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LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE GREAT GENGHIS KHAN



"I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you" Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan was born in 1162, near the border between present-day Mongolia and Siberia. Genghis Khan's birth name was Temujin, meaning, "iron" and the title "Genghis Khan" was given as an acknowledgement by the Mongol tribe leaders of his leadership and their loyalty in 1206. According to the Secret History of the Mongols, he was born grasping a blood clot in his fist, a traditional sign that he was destined to become a great leader. His mother Hoelun had been kidnapped by his father Yesukhei and forced into marriage. Temujin had three brothers Hasar, Hachiun, and Temuge, one sister Temule, and two half-brothers Begter and Belgutei. When he was nine, his father arranged a marriage for him and delivered him to the family of his future wife Borte from the tribe Khongirad. Temujin was to live there serving the head of the household Dai Setsen until the marriageable age of 12. On the return trip, his father ran into the Tatar tribe, who had long been Mongol enemies, and offered him food that poisoned and killed him. Upon hearing of his father's death, Temujin returned home to claim his father's position as clan chief. However, the clan refused to recognise his young leadership and ostracised his family to near-refugee status. From then, his mother taught him the basic skills of survival in the steppe lands of the great open grasslands of Mongolia.

For the next several years, the family lived in poverty, surviving mostly on wild fruits, ox carcasses, marmots, and other small game. The pressure on the family was great, and in a

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dispute over the spoils of a hunting expedition, Temujin killed his older half-brother confirming his position as head of the family. Temujin grew up also observing tribal warfare, thievery, raids, corruption, and revenge between confederations. In a raid around 1177, Temujin was captured by his father's former allies, the Tayichi'ud tribe, and enslaved. He escaped at night by hiding in a river crevice with the help of a sympathetic captor, and then joined his brothers and several other clansmen to form a fighting unit. At this time, none of the tribes of Mongolia were united, and arranged marriages were often used to solidify temporary alliances.

In 1178, as previously arranged by his father, Temujin married Borte to cement alliances between their two tribes and was also given a sable fur worth "a thousand of the swiftest horses". Soon after the marriage, Borte was kidnapped by the rival Merkit tribe and given to a chieftain as a wife. With the help of his blood brother, Jamukha, and his protector, Toghrul of the Keraites tribe, he established a fighting force of more than 20,000 men and was able to rescue her. She soon after gave birth to her first son, Jochi. Though Borte's captivity with the Merkit tribe cast doubt on Jochi's birth and the real father, Temujin accepted him as his own. He had four sons and an unknown number of daughters.

After this, Temujin began his ascent to power by setting out a plan to destroy traditional divisions among the various tribes and unite the Mongols under his rule. Then through a combination of outstanding military tactics and merciless brutality, Temujin avenged his father's murder by decimating the Tatar army and ordered the killing of every Tatar male who was more than approximately 3 feet tall. Following the victories over other rival Mongol tribes, including the victory over blood brother Jamukha's Jadarans who had split away from Temujin, other tribal leaders agreed to peace and bestowed on Temujin the title of Genghis Khan, meaning "universal ruler" in 1206. A year later, he led his armies in their first major invasion of China against the kingdom of Xi Xia also known as the Tangut Empire and, after two years, forced it to surrender.

In 1211, Genghis Khan's armies struck the Jin dynasty in northern China. Although the campaign against the Jin dynasty lasted nearly 20 years, Genghis Khan's armies were also active in the west against border empires and the Muslim world. Initially, Genghis Khan used diplomacy to establish trade relations with the Khwarazmian dynasty, a Turkish-dominated empire that included Turkestan, Persia, and Afghanistan. However, in 1219, Genghis Khan personally took control of planning and executing a three-prong attack of 200,000 Mongol soldiers against the Khwarazmian dynasty after their leader, Shah Muhammad, sent back the head of one of his ambassadors. This act released a fury, and the Mongols swept through the empire's city's fortifications with unstoppable savagery. Those who weren't immediately slaughtered were driven in front of the Mongol army, serving as human shields when the Mongols took to the next city. After defeating the Khwarazmian dynasty in 1221, Genghis Khan then prepared his armies to punish the kingdom of Xi Xia after the Emperor Shenzong and his military commander Asha refused to take part in the campaign and attempted to break away from the Mongol empire to ally with the Jin and Song Dynasties. In 1225, Genghis Khan sent a second, punitive expedition with a force of 180,000 to Xi Xia for their betrayal.

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In early 1227 a horse threw Genghis Khan to the ground, causing internal injuries and his health never recovered. He later died on August 18, 1227, soon after the submission of the Xi Xia. In his last words, "I have conquered for you a large empire, but my life was too short to take the whole world, but I leave to you". The empire's expansion continued and reached its peak under his son, Ogedei Khan's leadership. Mongol armies eventually invaded Persia, the Song Dynasty in southern China, and the Balkans. The Mongol armies had reached up to the gates of Vienna, Austria. Subsequently, the campaign lost momentum, marking the Mongol's farthest invasion into Europe. Genghis Khan conquered more than twice as much land as any other person in history. At their peak, the Mongols controlled between 11 and 12 million contiguous square miles, an area about the size of Africa.

