



Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun

Wess Roberts

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This is the book you've heard about. The book that leaped to the top ranks of the bestseller lists. The book that's got the business world reading, thinking, and quoting. This is the book that reveals the leadership secrets of Attila the Hun-the man who centuries ago shaped an aimless band of mercenary tribal nomads into the undisputed rulers of the ancient world, and who today offers us timeless lessons in win-directed, take-charge management.

Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun Details

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From Reader Review Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun for online ebook

Erik says

Attila was tactically smart....strategically a disaster. His campaigns depleted much of the breeding stock of the Hun's horses. For a horse culture this was disastrous. Result, within a generation of his death the Huns had practically disappeared. The author was obviously unaware of this...or like many people in the business community he was more concerned with short term quarterly goals instead of long term success. In short, I wouldn't follow Attila's example if you want to build a long lasting team.

Monika K says

Vaguely remembering my history lessons back in high school, I recalled the name of Attila the Hun. In pop culture his name has always been attached to a negative connotation and the references to him have never painted a positive picture of his intentions. This is perhaps what drew me into reading Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun. I have never been a history buff but it is an interesting twist to take someone as ruthless and fiend worthy as the King of the Huns and use him as a model for leadership studies.

The tone of Wess Roberts' words made it sound as if Attila wasn't that bad of a person, perhaps even misunderstood. It was an interesting route to take and even Roberts made it a point to explain that Attila "is an example of the type of leader who is never satisfied – preferring to take the initiative, acting rather than doing nothing" (Roberts 12). Putting Attila in this affirmative frame so early in the novel made me question if he was a villain to be scrutinized in the first place. However, this impression dissolved as more details of his quests were revealed within the text, such as chapter six's description of his conquer against Eastern Roman Empire. He was indeed someone who was killing others for the sake of achieving a goal: Ruling the world.

I still appreciated that Roberts explained in the preface of the book why he chose Attila, as he "provides a compelling opportunity for relating leadership fundamentals to a new generation of leaders who have no fear of him" (Roberts xvii-xviii). This made me not only appreciate a historically significant individual, it also allowed for the rest of the text to be relatable to an organization's level and certainly for today's leaders and managers.

The format of the text was interesting. While it was a quick read, the flow of the topics kept me involved throughout the pages. I enjoyed the fact that a history case was briefly detailed followed by a fictional narrative of Attila himself, bulleting out lessons, advice and thoughts for leadership qualities.

There were several wise words for me to remember, specifically in chapter one's section on leadership qualities, where we must "never [cease] as students, never being above gaining new insights or studying innovative procedures or methods" (Roberts 17). Other points that gave a lot of meaning to me included: What it takes to appreciate leadership, what it means to serve effectively, a group sharing an identity (perhaps in the workplace) to achieve better unity towards a goal, practicing patience, being accountable and taking responsibility for ones actions. The fact that "you are your reputation" was another quote that really resonated with me (Roberts 46). I also enjoyed chapter eight, "Picking Your Enemies Wisely" as it was instantly relatable in terms of competitors between companies. For this reason it was probably the most

relatable chapter when looking at it from a business standpoint.

Perhaps what was most eye-opening to me was in chapter fourteen, “There Is Another Day” where you must expect to experience defeat but always learn from it. As I haven’t ever truly experienced defeat it is something that I am definitely going to keep in mind. I also really appreciated the following quote from chapter nine: “Success is the result of hard work that overcomes all forms of disappointment and moments of discouragement” (Roberts 63). These points just reiterated the fact that we are all humans with emotions, and although I have to keep my emotions in check during times of crisis, I must learn from any and all experiences.

The lessons throughout the text gave me the feeling of a see-saw effect. Some chapters were particularly pivotal and taught me a lot, as noted before. However, I found that a few chapters in between were painfully common sense and seemingly unimportant. Even while some were common sense, it gave me hope that Roberts reminded the lessons “may seem...to be common knowledge...but they are not so common in practice” (Roberts 62). Perhaps it was better just to see these ideas of common sense put into words on paper to help enlighten the reader.

Even so, some chapters seemed rather repetitive. There are only so many ways to express the importance of team work, discipline and unity; topics that were mundanely explained throughout a handful of the chapters. In these cases I would have liked to see more detailed examples, either from a history standpoint or a narrative description. It would have given some of the points more meaning and given readers a better understanding. The majority of these lessons that the fictional Attila explained could be tied seamlessly into actual current day events, especially in the work place. Chapter seven (“Battle Dress and Armament”) completely threw me off as even the lessons were unrelatable in terms of speaking about weaponry and dress. A simple bullet point on looking professional or aristocratic would have sufficed.

