



The 33 Strategies of War

BookHacks Summary

Strategy Lessons from War for business, relationship, daily life, and more.

SUMMARY OF THE 33 STRATEGIES OF WAR

SELF-DIRECTED WARFARE

1. The Polarity Strategy

DECLARE WAR ON YOUR ENEMIES

Declaring war on a specific enemy helps define who you are and what you are fighting against. Always make your enemy a personal enemy - a real person, not a vague abstract one. By personalizing your enemy you will be able to garner emotional support from others.

2. The Guerrilla-War-Of-The-Mind Strategy

DO NOT FIGHT THE LAST WAR

See things for what they are currently - not what they were at your last battle. "Your tendency to fight the last war may lead to your final war." (18) The guerrilla army is always adapting and changing depending on the battle at hand. The same is true in modern life - don't repeat the same tactic, but adapt to the situation.

3. The Counterbalance Strategy

AMIDST THE TURMOIL OF EVENTS, DO NOT LOSE YOUR PRESENCE OF MIND

Counterbalance your emotions in the heat of the battle by clear thinking. Easier said than done, but you can practice by exposing yourself to conflict, being self-reliant, learning to suffer fools gladly, and focusing on simple tasks during moment's of panic. In the heat of the battle, you will tend to overestimate other's abilities and underestimate our own. Trust yourself more. Presence of mind is essential in battle and in everyday life.

4. The Death-Ground Strategy

CREATE A SENSE OF URGENCY AND DESPERATION

"As a warrior in life, you must turn this dynamic around: make the thought of death something not to escape but to embrace. Your days are numbered. Will you pass them half awake and halfhearted or will you live with a sense of urgency? . . . This could be your last throw of the dice: make it count." (47) Some ways to practice this strategy include acting before you are ready, staking everything on one throw, and keeping yourself restless.

5. The Command-And-Control Strategy

AVOID THE SNARES OF GROUPTHINK

“This is the game you must play: Do whatever you can to preserve unity of command. Keep the strings to be pulled in your hands; the overarching strategic vision must come from you and you alone.” (63) One way to avoid groupthink is by putting together a diverse team. People are naturally selfish - don't let them work unsupervised or they will only think of their own interests. Be the leader, the one with the reins, but choose other people for the team that will make up for your weaknesses.

6. The Controlled-Chaos Strategy

SEGMENT YOUR FORCES

“The essence of strategy is not to carry out a brilliant plan that proceeds in steps; it is to put yourself in situations where you have more options than the enemy does. Instead of grasping at Option A as the single right answer, true strategy is positioning yourself to be able to do A, B, or C depending on the circumstances.” (73) Be creative with your group's structure - don't fight their individuality. Use it by segmenting the task and creating multiple options.

7. Morale Strategies

TRANSFORM YOUR WAR INTO A CRUSADE

Make your team aware of the cause they are fighting for, and unite them around it.

1. Unite your troops around a cause - make them fight for an idea.
2. Take care of their material needs.
3. Lead by your action, not orders.
4. Be aggressive and keep momentum
5. Motivate through emotion, not reason.
6. Reward and punish - don't neglect one for the other.
7. Make your troops want to live up to the group's reputation.
8. Allow no grumbling.

DEFENSIVE WARFARE

8. The Perfect-Economy Strategy

PICK YOUR BATTLES CAREFULLY

Assess your enemies weak points. No group is invulnerable. Many times, an abundance of resource will dull your strategy. “Abundance makes us rich in dreams, for in dreams there are no limits. But it makes us poor in reality. . . . Warriors focus on what they do have, the strengths that they do possess and that they must use creatively.” (104) When you plan, focus on the skills and tools you actually have, not on your plans or dreams. Other ways to maintain economy when fighting include deception, avoiding enemies with nothing to lose, and remembering that things will always change - be patient.