Beyond his military accomplishments, Genghis Khan also advanced the Mongol Empire through the adoption of the Ughur script as the Mongol Empires writing system, he implemented governance through the legal code known as the Yassa, which was based on Mongol common law but contained edicts that prohibited blood feuds, adultery, theft and bearing false witness. He also developed one of the first ever international postal systems known as the Yam, which was later used by Marco Polo. Although known for the brutality of his campaigns, Genghis Khan is credited with bringing the Silk Road under one cohesive political environment. His conquests effectively connected the major trade centres of China and Europe. Present-day Mongolians regard him as the founding father of Mongolia.

Ten leadership lessons from the greatest conqueror in the world include:

1. He rose above adversity

As a child, life for Temujin was violent and unpredictable. He dealt with enormous adversity such as witnessing his father's death at the age of nine. He was outcast and forced to live in meek means for a number of years. He hunted to provide food for his family and even had to kill his half-brother after he refused to share spoils of a hunt. He was enslaved by a neighbouring tribe but managed to escape. He launched a daring rescue for his wife Borte after she too was kidnapped. All of these hardships would have had enormous pressure not only on himself but also on his family, all before he was of the age of 20. The harsh beginning of life on the Mongolian steppe lands provided him at times, insurmountable adversity as well as the incredible drive to overcome.

2. He built relationships

From a young age, Temujin was taught by his mother many lessons, especially the need for strong alliances to ensure stability in Mongolia. According to sources, Temujin began his ascent to power by offering himself as an ally (vassal) to his father's sworn blood-brother Toghrul, who was Khan of the Keraites. This relationship was first reinforced when Borte was captured by the Merkits tribe. Temujin turned to Toghrul for support, and Toghrul offered 20,000 of his Keraites warriors and suggested that Temujin involve his childhood friend Jamukha. However, Jamukha later split the tribe; the very thing Temujin feared most, disunity. Temujin recognised the benefit of making alliances, and with this, he built a reputation not only as a warrior but as a leader attracting a growing number of followers. He then came to power by uniting many of the nomadic tribes of Northeast Asia. In 1206, he

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proceeded in bringing the Mongols closer together, and in a meeting of the so-called Khuriltai (an assemblage of the Mongol nobility) they proclaimed their leader, Temujin, the title of "Genghis Khan" which signifies "universal ruler". Ultimately, he turned feuding tribes into the powerful nation of Mongolia.

3. He was a strategic thinker

The early success of the Mongol army owed much to the use of his brilliant military tactics as well as his understanding of his enemies' motivations. He employed an extensive spy network and was quick to adopt new technologies from his enemies. He built a well-trained Mongol army of fighters to coordinate their advance with a sophisticated signalling system of smoke and burning torches. Large drums sounded commands to charge, and further orders were conveyed with flag signals. In the summer of 1204, Genghis Khan rode west to confront his blood-brother, Jamukha. He called his generals and told them "one tribe is like a single arrow easily broken but many tribes together would be strong, they would never be broken". Genghis Khan didn't just rely on inspirational speeches, he practised psychological warfare. He knew Jamukha scouts would be watching. He then ordered each man to light five fires. The scouts reported that Genghis Khan's army was so large they had more fires than there was stars in the sky. He then advanced his army in silence saving the battle cries to the last. When the enemy came within reach, his archers released a storm of arrows and his cavalry attacked without mercy. He also held squadrons and weapons in reserve then with the enemy in disarray they regrouped and charged. According to the history of the Secret Mongols, each tactic was meticulously planned.

4. He sought discipline

Genghis Khan ensured that every soldier was fully equipped with a bow, arrows, a shield, a dagger and a lasso. The bow was made from wood, and animal bone and had a shooting range of 500 yards. He also made them carry large saddlebags for food, tools and spare clothes. The saddlebag was waterproof and could be inflated to serve as a life preserver when crossing deep and swift-moving rivers. Cavalrymen carried a small sword, javelins, body armour, a battle-axe or mace, and a lance with a hook to pull enemies off of their horses. Training in archery and horsemanship was made compulsory for all, even children. They practised relentlessly to release their arrows just as the horse's hooves left the ground for maximum accuracy. They could manoeuvre a galloping horse using only their legs, with their hands free to shoot arrows. The entire army was also followed by a well-organised supply system of ox carts carrying food for soldiers and beasts alike, as well as military equipment, shamans for spiritual and medical aid, and officials to catalog the booty. The difference between good and great often comes down to discipline, and Genghis Khan's success as a military leader shows the importance of discipline. He put his troops through rigorous and strict military training and as such the Mongols were devastating in their attacks, vanquishing most of their opponents and almost conquering the entire known world.

