

How to Apply Military Principles to High Value Sales Campaigns

Based on

The Principles of War

By

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What do the Principles teach?

Explanation of Theory

Fuller teaches Four Principles of Warfare and Three Accentuating Factors, these show you how to organise and engage in a campaign to its greatest effect. The Four Principles concern the fundamentals of setting yourself an objective and not losing sight of it, making sure that your dispositions and movements are guarded from your enemy's actions, the importance of being able to move freely and if necessary change direction on your path to your objective, and the need to be able to unleash your striking power fully and effectively at the appropriate time. The Three Accentuating Factors show you how to make the most of the Four Principles by not wasting your resources, being able to concentrate them in the right place at the right time, and the effects of surprise. Fuller's teachings in their simplest form can be summarised in his "Boxing Analogy" to Warfare:

"...the primary elements of tactics are to be seen in their simplest form in a fight between two unarmed men. They are: to think, to guard, to move, to hit.

Before a bout opens each boxer will decide how to knock out his opponent; as the bout proceeds he may be forced to modify his tactics, but the aim remains the same. He must maintain an adequate defense, and advance under cover of this defence and manoeuvre his opponent into a position where his defence can be penetrated and an attack can be mounted to knock him out. In military terms objective, security, mobility, striking power.

If the two fighters are experienced they will understand the value of three accentuating factors. They will economise their physical force to ensure they can still function no matter how many rounds the fight goes to, they will concentrate their blows against decisive targets such as their opponent's chin, and solar plexus, and finally will attempt to take their opponent by surprise, by feints and jabs to get around his defence to land the killer punch. In military terms these factors are defined as: economy of force, concentration of force, and surprise."

So here are the four principles:

1. Maintenance of Objective (Think)
2. Security of Action (Guard)
3. Mobility of Action (Move)
4. Expenditure of offensive power (Hit)

And three accentuating factors:

1. Economy of force (Efficiency)
2. Concentration of force (Effectiveness)
3. Surprise (Initiative)

These principles are equally applicable to both Strategy and Tactics. But they are only "Principles" not "Laws", Fuller says that they can be discarded with impunity, but only after deep consideration.

Why are the Principles important to You?

Explanation of Benefits in Sales Situations

If you follow Fuller's teachings and apply them to sales situations you will find that;

1. You can fight Campaigns, not just a series of disjointed engagements.
2. You will gain much greater control of your campaign.
3. You will maximise your victories, and minimise your defeats.

Benefits associated with the Four Principles

Maintenance of Objective

Having an Objective that is worthwhile and provides the overriding measure of outcome makes you better able to take difficult decisions and weigh up the many choices that fate will throw you in a campaign.

Frederick the Great in his Military Instructions says:

“Your Strategy must pursue an important objective. Undertake only what is possible and reject whatever is chimerical.”

The main reason for maintaining your objective is because it will prevent you from being distracted into less important areas thereby dissipating your energies which may ultimately lead to the failure of your campaign. Your objective will decide what you stand to gain, will allow you to calculate what resources you will need to achieve it, the likely timescales involved, and allow consideration from this of the risk vs the reward. Without a clear objective none of this is possible.

No plan is perfect, but again according to Frederick the Great;

“If you are not fortunate enough to follow a great plan through to its perfection, you will nevertheless go much further than the generals who, acting without a plan, make war from day to day”.

Having a clear objective will not guarantee success, but **not** having a clear objective will often guarantee failure. Finally, as Frederick the Great says above, even if the ultimate objective isn't reached, it is likely that many gains will be made en route to it, maybe enough to justify the effort even without the ultimate goal being reached.

Security of Action

The essence of Security of Action is control of information. Ensuring Security of action will prevent your own miscalculations and enemy offensives derailing your campaign. Similarly identifying areas which prevent security of action will highlight areas that need to be avoided or where more ground work is required to ensure the success of your plan.

Security of action allows you to bring your forces together in a decisive way at the decisive point at the correct time. If your competition is unaware of your plans and movements it will not be possible for them to take steps effectively to stop them ahead of time. No matter how good your plan is, if your competition know about it they may be in a position to counter it, or at least weaken it. Security of action prevents them from doing this.

