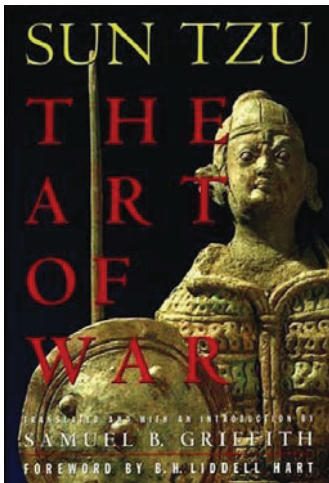




## Book Review



### Sun Tzu The Art of War

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As CFIs we consistently look for ways to strengthen our knowledge base, teach others, and improve our interrogation skills. We educate ourselves in different techniques for obtaining admissions and detecting deceit. One of the challenges our education creates is

retaining the ability to take a step back and consider the totality of circumstances before an interrogation. Creating a sound strategy before an interrogation can make the difference between a well developed confession and a darker alternative.

The Art of War, by Sun Tzu, is a book that I revisit regularly to remind myself not to lose sight of the importance of thinking strategically. Although there remains some debate as to the date of origin and actual author of this text it is generally accepted that Sun Tzu authored these thirteen chapters over 2000 years ago in China. Many authors have translated The Art of War and added their own forwards, insights, and recommendations for the text. The Art of War is prescribed reading for military officers, CEO's, sales professionals and college students alike. In this review I will examine how, as interrogators, we can benefit from Sun Tzu's lessons of leadership, preparation and confrontation.

Sun Tzu's biography includes a story in which the king of Wu requested Sun Tzu to conduct a training exercise with his concubines. According to the legend Sun Tzu clearly explained his expectations to the two columns of concubines twice. When his second consecutive order was disobeyed he ordered the execution of the king's two favorite concubines. The moral of this story is as leaders it is our responsibility to provide clear instructions and only after clear instructions can we hold our employees responsible for their actions. As we develop our employees we need to be conscious of the fact that things appearing trivial to us may be challenging to them. We can work to inspire them through education and provide critical feedback when appropriate.

Sun Tzu lists five factors to consider before going into battle, or an interrogation. These five factors are moral influence, weather, terrain, command and doctrine. We will often make tough decisions regarding an individual's employment or their freedom and the morality of those decisions should always be considered. Weather can be translated to the political climate of our situation. We should consider if our current climate supports the interrogation or if we should wait for a political storm to clear. The physical location of the interrogation constitutes the terrain. Although some environments are more challenging than others we should find a location that gives us an advantage as opposed to providing an advantage to our subjects. In many cases the command consideration involves us. Are we making good legal and business decisions and are we properly training our employees to conduct interrogations? Doctrine represents the methods we use to elicit information from people. Here is where we follow any applicable laws and policies as we execute our interrogation techniques.

Once the decision has been made to conduct the interrogation the focus turns to preparation. Sometimes we have days to prepare and on other occasions we may only have a few minutes. According to Sun Tzu, whatever preparation time we have should be focused on creating advantages for ourselves. We can create advantages by researching our subject's background, choosing the right location to conduct the conversation, reviewing the investigation or taking a few seconds to make the conversation appear spontaneous or well planned. If we look at preparation as an ongoing process we can consider Sun Tzu's assertion that better trained armies will typically prevail. As CFIs it is safe to assume that we make training a priority for ourselves so the question becomes how we train others. Activities including formal training classes, reviewing previous interrogations, assigned reading or even trading rationalizations and themes will continue to develop those whose careers we are trying to enhance.

When Sun Tzu states that the acumen of skill is to win without fighting he could have been speaking of obtaining admissions without having to overcome denials. He continues to discuss two very important points of knowledge. First is the importance of knowing when to fight and when to walk away. As interrogators there are many occasions when we want to interrogate someone as fast as possible, but we need to understand that it could be far more important to live to fight another day. By considering the political climate, the depth of the investigation, our subject's background and ourselves, we can make educated decisions regarding the best time to speak with someone. This leads us to his second point which is to know ourselves and our subjects. Sun Tzu accurately states that if

we only know ourselves we have, at best, a 50% chance at success. Each of us can probably recount interrogations that we salvaged because of one little detail we learned about our subject. Knowing ourselves is an underrated aspect of our preparation. It can be difficult to acknowledge that we have areas of our game that need improvement or that there could be holes in our investigations. When we understand our personal challenges we will be better prepared to avoid or overcome them during an interrogation. If we go into an interrogation and do not know ourselves or our subject we are almost certainly preparing to fail.

