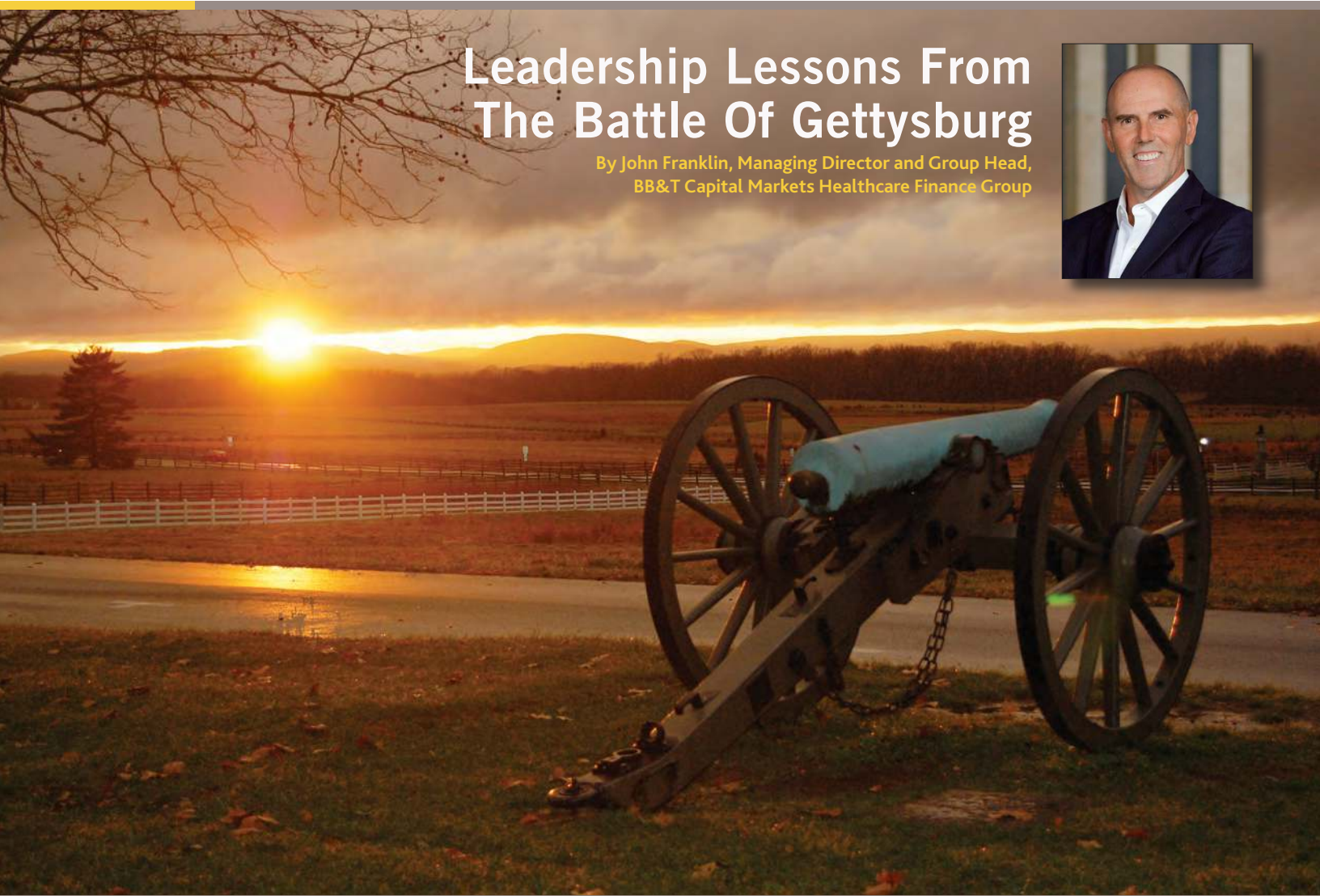




Capital Markets

# Leadership Lessons From The Battle Of Gettysburg

By John Franklin, Managing Director and Group Head,  
BB&T Capital Markets Healthcare Finance Group