I was also rather weary of the details regarding Aetius. The drawn out biography served little purpose in understanding the leadership qualities of Attila. Even after finishing the book I still question why so much emphasis was put on him, unless it was to simply mention that he was only man to defeat Attila. If this was the reason it wasn’t necessarily pointed out or summarized in such a way that would justify the in depth biography provided about this man. Again, it wasn’t necessarily clear unless the reason was “the only man in the empire whom Attila held in high regard” (Roberts 55).

A chapter that I felt wasn’t too thought out was twelve, “Rewarding Your Huns.” There was simply too much group think with lumping rewards together for sake of simplicity. Thinking back to a management course that I took last term, rewards should be given based on an individual’s value, as not everyone appreciates the same exact reward. It should never be given per set standards. There was at least some relevance in when rewards should be given. I am glad that the lessons pointed that out.

The last section or the “Selected Thoughts of Attila” seemed very rushed and thrown together. It was jumbled in meaning and there were many points that could have simply been made and had more relevance if they were included in their respective chapters. I believe that the book would have ended stronger at chapter 16, “Departing with Nobility.” That was the section that truly tied everything together and even included a topic that I didn’t realize leadership existed. Leadership certainly follows through to the end of ones term as a leader. I don’t think a lot of business leaders today realize that, with the way many of them hastily resign or retire.

Despite these inconsistencies, I certainly enjoyed Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun. I honestly have to say that Roberts provided the best definition of a leader that I have come across: “Leadership is the privilege to have the responsibility to direct the actions of others in carrying out the purposes of the organization...with

accountability for both successful and failed endeavors” (Roberts xvi). Leadership is certainly a privilege and this book has provided me with more insights and helpful bits of knowledge packed into one compact bound of text that I have highlighted and will keep for future reference and reminders. I certainly feel better endowed having read this book and I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for quick and simple leadership advice.

Heather says

Awful. Absolutely horrible. I don't care that Ross Perot loved it and gave it to all of his EDS employees. It took all of my power to read twenty pages before I finally gave up. I give up on a book maybe once a decade or so, so this is not something I do frequently.

I recommend reading the Lincoln on Leadership instead.

Jay Sellers says

This was on a list of preferred reading for those entering an MBA program. I think that I might need to find a new list.

Michelle says

Fast read, but no new info on leadership here.

- 1) Beyond a list of leadership qualities that you can adapt for any industry and argue they will lead to success, we are given bon mots like "you've got to want to lead" and "pick your enemies wisely".
- 2) Dress for the job you want, not the job you have. Be sure you conduct yourself accordingly, because you are always being watched.
- 3) Take responsibility, be decisive, delegate, negotiate, be resilient, and reward and recognize great performance. Learn from your failures, and move on.

I have just saved you an hour of reading time. Go forth and lead.

Monica Copeland says

Cheesy but the history info is fun.

Sadly, I can't follow Attila's tips w/kids cuz his strategy for inefficient members is to cut them out of the group. So, I guess my students won't be my horde of Huns.

Geert says

just read the last twenty or so pages to get the gist of the book. Attila has nothing to do with it.

Jaymes Dunlap says

Generally a fair book on Attila the Hun from a historical overview. There were also important principles regarding leadership. Better, I think, for inexperienced leaders.

So why am I rating it only three stars? This is not so much a book analyzing Attila's leadership objectively (although there is that aspect), but rather how Roberts consolidated a bunch of leadership materials and tried to fit them to Attila the Hun. As quoted in his preface:

"But I didn't choose Attila as the metaphoric character of this book...for the purpose of making him a cult hero in the modern age. Rather, Attila's robust life and controversial image as a determined, tough, rugged, and intriguing leader...provides a compelling opportunity for relating leadership fundamentals to a new generation of leaders who have no fear of him and who might enjoy a novel pedagogic treatment of what can otherwise be a very mundane, unexcited reading."

Although I agree that the text was a much more stimulating read, I prefer greater objectivity with historical characters. There are times it feels like the advice subtly conflicts with Attila's true character if you think about certain aspects. If you don't mind a text switching between contextual history and an attempt to breath life into Attila by presenting him in the first person between sections, you might enjoy this book. The historian in me didn't care for it.

