A Leadership

School administrators find the battlefield a place for fully appreciating the role of vision, mentoring and the power of words

BY ROBERT E. MILLWARD

hat can the Battle of Gettysburg reveal about leadership and organizational theory? Dwight Eisenhower answered this question in his book, At Ease Stories I Tell to Friends, writing:

"That many visitors to Gettysburg are satisfied with a fast review of the scene and a sketchy knowledge of the battle's high points seems to me a pity. Were they to delve a little deeper into the record of those who fought here, they would find lessons and inspirations beyond price. The battle was not just a contest of armed muscle. On the field, men found in themselves resources of courage, of leadership, of greatness they had not known before. Nor were they men of only physical courage. High moral courage marked them, too."

Eisenhower enjoyed telling stories about this famous battle, and in one such story he tells how, during Pickett's charge, a daring young lieutenant named Frank Haskell is forever remembered in history for actions that he took

during a brief span of just 15 minutes when, "without orders, without heed to the rules of seniority, rallied Union colonels and privates alike to plug gaps in the line; galloped along the front moving guns and muskets to the point of crisis; provided an abundance of leadership, where, without him, confusion and chaos would have ruled."

These are the stories that capture the essence of leadership and Gettysburg provides a perfect opportunity to focus on how the officers analyzed problems, made critical decisions, promoted ethical behavior and created a positive organizational climate. During the Leadership Walks Across Gettysburg that I've organized for superintendents and principals over the past decade, I've found the school leaders to be fascinated by how these battlefield scenarios directly related to situations they encounter daily. The seminar is offered through the administration and leadership studies program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



Len Fullenkamp (left), an expert on leadership and strategic planning and a professor at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pa., leads a group of education administrators through Gettysburg.

Ways and Means

The tour guide for the two-day seminar is Len Fullenkamp, a professor of military history and strategy at the U.S. Army War College in nearby Carlisle, Pa., who is an expert on the three-day battle of Gettysburg. Fullenkamp, a master teacher and storyteller, usually opens with a short description of the events that led to the three-day battle. He tells why Gen. Robert E. Lee proposed to leave his war-torn state of Virginia and why he chose to invade Pennsylvania.

At this stage, school administrators begin to see parallels between strategic planning from a military point of view and strategic planning for schools. They compare and contrast Lee's strategic plan to win the right to secede with President Lincoln's steadfast resolution to reunite the Union.

Fullenkamp, in an attempt to clarify strategic planning, reduces this complex process to simply three words: ways and means. He describes how Lincoln kept the national focus on reuniting the Union (ways) rather than being limited by the money available in the treasury at that time (means). Most administrators are surprised to learn that the U.S. treasury totaled only \$21 million at the start of the Civil War and that small amount was already committed. Lincoln was told the war could cost more than \$400 million. Yet Lincoln never wavered; the Union was to be preserved at all costs.

Fullenkamp reminds the superintendents that if "ways rather than means" drive strategy, then an administrator will not be tempted to think small.

Everyone Informed

Gen. George Gordon Meade was given command of the Army of the Potomac on June 28 just three days prior to the Battle of Gettysburg. As a corps commander, Meade led a force of 25,000 men, but on June 28 he became responsible for the lives of approximately 90,000 men.

During our Leadership Walk, Fullenkamp describes the commander's first important action. "At that point,



The Leadership Walk Across Gettysburg is a two-day seminar, sponsored by the administration and leadership studies program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, that draws parallels between school planning and battlefield strategy.

Meade does a very important thing for a leader. Meade ... later confides in a letter to his wife, 'I had been in the army for almost two years and throughout those two years, we were almost always in the dark. We never knew what the bigger picture was, so when we got ourselves in a situation and things began to go bad, we didn't know what to do because we didn't get orders from our superiors and we were humiliated time and time again.' So the first thing that George Gordon Meade does as a leader is almost inspirational. He sits down and he writes a memorandum to his subordinates, and in that memorandum he says the situation is this: We are here. The enemy is here, here and here. He then sets out what he intends for the Army to do in response. In modern terminology today, we call this 'commander's intent.' Now, the reason this is important is if you're that corps commander and you make contact with Lee's army ... you're going to fix him in place, because you know that the boss wants to fight."

In any organization, the administrator must communicate a clear vision and a clear direction for everyone in the organization.

Discretionary Directives

During the Battle of Gettysburg, the newly appointed Confederate corps commander, Gen. Richard Ewell, was leading a successful rout of Union soldiers with his troops in hot pursuit of panicking soldiers retreating wildly through the narrow streets of Gettysburg. Lee watched the chaotic mass of Union soldiers heading for the distant ridge and sensed an impending victory. And at this point,

many critics claim Lee committed a major blunder. He scribbled a simple command to Ewell saying: "Take the hill if practicable, but avoid a general engagement until the arrival of other divisions of the army."