In early June 1863, General Robert E. Lee led his Army of Northern Virginia across the Potomac River into Pennsylvania with the goal of destroying the Union Army of the Potomac. Lee hoped this would create political chaos in the North and lead to an early end to the American Civil War. Lee's army clashed with the Union Army in the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg on July 1-3 in what many believe to be the turning point of the American Civil War. This huge and bloody battle, known as The Battle of Gettysburg, offers a wealth of scenarios from which to draw lessons on both battlefield and corporate leadership.

I was fortunate recently to participate in The Gettysburg Leadership Experience, which is presented by Battlefield Leadership, LLC ([www.battlefieldleadership.com](http://www.battlefieldleadership.com)). The program took place on the grounds of Gettysburg National Park, which became our interactive classroom as we walked the battlefield while discussing critical points of the conflict. The purpose of the seminar was to take leadership lessons learned from the battle and apply them to the corporate environment. During this epic battle, with the direction of the war riding on the outcome, the pressure to make the correct decisions was enormous on all leaders involved, which added emotional power to the learning experience. It became very evident that the leadership lessons learned were very relevant to my clients and could be applied to achieve and maintain organizational success. As a result, I thought it would be beneficial to share these lessons with you.

During the day and a half retreat, several leadership principles were discussed through various case studies. Due to their relevance during my own career and how they intersect with each other, I chose to focus on three leadership concepts: Group Alignment and Leader Intent, Resolving Executive Disagreement, and Succession Readiness versus Succession Identification. As a leader, if you can get these three concepts right, you are well on your way to maximizing the effectiveness of your team and your organization.

## **GROUP ALIGNMENT AND LEADER INTENT – BUFORD AND EWELL**

Group Alignment may be the most fundamental and important leadership lesson because many dysfunctions within a group can be traced back to this simple but often-overlooked principle. Group Alignment occurs when the leader or executive team clearly identifies the objective(s) of the group. As the battle unfolded, the Union Army seemed to have better Group Alignment than the Confederate Army. Lee did not clearly communicate why it was important to invade the North and why it was important to engage the enemy as soon as possible. In contrast, General George G. Meade, the commander of the North, made it clear that the Union Army was not to engage with Lee's army unless the Union forces were able to hold the "high ground."

We learned that many of the ineffective decisions made by Lee's commanders during the battle started with not having Group Alignment. By clearly communicating intent and making sure everyone understands the rationale for a particular objective, leaders create a "well-aligned team."

Our leaders during this retreat informed us that most organizations, when polling their groups, find there is widespread disagreement on the group's objective. Leaders many times assume that everyone is aware of the leader's intent and understands the group's objective and, hence, everyone is aligned. However, unless leaders clearly and frequently communicate goals and get clear signals that everyone understands and agrees on those goals, group misalignment will occur. Group Alignment is obviously important to create a cohesive team, but there are other critical advantages. One advantage is that Group Alignment creates an environment where tactical decisions can be made by junior staff without the need for senior leadership to







*General George G. Meade*

approve every decision, creating a more effective and efficient organization.

By eliminating micromanagement and creating “guardrails” within which decisions can be made, junior leaders in the organization feel empowered because they clearly know and understand management’s intent and the group’s overall objective. As long as those decisions support the leader’s intent, these junior leaders are willing to take more risks to advance the group’s clearly stated objective.

On the eve before the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Colonel John Buford, commander of two brigades of Union Cavalry, made several critical decisions that gave the Union Army a key strategic advantage before the real battle had even begun. He felt empowered to make those agonizingly difficult decisions because he clearly understood the Union Army’s objective. On the other hand, during the very next day, Confederate General Richard Ewell made a decision, arguably an indecision, that clearly made it more difficult for Lee’s army to win the battle. His indecision was partly created because he did not understand Lee’s intent and did not clearly understand the Army of Northern Virginia’s objective.