Emmett Chase says

New York Times Bestseller? Endorsed by H. Ross Perot? I recently read "On Becoming a Leader" (just in case I ever need to lead someone somewhere) and it gave me a different perspective for self-reflection, it seemed to focus on ability, competence and ambition. When I found this book I thought it might give some insight to the other side: hitting below the belt, eye-gouging and throwing bricks at things. I was disappointed.

If you really want to read a book about leadership and this is the only one you will ever have available, then it might be okay. The best thing I can say about it is: It is short. It's short and yet seems to repeat itself. It gives a tiny taste of Attila's history, which is good. It also has sections that are supposed to be told in Attila's voice where he sounds like some stuffy, stick-up-the-butt corporate clown, which is bad. It's all general advice: Don't surround yourself with yes-men.... ask a bad question, get a bad answer.... things of this nature.

I think if Attila was alive and knew his name had been attached to such a book, he would find the guy that

did it, rip his still-beating heart out of his chest and hold it in front of his face so he could see how black it is before he dies.... the world's a twisted place (Wayne's World 1992).

Natasha Kolb says

Too boring to finish

Charles says

To date, I have read many books on management that include gimmicks in their presentation. The author of this one uses one of the most unusual tactics that is surprisingly effective. Even the person least acquainted with history has most likely heard of Attila the Hun, historically known as “the scourge of God.” To use someone that murdered rivals and ordered the slaughter of all the inhabitants of towns and cities as a role model seems to be odd and inappropriate.

However, as Roberts explains, Attila was not really a barbarian, but a well educated student of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, it takes intelligence and a great deal of ability to organize if you are going to fuse a set of disparate nomadic tribes into a powerful fighting force able to successfully engage the Roman forces in open combat. The Roman leaders had many years of experience in warfare against outside forces and rarely tasted defeat. Therefore, Attila’s leadership in ruling the Huns is very impressive and one can apply his leadership talents without having heads rolling about.

Each chapter is generally structured into two parts: a lead-in that is some history of the life of Attila and an issue he faced followed by a “personal statement” from Attila explaining the management tactic that he applied to deal with the issue. Even though the modern manager cannot order the death of rivals for power within the company or of the competition, what you read in this book is a set of tactics that can still be used.

Laura says

i mean, this little book of truisms was just bad. it was cheesy and not at all what i would consider original, as the author assured it would be in the preface. it was funny, if you don't mind taking in your humor a la Sesame Street. All the, "I, Atilla, the King of the Huns, implore you to" shite was just too much for me. No wonder Ross Perot liked it. If anything, this book proves that most people are destined to be lemmings, buying a book just because Ross Perot did. (like the Coach K book, a coworker lent me this. i respect the coworker, just not the book.)

I will admit, I did like the advice, "Don't insult people unless you mean it."

Geoff says

The rating is mostly for nostalgia; this was the only "business book" my dad owned. The attila gimmick seems just to be a vehicle for the author to express his (authoritarian, hierarchical) values.

Patrick Neylan says

Let's not forget that, within months of Attila's death, his empire was overthrown by a rebellion of his vassals. If your goal as a leader is to create a structure that is only held together by the immensity of your own ego, then Attila might be a good role model for your business career. You could be the next Robert Maxwell.

This book was briefly in vogue in the 1990s. It was popular because it was different, not because it was done well. The idea of a 20th anniversary reissue is based on the fact most people are too young to remember it or had forgotten how inept it was.

As a history book it is shallow, though not entirely without interest and mostly accurate. As a leadership book it is pretty trashy. There are plenty of vaguely stated aphorisms that are obvious and can be found in any book on leadership. All of them are totally fake, of course. Roberts made a lot of money by attaching his own mediocre insights to a major historical figure, and the best that can be said is that he doesn't pretend that any of this twaddle is genuine, even if some readers were still fooled. However, to keep up the "mystique", he uses the word "Huns" for "you", "they", "subordinates" and pretty much anything else. This gets very tiresome very quickly.

Hans says

Oh geez, the pathetic tactic of borrowing someone else's name and prestige to sell a no-name author's ideas and books. The worst part of this was that his intended audience, Americans, probably don't even know who Attila the Hun was, let alone why anyone should care about his so-called leadership secrets. Know your audience, come on man. This book is full of conjectures and loose assumptions. Should have been called "Leadership Secrets of Wess Roberts".
