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Executive Search & Board Advisory

## 11 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM JULIUS CAESAR

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*It is easier to find men who will volunteer to die, than to find those who are willing to endure pain with patience.*

If there ever was a most characteristic military leader in history, that was Julius Caesar. Beyond his indisputable ability for strategy, the Roman General stood apart due to his prowess in leadership and his ability to transmit his wisdom and vision to the troops he was commanding who in turn gave Caesar their trust and loyalty.

Caesar was born into a patrician family, the gens Julia, which claimed descent from Iulus, son of the legendary Trojan Prince Aeneas. Due to instability in Rome and because of Sulla's proscriptions, Caesar at the age of 19 joined the army and served with distinction at the Siege of Mytilene earning the Civic crown. After hearing of Sulla's death, Caesar thought it safe to return to Rome although Pirates captured him and although eventually released he swore he would hunt them down and kill them, an act he successfully completed. Caesar climbed up the political ladder throughout his life eventually becoming Proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyricum.

Caesar went on to become the greatest General and statesman of his era in which he attained ultimate power and received the title 'Dictator for life'. However, the underlying political conflicts had not been resolved and on the Ides of March, 44 BC, Caesar was

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assassinated by a group of rebellious senators led by Gaius Cassius Longinus, Marcus Junius Brutus and Decimus Junius Brutus.

Caesar thought differently than his contemporaries and to help us to understand why he stood out as arguably the Greatest Roman who ever lived. Here are some lessons that a bright dead personality could teach us were they alive today, Gaius Julius Caesar – a man so successful in his time that his last name became synonymous with “Emperor”.

### **1. People want to be led, not controlled.**

When Julius Caesar led his legions, he did so not with the standard cold, formal jargon that one would expect to hear in an army but he treated his soldiers as equals, when he addressed his troops he referred to them as ‘Comrades’, never ‘men’ or ‘soldiers’. Caesar understood that to gain a man’s trust and loyalty he must be different to that of the norm. He trained alongside his men with the same physical intensity they did and that he knew all of his centurion’s names, building with them an intimate rapport. Caesar knew that in doing so he would retain their trust and admiration and gave his troops the mentality that they were fighting alongside Caesar, not just for him.

### **2. “I came, I saw, I conquered.”**

Everyone loves a winner. The ingredients of leadership may be a brew of courage, vision and intelligence, but its flavour and appeal are the wins. Being a leader isn’t always enough, it must be proven again and again that and in doing so cements an individual as someone all should look up to. Throughout his life, Caesar’s actions showed that he had what it takes to win and win again. His personnel brew of leadership qualities allowed him to become the conqueror of Gaul, Imperator and Dictator for life.

### **3. “Experience is the teacher of all things.”**

Caesar understood that the subtleties of experience trump the best theoretical education in the world and that reading about former great generals such as Scipio Africanus and his Carthaginian rival Hannibal was one thing, but to roll up your sleeves and learn the hard way is best. Julius Caesar learned to soldier with the rank and file of the Roman legions. He fought on the front lines, shoulder to shoulder with Legionnaires. He slept with them, ate with them, drank with them, marched with them and bled with them. Had he not spent years in the trenches doing the work himself, he would not have been the military leader he became. “Experience is the teacher of all things.”

### **4. “Cowards die many times before their actual deaths.”**

Be bold. Takes chances. Don’t hide. Every time you don’t speak up in a meeting, every time you hold back due to fear you are missing out on opportunities which can potentially change your life. All successful businessmen and woman have all gone through a rollercoaster of success and failure, and every single one of them will tell you that failure taught them more than their successes.

Speak your mind, even if what you have to say may earn you a few frowns. It is easy to feel pressured by others to keep your mouth shut or not speak against the grain. Don’t let yourself be intimidated. Your opinion is as valuable as theirs, and your point of view just as

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worthy of expression. Better to know who your friends and enemies are than to live in fear of retaliation. Speak your mind. Find strength in courage.

### 5. “I had rather be first in a village than second at Rome.”

Some people are happy to be second. Others are okay with being in the top 5. Leaders don't fit into any of these categories, they want to win, and they want to be number one. When Caesar crossed the Rubicon River and uttered the famous words “*Alea iacta est*”, “the die is cast” he did so with the belief that he was to be the one man lead the Roman Republic. He did not do it because he wanted to go back to following as others have, he did so because he felt that he was the one to lead.