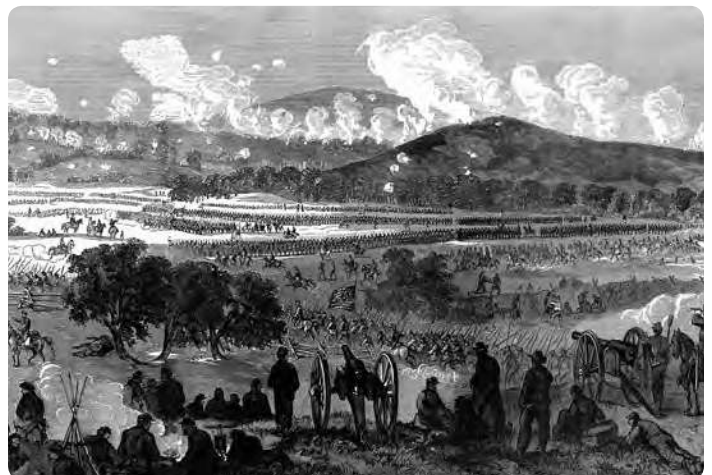
As leaders within our industry, we have the opportunity to create the mission and objectives for our organizations. Once created, we must ensure that every person within our organization understands intent and objectives, and it starts with our immediate reports. This is an ongoing process that

needs to be reaffirmed continuously. This may mean communicating the leader’s intent periodically through various means and reminding the group of its primary objective. Do not assume Group Alignment exists.

The responsibility for creating Group Alignment does not stop with the leader. Almost every person within an organization is both a leader and a follower. Even CEOs have leaders above them. They are known as the board of trustees. As a follower, if you are unsure of your leader or supervisor’s intent or the group’s primary objective, just ask. Leaders may assume that subordinates understand their intent. That does not mean that subordinates should not ask for clarification to ensure that they truly understand what is expected of them. Many subordinates may fear asking for clarification because they do not want to appear disrespectful, ignorant or incompetent and, occasionally, they may not ask because they are afraid of what the answer might be. Sometimes subordinates believe that by not assuming responsibility for clarifying objectives, they are “off the hook” because the leader did not clearly communicate expectations.

As a subordinate, think how critical it is for you to understand your leader’s intent and the larger group’s objective. If you do not understand your leader’s intent and the objective of the group he or she leads, how are you as a leader able to align your group’s objectives with those of your leader’s? The answer is that you cannot, and you have failed your group. Therefore, you owe it to every person in the group you lead to ensure that you understand your leader’s intent. This “upward management” cannot be overemphasized. I was reminded of this recently by one of my colleagues. He posed two questions. What is our leader’s goal for his group? What should be the goal for our group to help him achieve the goal for his group? It was a reminder to me that creating Group Alignment is a two-way street.

As we peel back the onion, it becomes evident that not having Group Alignment leads to a plethora of organizational failures. Buford made sure that he completely understood the Union Army’s objective and then communicated his intent to support



that objective back to his superior officer, General John Reynolds. This feedback loop, along with some other leadership attributes that Buford exhibited, gave him the confidence to make some very bold decisions that ultimately made it much easier for the Union Army to achieve its objective: to engage Lee's Army from high ground and to protect the high ground, providing the Union with a clear strategic and tactical advantage.

## RESOLVING EXECUTIVE DISAGREEMENT – LEE/LONGSTREET AND MEADE/HANCOCK

Once an organization has alignment, executive disagreement can and will occur. Because individuals have personal histories and various beliefs, different opinions are bound to arise and, as a result, executive disagreement.

I would like to stop here and make a point that was discussed at length in Gettysburg. Although it is okay, and even desirable, to have different opinions on how an organization achieves its mission, it is not okay to have a fundamental disagreement on the principles and values of an organization. You can differ on opinions, but you must agree on basic principles. If two parties do not agree on principles, executive disagreement cannot be fixed and the organization is better off if the two parties part ways, as painful as that may be. However, assuming there is agreement on principles and there is group alignment, there are effective ways to resolve executive disagreement.