9. The Counterattack Strategy

TURN THE TABLES

In battle, the side that is defending has an advantage. It is easier to defend territory than to take it. The counterattack was one of Napoleon's favorite strategies - lull the enemy to attack by appearing weak and unprepared, then pounce when the time is right. This strategy is especially effective against overaggressive people. In the modern era, aggression is looked down on. By allowing your enemy to attack first, you are able to defend and control your counterattack more effectively.

10. Deterrence Strategies

CREATE A THREATENING PRESENCE

Deter others from entering battle, and you have already won. People are more likely to attack if they think you are weak, and they will only attack if you appear to be so. To deter others, you can use boldness, reverse the threat by pushing back suddenly, establish a reputation, and never be predictable. Let people see that you are a fighter, and you won't have to engage as many battles.

11. The Nonengagement Strategy

TRADE SPACE FOR TIME

Use strategic retreats against stronger enemies, biding time until they have weakened or you have grown stronger. Strength can come from a better position, internal growth, or any number of external factors. Retreat for a time and refuse to engage until you are well-positioned. Time can improve any situation.

OFFENSIVE WARFARE

12. Grand Strategy

LOSE BATTLES BUT WIN THE WAR

Grand strategy is the art of looking beyond the moment and the current conflict to your end goal. A strategist who thinks this way has no issue with minor setbacks or losing battles, as long as he is advancing toward the overall goal. Expand your vision beyond the immediate battlefield. North Vietnam was able to win the war even though they never won a single major battle. They used more than the battlefield to fight the war, and were successful by using the media to turn the tide. "To become a grand strategist does not involve years of study or a total transformation of your personality. It simply means more effective use of what you have - your mind, your rationality, your vision." (157)

Four Main Principles of Grand Strategy

1. Focus on your greater goal, your destiny.
2. Widen your perspective - think beyond the battlefield.
3. Destroy the foundation of your enemies - what is the real way to win the war?
4. Take the indirect route. By planning ahead and focusing on the end goal, you can take any route to reach it. By taking an indirect route, no one will know what your true goal is.

13. The Intelligence Strategy

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Recognize that you need to learn about others. "Blindness and narcissism . . . are not so rare; we find them every day. Our natural tendency is to see other people as mere reflections of our own desires and values. Failing to understand the ways they are not like us, we are surprised when they do not respond as we had imagined. We unintentionally offend and alienate people, then blame them, not our inability to understand them, for the damage done." (169) People are not mysteries. Pay attention to the signals that others give out and you will quickly gather intelligence. Try to observe others in action, not just words.

14. The Blitzkrieg Strategy

OVERWHELM RESISTANCE WITH SPEED AND SUDDENNESS

"In order to separate yourself from the pack, to harness a speed that has devastating force, you must be organized and strategic. First, you prepare yourself before any action, scanning your enemy for weaknesses. then you find a way to get your opponents to underestimate you. When you strike unexpectedly, they will freeze up. When you hit again, it is from the side and out of nowhere. It is the unanticipated blow that makes the biggest impact." (183) The key to this strategy is forcing others to act

before they are ready. “The success of this strategy depends on three things: a group that is mobile (often, the smaller the better), superior coordination between the parts, and the ability to send orders quickly up and down the chain of command.” (184)

15. Forcing Strategies

CONTROL THE DYNAMIC

Recognize the struggle for control and move your enemy where you want them with purpose. The four basic principles of forcing strategies are:

1. Keep them on their heels - keep up relentless pressure, give no time to recover
2. Shift the battlefield - move the fight to unfamiliar territory for your opponent
3. Compel mistakes - move fast and they will make mistakes & missteps
4. Strategic control - let the opponent dictate the pace of the battle and shift it in your direction slowly

This strategy works well with people who feign helplessness. Recognize that they are not as helpless as they seem and use their behavior to control interactions. Use their behavior against them by applying Erickson’s Utilization Technique (201).