### 6. Ask everything of your people, but reward them like kings.

The troops who served with Julius Caesar's and survived to the end retired as wealthy men. His troops, who were often born into poverty would have never forgotten to who they owe their fortunes to. Julius Caesar was without a doubt one of the most successful and influential men that has ever lived. But he did not do it alone. Caesar understood that his successes came from the ordinary men, the men who fought his battles, built his camps and died for his cause. Caesar understood that everyone who contributed to his success deserves more reward that he could afford.

### 7. “The die is cast.”

Make decisions. Live with those decisions. Once you've committed yourself and your business to a course of action, to a play, to a tactical path, you're committed. The time for doubt or indecision is gone. Stay the course and brave the storm. During the final battle of the Gallic war, Caesar was facing a larger force in a terrain mostly unfamiliar with him, yet he stuck to his decision, dealt with the irregularities and overcame any obstacles thrown at him. He followed his instincts to the end, and in doing so, subdued the Gaul's and incorporated the province of Gaul (France) into the Roman Republic.

### 8. Always Choose Notoriety Over-Fitting In

Even when he was just starting out and had no power, Julius Caesar found ways to stand out. He was one of the noted fashionistas of his era, always dressing better and more uniquely than the other men around him. Caesar dressed so that he at first seemed as if he was a member of the Senatorial family, but the same time marked himself out as not quite the same as his peers.

### 9. “It is better to create than to learn! Creating is the essence of life.”

It is better to be a pioneer than a student. Go where no one has gone. Until Julius Caesar marched into Gaul and made it a Roman province, it was a mostly an unknown land that Rome feared for centuries. He had a vision of what could be, and he made that vision a reality. Julius Caesar like most great men looked outside the box, Caesar looked at what others thought to be impossible, and he made it a reality. Leaders today such as Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Steve Jobs, Henry Ford, Walt Disney, every brand of note has focused not on learning but creating and building.

### 10. Keep Your Power Base As Broad As Possible

As a member of the political party the *Populārēs*, meaning ‘favouring the people’ Caesar’s popularity came from the plebeians (the commoners). Caesar was loved by the lower classes of society, yet looked at with contempt by the more conservative, traditionally Republican senators who felt his ever growing power was destroying the republican values Rome had held so dear. As dictator, Julius Caesar enacted a legislative programme that addressed all segments of society. In his youth, he lived in a neighbourhood that wasn’t exactly prestigious, but it did allow him to converse with the poorer classes that Roman senators would pay no note to. To give it a modern analogy, Julius Caesar didn’t live in a bubble. He knew senators, equestrians, and the poor. He even championed the residents in the provinces abroad, such as those in Cisalpine Gaul who hadn’t been given citizenship but wanted it.

### 11. “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”

Caesar understood that Rome was in need of drastic change. He knew that without change Rome could once again plunge into civil war as it had done in the past with the wars of Sulla and Gaius Marius and himself and Pompey Magnus which had drained the Republic of both resources and funds. Caesar laid plans for economic improvements across the empire. Marshes south of Rome were drained, business districts of various cities were improved, and new theatres and temples were built. He proposed construction projects for improving trade by sea and for improving harbours. He laid plans for a new canal for the city of Corinth. Caesar began enlisting men of talent into public service, and he saw the need for improvement in the organisation of municipal governments throughout Italy. He started standardising and streamlining cumbersome local governmental operations. He sought to bind citizens in the provinces closer to Rome by doing away with laws that made distinctions between them and the citizens of Rome. He gave Roman citizenship to Gauls who had fought alongside him when he was governor there. He renewed old laws long ignored against extravagance. He upheld property rights and took steps toward the restoration of Rome's system of finances and the creation of economic stability. To prevent the kind of profiteering that had taken place under Sulla and to ease the burden of debt, he put restrictions on lending and borrowing. He gave Romans temporary relief from rents and began a programme of improving housing for the poor. He began welfare reform, reducing the number of those who were impoverished in Rome from 320,000 to 150,000.

Julius Caesar was a man who changed the course of the world. Through his achievements he dramatically changed the political landscape of Rome, then the foremost military and political power in the world and even today his teachings, words and name are held in accordance with those who succeed in the highest degree.

## BACKGROUND

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