One of my favorite Sun Tzu assertions is that it is better to capture an enemy than it is to destroy him. Assuming we are having a conversation with a guilty subject, one of our goals will be to develop a complete confession. If we attack, belittle, and threaten him we could destroy him and if he admits to anything it will be to what we already knew. However, if we use the strategy of convincing him of his guilt while helping him understand that good people make mistakes we can psychologically capture him and obtain a thoroughly developed confession. Sun Tzu goes on to include a technique for capturing our opponent; never fully surround him. When people find themselves completely surrounded in an adversarial situation they often feel the need to fight to the death. In an interrogation this could cause our subjects to continue to deny even if they believe they are caught. The alternative is to leave them a perceived way out. Regardless of what technique we choose we can surround our subjects by convincing them that their guilt is known. We leave their perceived escape route open by using the right rationalization/theme and following it up with a well conceived and properly timed soft accusation or choice question. When they choose to take that escape route by providing us an initial admission they unknowingly play right into our strategy without feeling the need to defend themselves.

During our preparation we will need to create an offensive and defensive strategy. Sun Tzu discusses the importance of understanding our own, and our subject's, strengths and weaknesses. This is similar to any SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis we have previously completed. Weaknesses can include time restrictions, incomplete investigations, language barriers or a lack of familiarity with our subject or their profession. Our strengths start with our training, education and experience but they may vary from there. We want to focus on protecting our weaknesses, avoiding their strengths and attacking their weaknesses with our strengths. Above all we never want to underestimate our subjects.

Although he is talking about a military battle Sun Tzu speaks of the importance of occupying the field first. We want to dictate the terms and pace of our interrogation and a great way to begin is by waiting in the room when our subject arrives. We may choose to alert him in advance to the conversation, have an escort explain the reason for the conversation on the way to the interview room or we could use an "ambush" technique, either alternative will allow us to set up our room, collect our thoughts and gain a psychological advantage without saying a word. When Sun Tzu considers waiting for his opponent's arrival his recommendation is to "wait in serenity". Every interviewer experiences varying levels of nerves and excitement before and during an interrogation. By cultivating a calm spirit before we start the conversation, we will not allow these emotions to effect our judgments.

Building rapport and verifying background information are steps that many individuals rush through or avoid due to lack of time, confidence or interest. In a military application Sun Tzu states that it is important to understand your opponent's movement so you can use it to your advantage. When we take the time to build rapport and verify background information we can learn our subject's normal speech and behavior pattern, what they look like when they are being truthful, and allow them to give us ideas for rationalizations/themes. This information becomes the foundation for our entire interrogation to be built on.

Another statement Sun Tzu makes is to "Be without shape". We are all comfortable with the fact that the best laid plans will somehow fall apart. At any point during an interrogation we might hit an unexpected roadblock or uncover new information. By "being without shape" we allow ourselves to remain flexible, transition between techniques, and become who ever our subject needs us to be.

It is also important to consider Sun Tzu's "five dangerous qualities of a general". He lists these negative qualities as being reckless, cowardly, quick tempered, having a delicate sense of honor and being too compassionate. These negative attributes should always be considered when we are deciding to interrogate an individual or to trust what we are being told.

In summation if we educate and inspire our employees, prepare by understanding ourselves, our subjects and our investigations, create advantages for ourselves, remain calm and exercise good judgment we will set ourselves up for success. The Art of War is a quick read and Sun Tzu's chapters are written in a bullet format, and depending on the translation you choose the author's notes and contributions could vary. I would recommend browsing through several translations and choosing the one that fits your reading style.