Prior to the battle of Gettysburg, General Stonewall Jackson, Lee's number two in command and possibly the most feared commander in either army, had recently died during the Battle of Chancellorsville. He was replaced by General James Longstreet, who had become Lee's most trusted confidant. Despite this close relationship, Longstreet and Lee had several major disagreements prior to and during the ensuing battle. Although they shared the same strategic goals, they differed on how to achieve those goals, with Lee preferring an offensive approach and Longstreet preferring a more defensive strategy.

On the Union side of the battlefield, Meade had just been promoted to lead the Army of the Potomac. After the death of Reynolds on the first day of the battle, General Winfield Scott Hancock became his second in command. Like Lee and Longstreet, Meade and Hancock had different temperaments and beliefs and, hence, disagreements on how to execute. How did these generals, like executives or co-workers who disagree, resolve these conflicts? There were definite disagreements within the leadership on both sides of the battlefield. How did the two sides resolve or not resolve those disagreements?

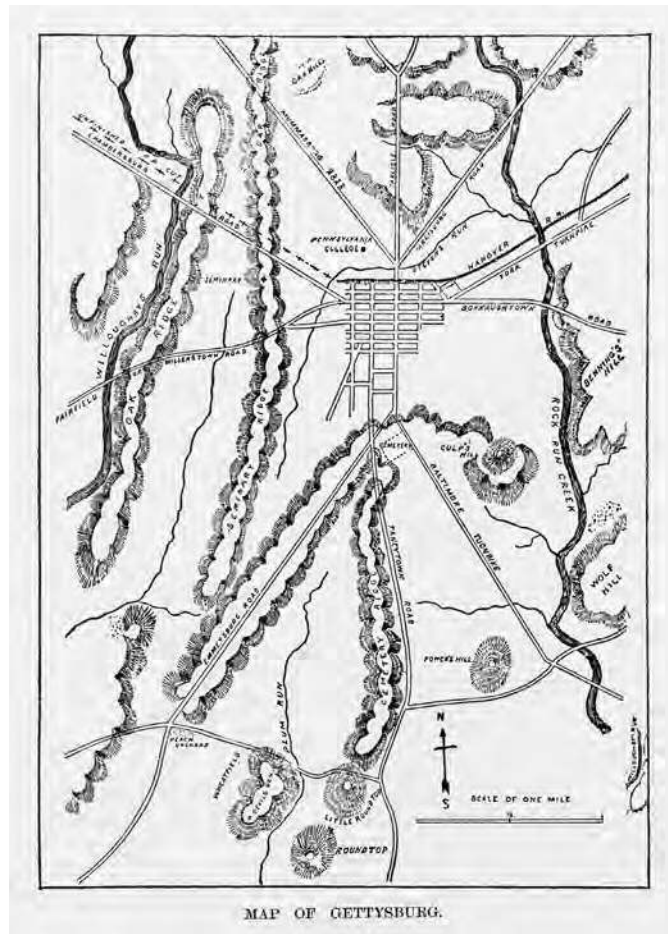
Seeking additional input from others is a very effective tool in resolving executive disagreements. When Meade and Hancock

had different opinions on battlefield strategy, Meade brought other members of his staff into the discussion. With additional information, he ultimately followed Hancock's strategy. Lee, on the other hand, did not bring others into the discussion. In hindsight, we can argue that Meade made a better decision based on what eventually occurred. But even without hindsight, it was clear that getting additional perspectives might have been helpful to Lee.