5. He was intelligent

Beyond his military accomplishments, Genghis Khan also advanced the Mongol Empire in other ways. He recognised the importance of trade and crafts for the economic survival of the Mongols and actively supported both. He decreed the adoption of the Uyghur Script as the Mongol Empire's writing system. He encouraged religious tolerance in the Mongol Empire. He created one of the first international postal systems known as the Yam. By having relay stations stocked with food, shelter and spare horses, official riders could often travel up to 125 miles a day which was unprecedented. In later years, the service was famously used by Marco Polo. Though Genghis Khan never converted to any of the religions, he was quite interested in Daoism, because they could supposedly prolong life. On his deathbed, he supposedly said that his divine mission (to rule the world) was unfulfilled.

6. He was ruthless

Temujin was brought up in a society without rules and order. As a child, in a dispute over the spoils of a hunting expedition with his half-brother Begter, Temujin and his brother Hasar killed Begter for his disloyalty to the family. When Temujin was about 20, he formed a fighting unit set out to destroy traditional divisions among the various tribes and unite the Mongols under his rule. Genghis Khan often gave other tribes a chance to peacefully submit to Mongol rule, but he did not hesitate to bring down the sword on resistance. In 1219, once he heard that the Khwarazmian Dynasty sent back the head of a Mongol diplomat, this released a fury within him. He sent a force of 200,000 Mongol soldiers that brought the Persian dynasty to its knees. The extent of the bloodshed in Persia was without precedent, he stated: "I am the punishment of God, if you had not committed great sins, God would have not inflicted a punishment such as me upon you." With the annihilation of the Khwarazmian Dynasty, Genghis Khan then turned his attention to China. The Tanguts of Xi Xia had defied his orders to contribute troops to the Khwarazm campaign, and he ordered the execution of the imperial family, thus ending the Tangut lineage. It's easy to stay popular when you appease everyone, but rarely will that drive a large organisation to success. At times leaders need to think of the greater good and take action, which is at times ruthless. We have to take into consideration the times and the acts of barbarism, but like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, he was ruthless in his action.

7. He fostered loyalty and meritocracy

He followed a meritocratic method and attracted a broader range and lower class of followers. Advancement within his military and government ranks was not based on traditional lines of heredity or ethnicity, but on merit. He put competent allies rather than relatives in key positions. As an incentive for absolute obedience Genghis Khan promised civilians and soldier's wealth from future war spoils. When he defeated rival tribes, he did not drive away their soldiers and abandon their civilians. Instead, he took the conquered tribe under his protection and integrated its members into his tribe. He would even have his mother adopt orphans from the conquered tribe, bringing them into his family. These political innovations inspired great loyalty among the conquered people, making Genghis Khan stronger with each victory. He stated, "Men are loyal only to a strong leader" and "I

cared only for the strength in a man's heart, a warrior does not win a battle by virtue of his birth".

8. He went against custom

It was not only the sword he wished to be remembered by. Having united the steppe land tribes, Genghis Khan ruled over some one million people. To suppress the traditional causes of tribal warfare, he created the Yassa law aimed at three things: obedience, a binding together of the nomad clans, and the merciless punishment of wrongdoing. He also abolished inherited aristocratic titles as well as forbade the selling and kidnapping of women, banned the enslavement of any Mongol and made livestock theft punishable by death. Moreover, Genghis Khan ordered the adoption of a writing system, conducted a regular census, granted diplomatic immunity to foreign ambassadors and allowed freedom of religion. Every generation has its share of thinkers and leaders who go against custom, often they fail, but some breakthrough, and when they do, it results in dramatic outcomes for all.

9. He was controversial

With his wife Borte, Temujin had four sons and many other children with other wives, as was Mongolian custom. However, only his male children with Borte qualified for succession in the family. In war, the Mongols plundered without mercy and from each conquest, Genghis Khan took his reward. Although known for the brutality of his campaigns and considered by many to have been a tyrannical ruler, Genghis Khan is also credited with bringing the Silk Road under one cohesive political environment, communication and trade from Northeast Asia into Muslim Southwest Asia and Christian Europe, and expanding the horizons of all three cultural areas.

10. He embraced technology

Along with the bow, it was said that each of his warriors was given a silk shirt, so if an arrow penetrated the body, it took the silk with it, making it easier to draw out the arrow and minimising the wound. In his conquest of China, Genghis Khan also faced one significant problem, the Great Wall, which must have appeared impregnable. However, with the Chinese engineers who had defected, his generals learnt to build catapults and battering rams – the tools of siege warfare and overcame the greatest man-made obstacle at the time ever built. He stated, "I trained my men to attack with the speed of the wind now they had to learn the guile of the wolf". The Mongols most potent technological weapon may have been their vast communication network. Genghis Khan established a network of routes joined by staging posts whereby a messenger could travel 125 miles in a single day. This kept Genghis Khan abreast of military and political developments and allowed his empire to communicate with incredible speed and accuracy in effect creating one of the world's earliest postal services.

Genghis Khan is regarded as one of the greatest military leaders the world has ever known. He conquered more than twice as much land as any other person in history. Many of these leadership lessons can be directly applied to business today.

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