16. The Center-Of-Gravity Strategy

HIT THEM WHERE IT HURTS

“The first principle is that the ultimate substance of enemy strength must be traced back to the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one alone. the attack on these sources must be compressed into the fewest possible actions By constantly seeking out the center of his power, by daring all to win all, will one really defeat the enemy.” (Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*)

17. The Divide-And-Conquer Strategy

DEFEAT THEM IN DETAIL

The best chess position for beginner’s is in the center of the board, where you can divide your opponent’s pieces and take them out. If you control the center, you can divide and conquer.

Before attacking, its always good to weaken by division first. Good places to drive a wedge include between the leaders and the people or by separating the people from the foundation.

The divide-and-rule strategy works well with groups but also verbally. By taking someone’s side at first, you can divide their argument into pieces and concentrate on one part at a time.

18. The Turning Strategy

EXPOSE AND ATTACK YOUR OPPONENT’S SOFT FLANK

“The key to any flanking maneuver is to proceed in steps. Your initial move cannot reveal your intentions or true line of attack. Make Napoleon’s *manoeuvre sur les derrieres* your model: First hit them directly, as Napoleon did the Austrians at Caldiero, to hold their attention to the front. Let them come at you *mano a mano*. An attack from the side now will be unexpected and hared to combat.” (237)

“The indirect approach is as fundamental to the realm of politics as to the realm of sex. In commerce, the suggestion that there is a bargain to be secured is far more important than any direct appeal to buy. And in any sphere, it is proverbial that the surest way of gaining a superior’s acceptance of a new idea is to weaken resistance before attempting to overcome it; and the effect is best attained by drawing the other party our of his defences.” (B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*)

19. The Annihilation Strategy

ENVELOP THE ENEMY

The greatest danger during a siege is not your enemy, but the panic and confusion in your own ranks. If you can make someone feel vulnerable to attack on many sides (psychological), it is almost as effective as actually surrounding them physically. Surrounding the enemy and not giving them any place to go will often cause them to make grave mistakes on their own.

20. The Ripening-For-The-Sickle Strategy

MANEUVER THEM INTO WEAKNESS

The maneuver-warfare philosophy is the underlying philosophy in Sun-tzu's *Art of War*. What matters in maneuver strategy are the steps you take towards battle to make the confrontation less costly. "By always thinking first about the overall situation and about how to maneuver people into positions of weakness rather than fight them, you will make your battles less bloody - which, since life is long and conflict is endless, is wise if you want a fruitful and enduring career." (255)

1. Craft a plan that has many options, depending on what happens in battle. Having this in place will allow you to move much faster than the other party.
2. Give yourself plenty of room to move, don't back into a corner
3. Give your enemy dilemmas, not problems. Problems can be solved, but a dilemma is a choice between two bad options.
4. Create maximum disorder by being ambiguous and difficult to read.

Napoleon used this strategy to great effect, thinking through his battles meticulously before engaging. By using this strategy, you will gain easy victories to build on as well.

21. The Diplomatic-War Strategy

NEGOTIATE WHILE ADVANCING

Negotiation and battle should not be separated. By continuing to advance while negotiating, you will force your opponent to think quickly and consider the offered terms seriously. Establish your long term goals before negotiating and don't give ground on anything that will move you away from them.

"Understand: if you are weak and ask for little, little is what you will get. But if you act strong, making firm, even outrageous demands, you will create the opposite impression: people will think that your confidence must be based on something real." (281)

"Let us not consider ourselves victorious until the day after battle, nor defeated until four days later . . . Let us always carry the sword in one hand and the olive branch in the other, always ready to negotiate but negotiating only while advancing." (Prince Klemens von Metternich)

22. The Exit Strategy

KNOW HOW TO END THINGS

"Short-term defeat is better than long-term disaster. Wisdom is knowing when to end." (288)

Try not to think in simple terms of winning or losing, success or failure. Life and war are more complicated . . . by expanding your view, you can gain much out of small advances and learn to accept small defeats. Defeat is inevitable - it will happen. Learn how to deal with it strategically and well and you will turn your defeats into advantages. Use your defeat to demonstrate something positive about yourself. Even if you see defeat is inevitable, consider going down swinging - it is often the best strategy for the future.