If Lee had made the decision to bring others into the discussion when he and Longstreet disagreed, would he have changed his mind? We do not know, but by broadening participation when there is executive disagreement, both parties gather more data points and inherently more insight and perspective, providing the basis for a more informed

decision. As we stood on the ground close to where Lee and Longstreet had their disagreement before the second day of battle, it was rather painful because you knew that Lee was limiting his options by not getting additional perspectives and, as a result, many young men would die. It made the lesson very real and powerful because thousands of men would sacrifice their lives because of this particular instance of failure in leadership.

Based on his extraordinary track record and the writings of his contemporaries, most historians would agree that Lee was a masterful leader. So why did he not seek additional perspectives? When discussing how Lee and Meade handled





disagreement during the battle of Gettysburg, it is important to understand that Lee had led the Army of Northern Virginia for two years and had just achieved four successive victories against the North. Meade, on the other hand, was new to his role and had inherited an army that had not yet won a battle. This nuance is important, especially as it relates to our industry. Many CEOs have been leading their respective organizations for many years with success. What can happen is that leaders become accustomed to resolving executive disagreements with little if any feedback from others, especially if it seemed to work in the past.

There may be several reasons why Lee did not expand his and Longstreet's discussion to include others. One reason may have been that Lee was afraid of what he might hear. As a result, he focused only on the facts that supported his viewpoint. This is known as "confirmation bias." Another term that is often used is "willful ignorance." This is very common among people and organizations that are experiencing enormous stress because of rapid change. Another reason Lee did not assemble his team may have been simple logistics. As the battle unfolded, the Confederate line became more stretched out with its leaders becoming more separated.

Even so, there are three other tools that Lee and Longstreet could have used to resolve their difference of opinion. They include creating common ground, utilizing "active listening" and focusing on facts instead of emotion.

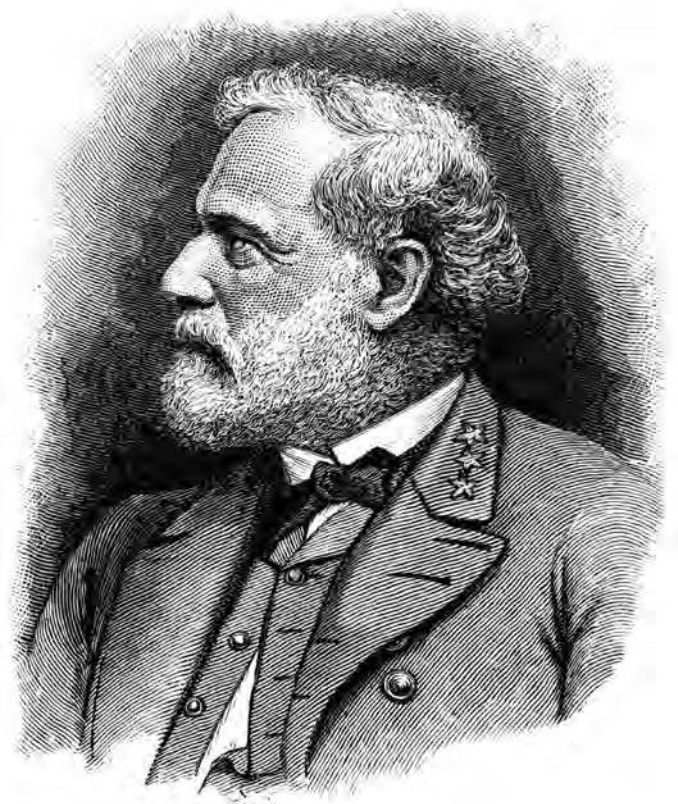
To **create common ground**, both parties agree to go back to the place where they agree and start from there. From that point of agreement, it is usually easier to build consensus than to try to move from perspectives that could be far apart. This process has a way of narrowing the gap of disagreement to the point where the gap can be bridged with a slight compromise. Going back to common ground or to the common goal also creates psychological alignment with more willingness to listen and compromise.

