 chapters outlining about laying plans; waging war; attack by stratagem; tactical dispositions; energy; weak points and strong; maneuvering; variation of tactics; the army on the march; terrain; the nine situations; the attack by fire; and the use of spies.

The book breaks the ice with 'The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death. A road to either safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of enquiry which can on no account be neglected. It ends: 'Hence it is only the enlightened ruler and the wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for purposes of spying,

and thereby they achieve great results. Spies are a most important element in war because upon them depends an army's ability to move.'

## SUN TZU'S STRATEGIES

The book reveals several military strategies for both offending and defending which can be applied in corporate world. Here are the hallmarks and the takeaways about the book:

- (1) In peace prepare for war, in war prepare for peace.
- (2) To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.
- (3) He who wishes to fight must first count the cost, which prepares us for the discovery that the subject of the chapter is not what we might expect from the title, but is primarily a consideration of way and means.
- (4) We must cause the enemy to regard our straightforward attack as one that is secretly designed, and vice versa.
- (5) Steadily develop indirect tactics either by pounding the enemy's flanks or falling on his rear.
- (6) There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combination of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard. There are not more than five primary colors, blue, yellow, red, white and black. There are not more than five cardinal tastes, sour, acrid, salt, sweet, bitter. Yet combinations of them yield more flavors than can ever be tasted.
- (7) Simulated disorder postulates perfect discipline; simulated fear postulates courage; simulated weakness postulates strength.
- (8) The clever combatant looks to the effect of combined energy, and does not require too much from individuals.
- (9) The commander first of all considers the power of his army in the bulk; afterwards he takes individual talent into account, and uses each man according to his capabilities. He does not demand perfection from the untalented.
- (10) Emerge from the void, strike at vulnerable points, shun places that are defended, attack in unexpected quarters.
- (11) If the enemy is the invading party, we can cut his line of communications and occupy the roads by which he will have to return; if we are the invaders, we may direct our attack against the sovereign himself.
- (12) By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided.
- (13) If the enemy's dispositions are visible, we can make for him in one body; whereas, our own dispositions being kept secret, the enemy will be obliged to divide his forces in order to guard against attack from every quarter.
- (14) The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points.
- (15) The highest generalship is to compel the enemy to disperse his army, and then to concentrate superior force against each fraction in turn.
- (16) Like water, take the line of least resistance. As water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. The five elements: water, fire, wood, metal, earth, are not always equally predominant; the four seasons make way for each other in turn.
- (17) Without harmony in the State, no military expedition can be undertaken; without harmony in the army, no battle array can be formed.
- (18) You cannot shut your ears to the thunder or your eyes to the lightning – so rapid are they. Likewise, an attack should be made so quickly that it cannot be parried.
- (19) The value of a whole army – a mighty host of million men – dependent on the one man alone: such is the influence of spirit!
- (20) Presence of mind is the general's most important asset. It is the quality which enables him to discipline disorder and to inspire courage into the panic-stricken.
- (21) Do not pursue an enemy who simulates flight; do not attack soldiers whose temper is keen.
- (22) Do not swallow a bait offered by the enemy. Do not interfere with an army that is returning home.
- (23) When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. This does not mean that the enemy is to be allowed to escape. The object is 'to make him believe that there is a road to safety, and thus prevent his fighting with the courage despair.'
- (24) If we wish to wrest an advantage from the enemy, we must not fix our minds on that alone, but allow for the possibility of the enemy also doing some harm to us, and let this enter as a factor into our calculations.
- (25) The wise man considers well both advantage and disadvantage. He sees a way out of adversity, and on the day of victory is not blind to danger.
- (26) There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general; (a) recklessness, which leads to destruction; (b) cowardice, which leads to capture; (c) a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults; (d) a delicacy of honor which is sensitive to shame; (e) over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.
- (27) When birds that are flying along in a straight line suddenly shoot upwards, it means that soldiers are in ambush at the spot beneath.
- (28) Humble words and increased preparations are signs that the enemy is about to advance. Violent language and driving forward as if to the attack are signs that he will retreat.