23. Misperception Strategies

WEAVE A SEAMLESS BLEND OF FACT AND FICTION

The six main forms of military deception:

1. The false front: the oldest form of military deception is the simplest. The face presented to the enemy “promises the opposite of what you are actually planning.” (307)
2. The decoy attack: don’t rely on empty threats. By actually attacking and moving, an army will force the enemy to react even if it is a decoy.
3. Camouflage: By blending in, an army will remain hidden from view and increase their attacking power through surprise when the time comes.
4. The hypnotic pattern: The key to this form is creating a predictable pattern that your enemies will suspect, then breaking the pattern.
5. Planted information: Planting false information (with a third party for example) and letting your enemy seek it out will be more effective than trying to deceive directly.
6. Shadows within shadows: Armies that are difficult to read, so ambiguous that they are impossible to predict, are often the most effective.

24. The Ordinary-Extraordinary Strategy

TAKE THE LINE OF LEAST EXPECTATION

Unconventional warfare has four main principles:

1. Work outside the enemy’s experience: by using novel strategies, to your enemies, they will be unlikely to know how to combat it effectively.
2. Unfold the ordinary into the extraordinary: show ordinary and lull the enemy before moving to something extraordinary. Combining the two create the effectiveness.
3. Act crazy like a fox: someone who is unpredictable is very difficult to prepare for
4. Keep the wheels in constant motion: embrace change and new strategies quickly, never settling into a routine that will be predictable and grow stale

“In general, in battle one engages the enemy with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox The unorthodox and the orthodox mutually produce each other, just like an endless cycle. Who can exhaust them?” (Sun-tzu)

25. The Righteous Strategy

OCCUPY THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

You cannot win wars without public and political support. If you are going to pick a fight, find someone you can portray as authoritarian & power-hungry. By occupying the higher moral ground, you are using an exterior maneuver because it “lies outside the territory being fought over and outside battlefield strategy.” (337) Martin Luther is a good example of someone who used this strategy to great effect to start the Reformation. By attacking the domineering church leadership, he was able to occupy higher moral ground and expose their defenses as hypocritical and controlling.

26. The Strategy of the Void

DENY THEM TARGETS

By denying your enemy targets, you can exhaust them psychologically and physically, always strategically retreating when they advance. This will also open up opportunities to employ guerrilla warfare. Think of time as an offensive weapon, letting your enemies think that they will always defeat you at the next battle. By exhausting your enemy, you will win without losing people or resources.

27. The Alliance Strategy

SEEM TO WORK FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS WHILE FURTHERING YOUR OWN

Choose allies that can provide skills and resources that you lack. Recognize that we all have allies, and need them, and choose yours carefully. Make your alliances strategic and align with people that provide you with what you could not get on your own. Don't create alliances based on emotion or sentimentality.

28. The One-Upmanship Strategy

GIVE YOUR RIVALS ENOUGH ROPE TO HANG THEMSELVES

This strategy involves using rumor and an enemy's own weaknesses against them. By exposing their own insecurities or weak points, they will often try to overcorrect to prove their position. This strategy is subtle and one that will be effective with even small disturbances. Once the initial push is made, allow others to further it (media, third parties, other enemies, etc.).

29. The Fait Accompli Strategy

TAKE SMALL BITES

Hide your long-term, larger goals by moving toward them slowly. Always advance, but disguise your intentions by moving in small steps. The key to this strategy is two-fold: first, act without discussion or warning. Second, take something small at first to make it difficult for your opponents to object. Once settled, take another bite.

This is an effective strategy to use when a project or group has divided leadership and needs direction. Multiply small successes quickly and you will soon have a larger piece of the pie than anyone expected.

30. Communication Strategies

PENETRATE THEIR MINDS

Communication is a form of warfare - you must be able to communicate ideas in a way that can alter behavior. Even the most brilliant ideas and minds are useless without the ability, or desire, to communicate them effectively. Pay attention to the form of your message as well as the content. Use emotion and mirroring more than rational logic to change people's minds.