Although Lee's real intent was for Ewell to continue his attack and to sweep the Yankees from Cemetery Ridge south of town, Ewell's interpretation of Lee's discretionary order may have been the difference between victory for the South and the defeat of the North.

On our leadership walk, we use Lee's discretionary order to help school leaders see the implications of discretionary directives. Lee's discretionary order sets the stage for lively arguments and in-depth discussion.

It's not long into the discussion before an administrator raises the question: What if Lee's message had said, "Gen. Ewell, take the hill." The educators also wonder why Lee issued a discretionary order. They begin to analyze the word "practicable" and how this single word was interpreted by Lee and perhaps misinterpreted by Ewell. They discuss the reasons why Lee seemed to prefer using a discretionary order rather than a nondiscretionary order with his generals. They also begin to understand that Lee's leadership behavior failed to take into account the lack of experience of his newly appointed corps commander, Gen. Ewell.

Ewell was a former division commander (divisions consist of 6.000 men) who served under Gen. Stonewall Jackson. The latter seldom issued discretionary orders to his officers; he much preferred clear-cut orders. Most historians claim Jackson, who was killed two months prior to Gettysburg, would have interpreted Lee's discretionary order as: Take the hill!

Was Lee's discretionary order an error in leadership? Was Ewell correct in assuming that the Union troops who were entrenched on the hill could not have been dislodged? These two questions generate great discussions on the battlefield among the education leaders.

Situational Awareness

School administrators are confronted daily with problems related to situational awareness and situational understanding. Situational awareness occurs when a superintendent discovers that 5th-grade reading achievement scores have declined significantly compared to the previous year. However, the superintendent refrains from developing an action plan until he or she has situational understanding of why the scores dropped. Perhaps they declined because the 5thgrade students started using a new reading series, or perhaps several 5th-grade teachers retired during the past year, leaving rookies to run the classrooms, or perhaps the school schedule was disrupted. In short, situational understanding often requires more time and more detective work prior to initiating an action plan.

A lack of situational understanding occurred on the third day of the battle when Robert E. Lee decided to attack the middle of the Union line. He believed this was the weakest spot in the Union position. Lee understood that the right and left flanks of the Union position were strong, and the day prior his men almost broke through the defense on four different occasions. On this day he sent Jeb Stuart and 4,000 cavalry to circle the Union defense and attack it from the rear while initiating a simultaneous attack on the Union's right flank. Lee also ordered approximately 180 Confederate cannons to bombard the center of the Union line before Pickett's frontal charge.

Once the deafening roar of the cannons began, it wasn't long before Union cannons began to blink out on top of the hill. Lee mistakenly believed Union artillery was being severely damaged when the Union cannon fire almost ceased.

Unfortunately, Lee did not have a valid situational understanding of what was actually happening. What really was occurring was that Gen. Henry Hunt, the Union artillery commander, sensing that a Confederate attack was imminent, rode down the line saying, "Cease your fire. There will be an infantry attack. Conserve your ammunition." Lee's situational awareness, however, was telling him his cannons were hitting the intended target. The heavy smoke from the cannons camouflaged the fact Confederate cannon balls were exploding with little effect, far behind the Union line.

Lee did not realize that Jeb Stewart's cavalry attack had been guashed by Union cavalry, and the attack on the Union's right flank never got started. So when Pickett made his charge into the center of the Union line. he met a disastrous defeat and within 45 minutes some 9,000 Confederates were killed or wounded. The third day of the battle of Gettysburg is a classic example of the

"Our leadership walks across Gettysburg have touched on ethics, communication, vision, toxic leadership, mentoring, doing the right thing and the power of words."

difference between situational awareness and situational understanding.

Walking Lessons

The Gettysburg battlefield sets the stage for studying an array of relevant school leadership issues. Our leadership walks across Gettysburg have touched on ethics, communication, vision, toxic leadership, mentoring, doing the right thing and the power of words.

Participating school administrators understand how military leaders relied on subordinate officers as well as the men on the front line to accomplish the objective. It also becomes obvious that leaders must be prepared to adapt to rapidly changing conditions, to issue precise directives, and then to step back once orders are given and allow subordinates to complete the task.

Robert Millward is coordinator of administration and leadership studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. E-mail: Millward@iup.edu



Recruit Top K-12 Leaders With Online Classified Ads

The online AASA Job Bulletin offers 24-hour access to posting and viewing the hottest administrative K-12 jobs.

The listings are organized by job category (superintendent, central office, higher education, principal, consultant) and geographic region and can be hyperlinked to the advertiser's home page.

Use the AASA Job Bulletin to fill your vacancies today! Log on to www.aasa.org/AASAJobBulletin for details on how to submit an ad.

MEMBER AD RATES

30 days	\$295
60 days	\$495
90 days	\$695

The AASA Job Bulletin is the No. 1 source for advertising superintendent

