



CERTAIN TO WIN

by Chet Richards



Overview

This book applies the strategy of John Boyd, a brilliant Air Force pilot and strategist, to business. The core principle is to move through the OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) faster than your competition. If you can do this, in war or in business, then you have a significant edge which can overpower even a foe with superior numbers or technology. Time, swiftness to act, efficiency, and disruption are key.

“If you can do things before the other side reacts, you can greatly increase your chances of winning, & it doesn't make much difference how big or how strong the other guy is.”

Chapter 1. Nor The Battle To The Strong

In the modern world of business, “strategy” varies from company to company. The definition varies greatly and is not utilized very often in terms of success. Instead, many businesses solely focus on rates of customer satisfaction and limiting production costs.

And yet while strategy may not be a common topic in business, it is certainly vital in the realm of war. In war, strategy can mean the difference between winning and losing, which history has thusly proven again and again. How is it that strategy plays such an imperative role in war yet seems to be undervalued in business? In general, those who engage in and study military tactics rarely cooperate with businesses. Many believe that the lack of direct attacks, undefinable wins, and multitude of enemies makes strategy obsolete for business.

In May of 1940, Germany attacked Holland and Belgium, moving to the French border. The Allies expected this move since the Germans began World War I the very same way. When French and British soldiers hurried forward to meet the enemy, the Germans had actually been anticipating such an act. The main German army swooped around the forces, effectively cutting off the Allied troops from France. In hindsight, France should have had little difficulty fending off the German invasion.

- The French recognized weak spots along the border and had safety guards in place.
- German weaponry was inferior, and the Germans had limited tanks due to a World War 1 ban.
- France was expecting an attack there and even placed troops in the area.

While these odds might sound staggering, the French did not anticipate everything, to their own detriment:

- Communications were slow, and in some cases false information was relayed.
- Psychological problems such as fear, hunger, and exhaustion weighed heavily on Allied forces. The Germans preyed upon such weakened troops, as the Germans were better able to cope with their own psychological and environmental stresses.
- The Germans used pandemonium to confuse, frustrate, and disillusion the Allies.
- Believing they had the upper hand, the French considered regrouping, a pause that cost the battle.
- The French had inaccurately predicted that the Germans would lose power, giving them a chance to catch their breath and attack in full-force. While they were reorganizing, the Germans powered forward with a significant time advantage.
- The German Blitzkrieg strategy worked to create disorder for the Allies, and then used that disorder against them. Time played a key role in giving the Germans the advantage and then to maintain it.

The German triumph here can describe possible business tactics to help avoid pitfalls in many corporations. U.S. Air Force Colonel John R. Boyd recognized the significance of strategy and created enduring theories used by institutions like the U.S. Marine Corps. Boyd focuses on the idea of “Orientation”, or how one sees the surrounding world. When things do not match the idea (especially an unexpected timing or pace) people become bewildered. This leads to panic and, eventually, mistakes.