**Active listening** is another powerful tool to resolve executive disagreement, and I encourage everyone to learn more about this process. A pillar of active listening, and one of its most effective techniques, is "mirroring." Mirroring is the act of restating in your words what you think the other person is trying to communicate. This is a key to clear communication, and you will be shocked at how many times the message you thought you heard is not what the person intended. By using this technique, many disagreements are cleared up because the issue was a miscommunication instead of a disagreement.

**Focusing on facts instead of emotion** is yet another way to help resolve executive disagreement. As many of us know, people many times make decisions based on intuition and emotion instead of facts. Although Longstreet tried to bring facts into the discussion, Lee disagreed with his facts. Therefore, the facts have to be facts that people can agree on. Seth Godin, an incredible



thought leader and philosopher, recently posted a very key insight on this subject on his blog. In a blog titled, "Don't argue about belief, argue about arguments," he says. "The key question is, 'Is there something I can prove or demonstrate that would make you stop believing in your position (sic)?' If the honest answer is no, then we are not having an argument, are we?" Before taking time trying to resolve a disagreement, make sure it is worth the time. In his book, "The Righteous Mind," Jonathan Haidt does an outstanding job of explaining why people believe what they believe and how they make decisions. This is an excellent read on moral psychology and a worthwhile read for any leader.



*General Robert E. Lee*

There is one side note I think is worth mentioning. The reader may get the impression from the previous discussion that Lee was an ineffective leader. He was anything but that. In fact, despite fewer men and resources than his enemy, he continued to win battles and kept the war going on for two more bloody years. Like all leaders, he made mistakes. But unlike many leaders, he owned his mistakes. After the battle of Gettysburg, he personally apologized to his entire army and took full responsibility for the defeat at Gettysburg. He even put in his resignation, but it was not accepted. Sometimes the greatest thing a leader can do is take responsibility for a failure. What this does is remind everyone in the organization that it is okay to take risks and it is okay to fail, as long as the strategy was sound and it was aligned with the leader's intent and the organization's objective.

### **SUCCESSION READINESS VERSUS SUCCESSION IDENTIFICATION – JACKSON AND CHAMBERLAIN**

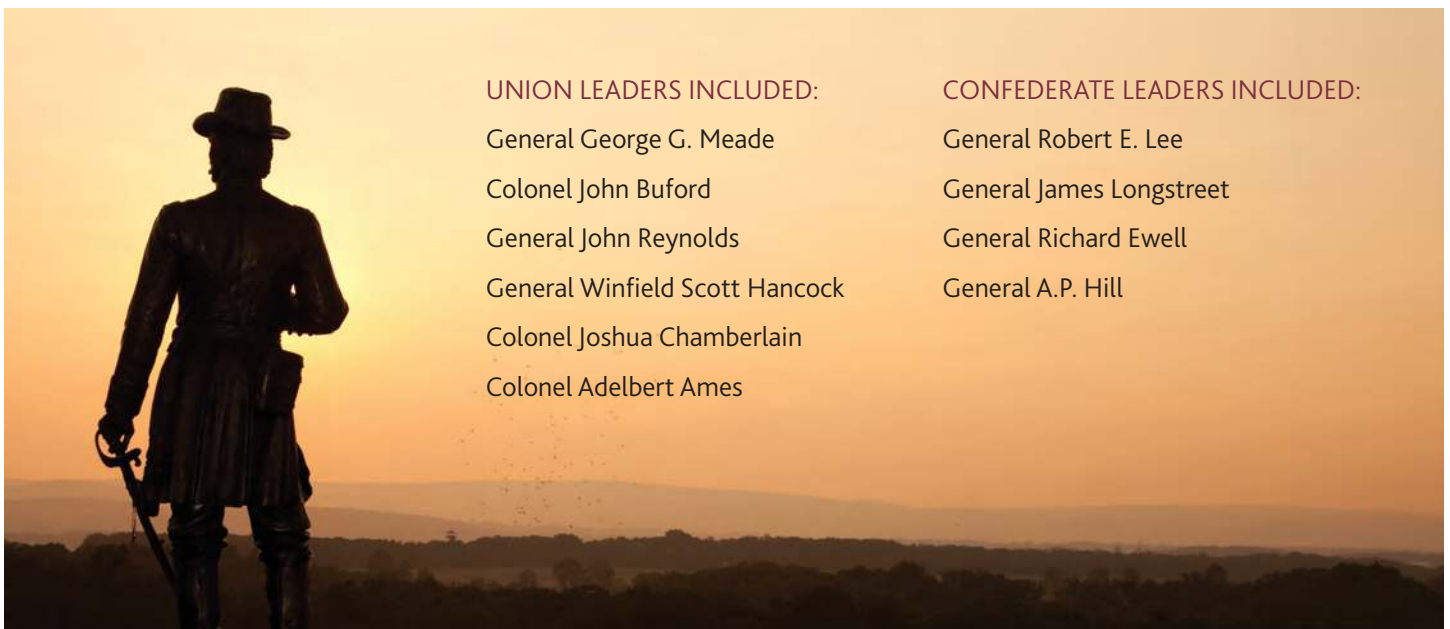
It is fairly well documented that a large percentage of CEOs, executive directors and other C-Suite executives in the senior living industry are on the verge of retirement. How do we prepare our organizations for this wave? A more fundamental question is how do we identify potential leaders and also encourage and develop them – at all levels within the organization?