Secrecy is defensive and provides security of action, which leads to the offensive accentuating factor of surprise. Conversely intelligence and experience can be thought of as offensive but will lead to the defensive accentuating factor of economy of force by ensuring that you don't waste your efforts in fruitless areas of endeavour.

Without security of action the likeliness of you being able to follow your objectives to a successful conclusion will be decided by chance and the actions of your enemies as much as by the actions you take. Without security of action you cannot maintain the initiative or be sure of reaching your objectives.

Mobility of Action

Because "You don't know what you don't know" you may have to change your plans due to unforeseen difficulties, or sudden opportunities. Either way you need to be able to amend your plans to avoid setbacks or exploit an advantage whilst still maintaining your Objective and benefiting from Security of Action.

Mobility of Action renders flexibility into your plan, and at the very least you must understand where the limits of your flexibility are and attempt to bypass these danger areas as quickly as possible during your campaign. Likewise you need to be able to identify and exploit potential advantages as they arise.

Being able to manoeuvre faster than your competition will allow you more time to gain objectives and advantages, and less time having to fight over them.

During WW2 German General Heinz Guderian was one of the war's greatest exponents of the teachings of Fuller, his view on mobility was summed up as:

"The engine of the Tank is a weapon just as its Gun is." ("Der motor des Panzers ist ebenso seine waffe wie die kanone").

Expenditure of Offensive Power

The ability to deliver a decisive blow in order to win the objective quickly, effectively and efficiently, must be the pinnacle of your. Unless your power is delivered in this manner you will not produce the optimum result.

Again General Heinz Guderian had a saying for it, and if he thought his men were applying less than decisive pressure in their attacks he would say;

“Bash them, don’t splash them!” (“Klotzen, nicht Kleckern!”)

Maximum force must be delivered in the most decisive areas, and at the most decisive times. Force must be controlled and directed, it must be reserved until required, and then unleashed to the optimum level required to ensure victory. There must be no holding back, no thoughts of humanity, no sympathy for your competition. The point of using your offensive power is to break your enemy’s will to fight; they will only be defeated when they believe that they have lost and you believe that you have won. The expenditure of your offensive power must convince your competition that they cannot win; at that point they have lost.

Antoine-Henri de Jomini (one of Napoleon’s Generals) summed up what is required in the expenditure of offensive power in his maxim:

“To throw by strategic movements the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theatre of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without compromising one’s own.”

Benefits associated with the Three Accentuating Factors

Economy of Force

Assuming your resources are not unlimited, a profligate use of them will result in an inability to use them when and where they will be most effective. There are few things easier than making commitments in a customer situation, and few things harder than backing out of them when circumstances change and you need the people you have committed for a more important or urgent task elsewhere. So judging the worth of tasks and challenges before undertaking them will ultimately allow you to have resources on hand when they are needed.

If the resources used in a campaign can be kept to the minimum required to achieve the objective it will be found that planning and maintaining the objective is fast and simple with less dissention and extraneous opinions and actions, security of Action is greatly increased the fewer the people that are involved and aware of the objective, mobility of action is always faster with fewer people to control and direct to new areas, and even in expenditure of offensive power having just enough resources will allow a much faster, effective, and concentrated blow to be delivered without dissipating the force of the blow, if you have managed to save your forces till the decisive blow can fall then they are much more likely to be fresh with high morale, and therefore more effective in the engagement when it is required.

Conversely profligate salespeople will waste resources by soaking up all those which are available, if these resources are required, then that is excusable. If they are not required to achieve the objectives, having too many people involved in a campaign will make it less likely that an objective will be maintained due to too many opinions and agendas. Security of action becomes much more difficult to maintain as the more people who are aware of the plans and objectives, the more likely it is that there will be a leak that will reach your enemies. Mobility of action will be more difficult to achieve as it is much easier to react quickly and efficiently to changes in approach and plan with a small force than a large one, and you will find that it will become quite difficult to disengage and keep a low profile if heavy resistance forces the need for such change of approach

Concentration of Force

Concentration of force in space and time is the single most effective act that you can take during a campaign. Bringing your forces together to act in unison greatly magnifies their individual effects, and has a far greater impact on the psychology of a customer, and on your competition. Concentrating your forces in space and time will maximise their effect at the decisive moment. If you concentrate your forces when or where they are not required renders them useless. You want them at the right place and at the right time in order to deliver the decisive blow to maximum effect. Once the time and place are right bring all necessary forces together to ensure a decisively positive outcome.