- (29) Fear makes men restless; so they fall to shouting at night in order to keep up their courage.
- (30) If there is disturbance in the camp, the general's authority is weak. If the banners and flags are shifted about, sedition is afoot. If the officers are angry, it means that the men are weary.
- (31) When an army feeds its horses with grain and kills its cattle for food, and when the men do not hang their cooking-pots over the camp-fires, showing that they will not return to their tents, you may know that they are determined to fight to the death.
- (32) Too frequent rewards signify that the enemy is at the end of his resources; Because when an army is hard pressed, there is always a fear of mutiny, and lavish rewards are given to keep the men in good temper.
- (33) The commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, courage and strictness.
- (34) Attack him when he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.
- (35) If attackers and attacked are equally matched in strength, only the able general will fight.
- (36) War is not a thing to be trifled with.
- (37) Knowing the enemy enables you to take the offensive, knowing yourself enables you to stand on the defensive. Attack is the secret of defence; defence is the planning of an attack.
- (38) He who sees the obvious, wins his battles with difficulty; he who looks below the surface of things, wins with ease.
- (39) In warfare, first lay plans which will ensure victory, and then lead your army to battle; if you will not begin with stratagem but rely on brute strength alone, victory will no longer be assured.
- (40) When envoys are sent with compliments in their mouths, it is a sign that the enemy wishes for a truce.
- (41) If the enemy open friendly relations by sending hostages, it is a sign that they are anxious for an armistice, either because their strength is exhausted or for some other reason.
- (41) When the officers are too strong and the common soldiers too weak, the result is collapse.
- (42) Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.
- (43) Make forays on fertile country in order to supply your army with food.
- (44) Carefully study the well being of your men, and do not overtax them. Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength.
- (45) Throw your soldiers into positions where there is no escape, and they will prefer death to flight. If they will face death, there is nothing they may not achieve. Officers and men alike will put forth their uttermost strength.
- (46) If our soldiers are not overburdened with money, it is not because they have a distaste for riches; if their lives are not unduly long, it is not because they are disinclined to longevity.
- (47) It is the business of a general to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just, and thus maintain order.
- (48) If the enemy leaves a door open, you must rush in.
- (49) Walk in the path defined by rule, and accommodate yourself to the enemy until you can fight a decisive battle.
- (50) Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical.
- (51) Finally, use your spies fully to minimize damage and destruction and maximize success. To neglect the use of spies is nothing less than a crime against humanity.

## FINAL WORD

The book provides the preachings of Sun Tzu in a capsule format. It is an excellent book with great takeaways. It teaches us to fight back against odds than succumb to them. It encourages and motivates you by looking at the ideas than brooding over issues and individuals. It contains pearls of wisdom in every sentence. It guides and grooves you in the right slot as a successful leader. You can read this book on one sitting and learn the secrets and strategies of Sun Tzu.

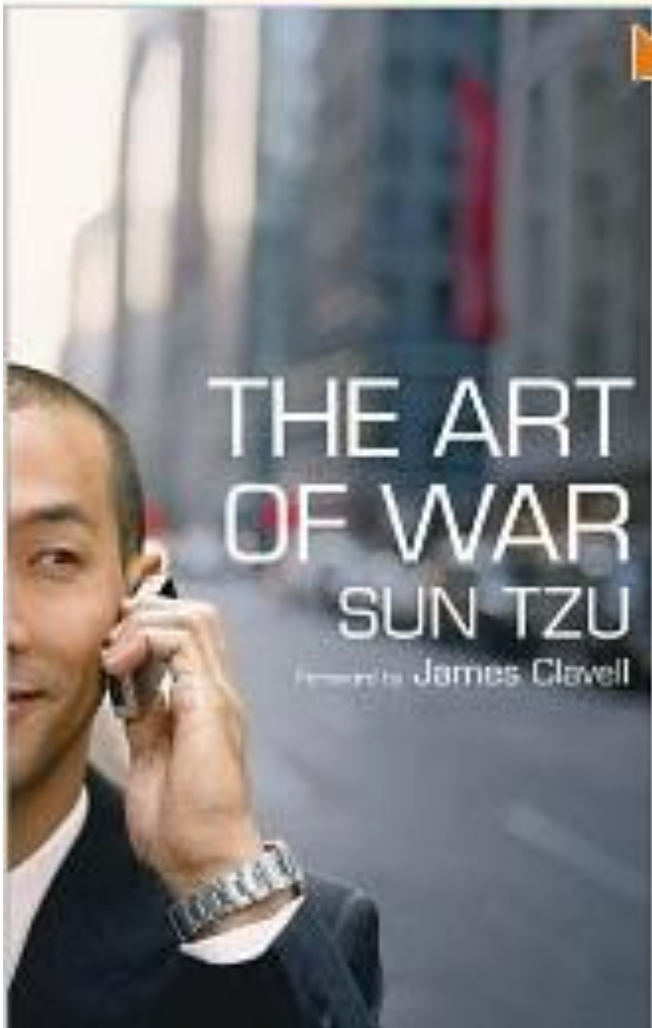
It has been translated from Chinese. It widens your mental horizons and improves your thinking skills. It provides several leadership lessons for future leaders so that they can take leaf out of them and excel as leaders. It helps minimize mistakes and maximize your success rate. It helps improve your personality development and leadership success. It is useful to leaders of all streams such as military, business and politics to avoid costly mistakes while waging organizational battles.

The ideas and ideals of Sun Tzu, one of the greatest generals written two and a half millennium ago are still relevant today and will be useful as long as human civilization exists. It is believed that Napoleon followed the rules of Sun Tzu and won battles. Various military organizations follow the strategies of Sun Tzu even today. The book is a must read for every leader in his/her lifetime. Not to have read Sun Tzu's book means not to have known anything about leadership.

## REFERENCES

Author's Blog: <http://profmsr.blogspot.com>

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The art of war (paperback) By James Clavell (foreword), Sun Tzu (Author). ISBN: 978-0-340-93784-6.