In studying the battle of Gettysburg, it was clear that some officers were more comfortable making critical decisions during this intense battle than others. For example, two corps commanders under Lee, General Richard Ewell and General A. P. Hill, were indecisive during the battle, while Colonel Joshua Chamberlain, a Union officer who had been a rhetoric professor at Bowdoin College before the war, was very comfortable making decisions during the heat of the battle. All three of these officers had been recently promoted. Why was Chamberlain ready for his new role and Hill and Ewell not?

Both Ewell and Hill had been division commanders under General Stonewall Jackson. After Jackson's death, Lee split up Jackson's prior command into two corps and promoted each general to command one. The biggest difference between commanding a corps and commanding a division are the types of decisions that have to be made, especially involving strategy. Jackson's leadership style evidently was very autocratic with little room left for discussion or disagreement from his subordinates. He gave the orders and expected his subordinates to execute, and execute they did. While this worked very well while Jackson was there to give the orders, it did not work so well when Ewell and Hill were expected to step up and assume the same type of command. In fact, Ewell had even been named by Jackson as his most likely successor, which means that "succession identification" had occurred, the first step to succession planning. However, "succession readiness" had not occurred. Neither Ewell nor Hill had been properly prepared or coached to lead a corps.

As a leader, Jackson developed followers and, as we learned in studying the Battle of Gettysburg, Ewell was not ready to make independent decisions. The primary job of every leader is to develop other leaders. To develop leaders, you need to delegate authority, not tasks. You also need to promote on potential as well as past performance. One important ingredient in well-run companies is developing a culture of leadership development.

As a colonel in the Union Army, Chamberlain did not have a huge leadership role within the Army of the Potomac, but the leadership he exhibited before the battle and during the battle had a huge impact on the outcome. It is a case study in how leadership can be exhibited anywhere within an organization. After the battle, Chamberlain went on to become one of the most decorated officers within the Union Army and was personally selected by General Ulysses S. Grant to accept the surrender of Lee's army at Appomattox, Va. Who was this professor of rhetoric from Maine and why was he such an exceptional leader?