Surprise

Surprise allows you to psychologically disorient your competition, which allows you to gain the initiative and act before they have a chance to react. It allows a smaller force to beat a larger force, and multiplies the effect of numbers and speed, so manoeuvre is easier, and actions and results happen faster.

Surprise can produce a strategic and/or tactical dislocation in the enemy's mind, and should also produce a dislocation for the enemy at an operational level. The degree of the psychological dislocation will depend on your enemy's morale, the degree of dislocation at an operational level will depend on your enemy's ability to react quickly and calmly.

A surprise attack or move to your advantage will have three effects: The first being Tactical where you have the initiative and can therefore take advantage of time and space to gain an immediate win, the second is psychological, if the enemy feel they have lost the initiative and cannot effectively counter you, the enemy's morale will be lowered, thereby reducing their will to fight; thirdly it can destroy your enemy's plans as they will have to take actions to counter your move thereby becoming distracted from their own plans. So a successful surprise move can give you a tactical, psychological and strategic advantage.

How to apply Fuller's teachings to sales situations

The Four Principles

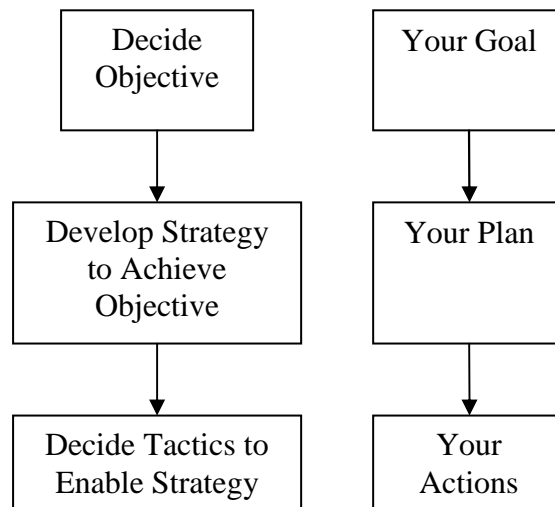
Maintenance of Objective

Plan your objective based on three things:

1. The resources you have at your disposal.
2. The time available to complete it
3. The reward vs the risks involved.

The entire decision process must be based around the maximum that can be realistically achieved. Objectives should be bold but not foolhardy, and should offer the greatest possible reward but with the most manageable risks. If you get any one of these seriously wrong, you will not be able to maintain your objective.

From your Objective comes your plan i.e. your strategy to achieve it, and from your strategy flows your tactics. So your Objective is what you want to end up with, your strategy is your plan to achieve it, your tactics are the actions you will take to achieve your strategy. The converse is also true, if you have only one set of tactics at your disposal, then your strategy will be decided by these, and your objective will need to be tailored to this strategy.



The problem you will face will be diversions from your objective, whether caused by your competition, the customer, or your own internal management. These must be avoided unless it is obvious that you have the wrong objective, and these diversions offer a better alternative. But generally they should be avoided as you will risk never reaching any grand objective if minor distractions continually pull you away from it.

Again Frederic The Great says:

“Give battle only when you have reason to hope that your success will be decisive, and fight not only to defeat the enemy but to execute the course of your strategy that would fail but for this decision.”

