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## AN INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN – JOAN OF ARC

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*"I am not afraid... I was born to do this." Joan of Arc*

Born in 1412, Jeanne d'Arc (or in English, Joan of Arc), a peasant girl living in medieval France, believed that God had chosen her to lead France to victory in its long-running war with England. With no military training, Joan convinced the embattled crown prince Charles of Valois to allow her to lead a French army to the besieged city of Orléans, where it achieved a momentous victory over the English and their French allies, the Burgundians.

After seeing the prince crowned King Charles VII, Joan was captured by Anglo-Burgundian forces, tried for witchcraft and heresy and burned at the stake in 1431, at the age of 19. By the time she was officially canonized in 1920, the Maid of Orléans (as she was known) had long been considered one of history's greatest saints, and an enduring symbol of French unity and nationalism.

Joan of Arc introduced an unorthodox approach to the conduct of war during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century by emphasizing nationalism and patriotism. With her contributions to the war, Joan of Arc helped turned the tide of the hundred year's war in France's favour eventually resulting in victory and along with it the expulsion of the English from continental Europe.

Joan of Arc used her charismatic leadership to help build the nation state of France. The first important leadership trait she had was to have a 'strong sense of mission.' Joan of Arc was

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on a mission, that may have not been something she proposed on her own, but rather it was her calling from a higher power. Despite the risks she took throughout her life, it did not stop her from wanting to remove English rule over her native land. Her strong faith in God, made her a passionate Catholic, which was essential to her: “confidence in the rightness and goodness of the aims that he proclaims for the movement.” The charismatic leader in Joan of Arc’s times was often considered to have a gift from God, whether or not this is true there is no debate that through the strength of her character Joan of Arc empowered others to find the strength within themselves to help take part in a movement which was to shape the future of the world.

At the age of 13 Joan begun to have visions of Archangel Michael, Saint Margaret, and Saint Catherine of Alexandria instructing her to support Charles and that she would be God’s instrument in setting France free. Her voices told her to go to the Governor of Vaucouleurs who would provide her with an escort of men-at-arms and send her to the Dauphin, who was the uncrowned heir to the throne. In leaving her village home Joan said, “I am enlisted. God helping me, I will not turn back until the British grip is loosened from the throat of France.” When the governor had heard her message he said, “What nonsense is this? You are but a child.” But Joan said, “Nevertheless, I am appointed by the King of Heaven to lead the armies of France to raise the British siege of Orleans and crown the Dauphin at Rheims.”

Joan won the confidence of the Dauphin and the court with her sweetness, simplicity, sincerity, and unconscious eloquence. The best and the most capable among them recognised that she was formed on a grander plan and moved on a loftier plane than the ordinary mass of mankind. Finally Joan was given her command.

With an almost impossible objective ahead, Joan said to one of her generals, “I will lead the men over the wall.” The general replied, “Not a man will follow you.” Joan said, “I will not look back to see whether anyone is following or not.” But the soldiers of France did follow Joan of Arc. With her sacred sword, her consecrated banner, and her belief in her mission, she swept all before her. She sent a thrill of courage and enthusiasm through the French army such as neither king nor generals could produce. Then on May the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1430, by sheer strategy and force, she broke the siege at Orleans. This anniversary is still celebrated in France as “Joan of Arc Day.” It is the day that she drove out the British and saved France. Then at the head of her troops she marched to Rheims and crowned the Dauphin King.

With her mission accomplished, Joan planned to return to her family in Domremy, but she was treacherously betrayed and sold to the British. Then her long trial of over a year began. For many weary months she was kept in chains. She was threatened and abused. The English believed that Joan had conspired not with God but the Devil and tried relentlessly to discredit her. She was promised freedom if she would deny the visions and mission she was given. However Joan was immovable, and after a year of imprisonment she was burned at the stake on charges of heresy, at the age of 19.

Joan of Arc was looked upon by her fellow French Soldiers as a gift from God whose mere presence on the battlefield stirred the hearts of a French Army who had suffered regular occurring defeats for years by the hands of the English and Burgundians. She had dauntless courage when hope had perished in the hearts of her countrymen. She was spotlessly pure

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in mind and body when most of society was foul in both. She was, perhaps, the only entirely unselfish person whose name has held a high place in profane history. No vestige or suggestion of self-seeking can be found in any word or deed of hers.

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**Contact us**

**Sydney** p +61 2 9253 0950

**Melbourne** p +61 3 9653 9510

**w** [www.blenheimpartners.com](http://www.blenheimpartners.com)