31. The Inner-Front Strategy

DESTROY FROM WITHIN

It is often more effective to work within a power structure for change than outside of it. One of the most effective ways to destroy anything is to avoid reacting out of impatience or hostility until you have enough power to make a real difference.

This strategy is often employed by immoral persons in groups. Beware of people who seem overly kind or giving. They will often make manipulative and destructive maneuvers to take control of the group eventually, destroying the existing power structure from within. This strategy is used to great effect in the modern era by unscrupulous people, sometimes with intention but often without. By befriending enemies, they are actually working to expose their weaknesses and attack them when the time is right. They will often use a "Trojan Horse" strategy, getting people to lower their defenses through kindness before attacking relentlessly and from within.

Leaders should be wary of those who are inserting themselves into powerful positions too quickly, regardless of what front they put on.

32. The Passive-Aggression Strategy

DOMINATE WHILE SEEMING TO SUBMIT

This is the most common and accepted form of aggression in modern society, but can be extremely harmful. People who desire great power will use this strategy when they have a need to believe in their own goodness at the same time. By not engaging opponents directly, but by subtly undermining them, the passive-aggression strategy allows the manipulator to avoid direct conflict or even establishing their own position.

Passive-aggression is so prevalent in today's society that many people are unaware that they are engaging in it, using it for both important and petty matters in all areas of their life. There are four main ways to defend against passive-aggression:

1. Ignore: Passive aggressive people will often hide their feelings in double-talk, trying to incite anger while remaining innocent. Simply ignoring these minor offenses is the most effective way to combat them. Use this against those who are unaware of their behavior.
2. Confront: Call the unaware passive-aggressor's out, and they will often work to change their behavior.
3. Disengage: If you recognize you are dealing with a dangerous passive-aggressive personality, disengage from them so as not to flare up and cause a scene. Avoid them.
4. Fire with fire: If you are unable to disengage completely, you may have to resort to using their own strategy against them. Remember that those who employ this strategy on purpose are trying to cause your overt reaction first - turn the tables.

33. The Chain-Reaction Strategy

SOW UNCERTAINTY AND PANIC THROUGH ACTS OF TERROR

Terrorism is an all too real strategy affecting modern life. Recognize that the main weapon terrorists use is fear, creating panic and disorder through small but violent acts of war.

Terrorists work to create psychological damage, so the best defense against it is to thwart future strikes and avoid changing unnecessarily. Don't allow fear and emotion to dictate your behavior - examine statistics rationally and you will make the effect terrorist's have weaker.

Beware of overaggressive counterattacks. You will gain the high moral ground by default after an attack, don't give it up by acting too rashly.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a hard book to summarize effectively, so let me start out by saying that anyone even remotely interested in this book should [pick up a copy immediately](#). It is over 450 pages long but is so dense with information that it seems much longer. The amount of research and information on each strategy is fascinating and staggering. Each strategy in the book includes title, subtitle explaining it, short summary of the chapter, two anecdotal stories from history or literature, an interpretation of each story and how it relates to the current strategy, the keys to warfare portion that tells the reader how to employ the strategy, a mnemonic device to help you memorize the strategy, sidebar quotes on every page to support the strategy, a final authoritative quote at the end summing up the strategy, and finally a reversal explaining how to counter the strategy. The only books I can think of to compare it to in its scope of information would be annotated classics or a study Bible.

That said, you will find things in this book and some of the suggestions made to be morally bankrupt. The author approaches this from a secular viewpoint, devoid of almost any morality or universal truth besides looking out for number one. Nonetheless, it is thought-provoking and insightful. I have already added books on Napoleon, Genghis Khan, strategy, warfare, Sherman, etc. to my list because of this book. That may be its' greatest strength - it is a gateway book and will point you in the direction of many other good reads. It was published in 2007, but still reads as brand new. Highly recommended, especially to anyone with an interest in history, psychology, or warfare. Buy [The 33 Strategies of War](#) here. **Sign up for more Book Summaries at www.BookHacks.net.**