

The Art of War is one of the most ancient military treaties in the world, attributed to the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu. The book contains Sun Tzu's musings and philosophical ideas with which he advises about warfare and conflict.

A 3 Minute Summary of the 15 Core Lessons

#1 Planning and Preparation Are Key

Sun Tzu makes it clear that planning for battles, and thoroughly, were necessary for him or any leader to achieve victory through their armies. This lesson extends to every aspect of life, whether in business, education, or any other serious life decision. Planning for the events and efforts you undertake will help you counter surprises and have the resources you need to achieve victory.

#2 Commit to the Cost of an Act

The book describes the importance of understanding the price or costs necessary with an act of pursuit. A good example is college tuition; before pursuing higher education, figure out how much it will cost you and commit to paying that price for as long as it takes. This will help you stay the course when things get rough and avoid bigger consequences if you don't follow through.

#3 Mental Battles Are First

The key to winning any battle or finishing any pursuit in the real world lies within defeating your opponent in your mind. You must convince yourself of your success and believe in yourself and your abilities before you can translate that confidence into real-world action. Don't pursue victory if you haven't already convinced yourself that victories possible.

#4 Small Steps/Tasks Are Needed

Many of the most worthwhile goals in life seem monument to us when we first consider approaching them. To defeat larger armies or to complete bigger goals, you must break down your overall process into smaller steps. Don't focus on becoming a CEO first; focus on graduating college, then getting a job, then working your way up the ladder, and so on.

#5 Flexible Methods, Rigid Results

Sun Tzu stresses the importance of focusing on your end goal and being willing to be flexible with your methods of victory so long as that victory is what you intended. In other words, you may have to deal with complications in your plan as you pursue your goals, but so long as you maintain the flexibility needed to remain standing you can still achieve success.

#6 Appear Weak When Strong, Strong When Weak

This takeaway largely pertains to businessmen, athletes or soldiers. Sun Tzu claims that it's smart to feign weakness while your enemies are watching so that they will overextend or leave themselves vulnerable to attack. Similarly, you should appear

strong even if you are internally weak to prevent your enemies from attacking or taking advantage of your vulnerability.

#7 Choose Battles Wisely

Sun Tzu knew that even the best army couldn't be expected to fight and win every battle in the cosmos. Instead, he preached the necessity of choosing your battles wisely. You should only engage in battle when you have a "clear advantage". In today's world, this translates to pursuing your goals when you are of sound mind and body and when you have the resources to take certain risks in the name of progress.

#8 Timing is Everything

Making a move or mistake at the wrong moment can throw an entire campaign or pursuit off track. Timing is important for everything in our lives, from our careers to our relationships. Understanding the right time in which to engage your enemy, finish your degree, or start a family can lead you to greater success and fewer mistakes.

#9 Think Creatively

Sun Tzu once said, "All warfare is based on deception". What he means is that using your own creative advantages and instincts is important to chart success for whatever venture you prioritize. Find the skills or talents you are good at and use those to come up with creative pathways to your goals.

#10 Chaos is Opportunity

This is as relevant in the business world today as it is on the battlefield. Whenever chaos overtakes your industry or life, don't let the fear bog you down. Instead, look for new opportunities created by the conflagration and try to find a way to come out on top. Many of the most successful individuals have taken advantage of chaotic times to fill in gaps that were previously taken.

#11 Know Yourself

Sun Tzu knew the importance of understanding yourself before going into battle. This is just as important today. You need to understand your strengths and weaknesses before you undertake any major endeavor. Failing to do so can lead to overconfidence or extra mistakes that can progress to complete catastrophe. Only by understanding yourself will you even know what battles or campaigns you should undertake in the first place.

#12 Know Your Enemy

This doesn't have to be a single individual; it can instead be a business, a goal, a college, or anything else standing in your way to success. Regardless, knowing your enemy or foe will provide you the best insight available with which you can triumph against incredible odds.

#13 Disguise Your Plans

It's not always the smartest idea to let everyone know what you're planning. This is especially true in the business world. Many will find great success if they deceive their

opponents and act in ways that do not alert their enemies as to their intentions or progress.

#14 Success Leads to Success

Sun Tzu understood that momentum from success in an army or battle often leads to greater success. In other words, “opportunities multiply as they are seized”. Whenever you succeed, you should consider pushing for greater heights of success, as your momentum may carry you through to higher goals.

#15 Winning Without Fighting is Best

Sun Tzu also noted that warfare was inherently risky, so certain victories were the best of all when armies didn’t need to actually fight. The same concept can be applied to any conflict or struggle in your life. If you have the opportunity for a clear and easy victory, don’t hesitate: take it!

Top 10 Quotes from The Art of War

1. “Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak.”
2. “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”
3. “Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.”
4. “Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.”
5. “In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.”
6. “The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.”
7. “There is no instance of a nation benefitting from prolonged warfare.”
8. “Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons. And they will follow you into the deepest valley.”
9. “Move swift as the Wind and closely-formed as the Wood. Attack like the Fire and be still as the Mountain.”
10. “When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard.”