UNION LEADERS INCLUDED:	CONFEDERATE LEADERS INCLUDED:
General George G. Meade	General Robert E. Lee
Colonel John Buford	General James Longstreet
General John Reynolds	General Richard Ewell
General Winfield Scott Hancock	General A.P. Hill
Colonel Joshua Chamberlain	
Colonel Adelbert Ames	



Chamberlain joined the army as a lieutenant colonel and was second-in-command of the 20th Maine Regiment. As his superior officer, Colonel Adelbert Ames saw potential in Chamberlain and began teaching him how to command. In fact, during the Battle of Fredericksburg, where Chamberlain received the first of six wounds he would incur during the war, Ames gave Chamberlain an opportunity to lead. Eventually, when Ames was promoted, Chamberlain was in turn promoted to command the 20th Maine Regiment just a few weeks before the Battle of Gettysburg. Unknown to Chamberlain or the Union Army at the time, Chamberlain would make a series of decisions during the second day of battle that arguably saved the entire Union Army from disaster. With 358 soldiers and 28 officers, he successfully defended the entire left flank of the Union Army from a series of attacks by a much larger enemy force. Chamberlain was prepared for this moment in history by his previous commander.

Unlike Jackson, who developed followers, Chamberlain's superior officer developed leaders, and he did it in a very natural way that was not disruptive. He did this by being "intentional." When opportunities presented themselves to develop Chamberlain as a leader, he took advantage of them. Obviously, Chamberlain exhibited natural leadership aptitude and, as a result, he was identified as Ames' successor. In contrast to Jackson, Ames practiced succession readiness. He made sure that Chamberlain was ready to assume a leadership role. Jackson failed to engage and encourage his reports in making independent decisions.

It can be threatening to leaders when their subordinates begin making independent decisions that are sometimes superior to the decisions they would have made. It is very common for current leaders and supervisors to develop reactionary tendencies when feeling threatened, but this creates a lot of stress on organizations and often leads to less-than-ideal results and costly turnover. The organization not only misses out on the contributions these employees could make, but also runs the risk that their natural leadership abilities may cause them to do things that are counterproductive to the organization or cause them to leave, usually to a competitor. Organizations have to almost expect reactionary tendencies from leaders and make sure that current leaders do not feel threatened when they have a natural leader working under them. In fact, every organization should design a system that identifies and formally develops bench strength for each leadership position within the organization.

So how does one identify bench strength or future leaders for possible succession? There are various ways to do this, but Chamberlain provides a wonderful example of someone who showed exceptional leadership aptitude. First, he was a continuous learner with enormous intellectual curiosity. He was constantly improving himself and was not afraid to ask lots of questions. Second, he was good at building relationships, not only with those above him but especially with those below him. Chamberlain also had passion for what he was fighting for, and he was able to transfer that passion



to others. Finally, he led by example. While standing on that sacred spot in American history known as Little Round Top, I think everyone in our group realized that Chamberlain was the complete package, a true servant leader.

Speaking from experience, there were times when I was not ready for the leadership positions I was put into. No one ever talked to me about group alignment, successfully mediating conflict and developing leaders beneath you. I learned the hard way – learning from my many failures. We owe it to the organizations we serve, but more importantly to those we work with, to learn effective leadership techniques and to teach those techniques to others in our organizations.

There are hundreds if not thousands of books on leadership, and most have something valuable to communicate. As I participated in this powerful and valuable experience in Gettysburg, I realized that keeping things simple is a key to having some of these ideas stick. If organizations hire people who understand and have a passion for their mission, create group alignment, resolve executive disagreement and develop succession readiness, they will be successful and remain successful.

For further information, please contact John Franklin  
[jfranklin@bbandtcm.com](mailto:jfranklin@bbandtcm.com) or 804-649-3943.



Capital Markets

[BBTCAPITALMARKETS.COM/HEALTHCARE](http://BBTCAPITALMARKETS.COM/HEALTHCARE)

BB&T Capital Markets is a division of BB&T Securities, LLC, member FINRA/SIPC. BB&T Securities, LLC, is a wholly owned nonbank subsidiary of BB&T Corporation. Securities or insurance products and annuities sold, offered or recommended are not a deposit, not FDIC insured, not guaranteed by a bank, not guaranteed by any federal government agency and may go down in value.

© 2016, Branch Banking and Trust Company. All rights reserved.

Connect with us on [Linked in](#).