If you do need to engage with your enemy, do not believe anything your competition says about their strength, unless you've seen the proof. Assume that they are guilty and lying until proven innocent. Do not let their propaganda dictate your actions. I cannot remember the number of times that inexperienced sales and technical people have come to me in a panic because of some new statement from a competitor, without any proof that it is true, acting as a fifth column on the competition's behalf spreading doubt within our own ranks, only to find, when fully tested, that their claims are pure fantasy with no empirical evidence or customer examples to support them. I have won scores of deals by rubbing my competition's noses in their false claims, but have never lost a deal because I forced them to prove their claims; nine times out of ten they will not be able to prove their claims, and the one time they do you will have discovered a highly valuable truth, and will know what to avoid in future. At the very least this course of action will bog them down in defensive work just to hold their ground. The main thing to avoid is distraction from your objective, into ambush by your competition. They will do this to break your momentum, to prevent you reaching a decisive position in space and time, and to destroy your strategy. Only spend time challenging them if it directly helps your objective.

Security of Action

In order for your actions to be secure, you must keep them as secret as possible; do not broadcast them internally other than to those who must know them, your colleagues may leave and join the competition and give away your plans, they may talk about them to other partners and customers which will alert your competition of your likely actions. Do not explain to your partners or resellers what your plans are other than what you must tell them in order to make them support your actions. Above all do not tell the customer what your plans are as they may use this against you and may actually tell your competition what you are doing thereby allowing them to take counter measures.

So, enforce your code of secrecy to your colleagues, your partners, and the customer, adjust what you tell them to how well you believe they will be able to be quiet about your plans.

Probe and scout for the best and easiest areas of engagement in the target customer account, do not spend time fighting in areas that are too difficult as this will show your enemies what your plans are and give them time to adjust their own plans to thwart you.

It is not possible to avoid risks altogether, and few worthy objectives exist that do not contain an element of risk; it is a matter of weighing up the risk vs the reward available to you in taking any particular line of action in the pursuit of your overall objective. You must make judgments as to when to push hard and when to withdraw, pushing too hard at the wrong time or in the wrong place will show your hand to your enemies, conversely withdrawing too soon will rob you of the chance to achieve your objective. Follow the advice of The Duke of Wellington; “All the business of war, and indeed all the business of life, is to endeavour to find out what you don’t know from what you do.”

The greater your experience of similar campaigns, the greater your likelihood of understanding the risks you face in this one. However a word of warning from Frederick The Great: “ A mule who has carried a pack for ten campaigns under Prince Eugene will not be a better tactician for it.” the value of any previous experience will be multiplied or divided by the intelligence and aptitude of the commander. No matter how good the teacher or the lessons, an Ass can never learn them.

Mobility of Action

The key to this section is the conjunction of the two adjectives “Mobility” and “Action” moving on its own is not enough your movement must be to deliver an action, and your action should either move your campaign forward to its objective, or help secure your position for future moves. You must look for the Line of Least Resistance and when in doubt be prepared to strike out and take the initiative.

The key is to look at a number of different potential outcomes and choose to follow a route which will lead to the optimum benefit whilst either allowing lesser objectives to be reached en route, or that would allow a switch of emphasis to an alternative profitable conclusion. In order to do this you must build in flexibility of timescales and personnel, and have your stockpiles of arguments, proposals and counter arguments arranged along your route for use as necessary depending on the changing circumstances.

One of the biggest mistakes made by less able salespeople is to fixedly and inflexibly try to batter their way via an impossible route which will never allow them to reach their Objective, in order to avoid having to do the complex work of thinking through the alternatives, and arguing for changes to the plan.

Potential obstacles to success may be caused by the competition, the customer, or by your own organisation. The competition may buy time by asking the customer to wait a few months until they have a new product available, the customer may have their budgets cut, or you may find that your offering does not work as well as you had been led to believe by your Marketing and Development teams.

Conversely you may come across unforeseen opportunities, you may uncover a particular weakness in a competitor’s solution, you may find a particular customer need in a new area which could offer an opportunity, or your R&D department may come out with a particularly beneficial feature which will accelerate the take up of your solution.

All of these factors and more, must be assessed as they occur and your plan must contain the flexibility to either deal with them or at the very least you must understand where the limits of your flexibility are and attempt to bypass these danger areas as quickly as possible during your campaign. But most importantly you must be prepared to take action in order to exploit potential advantages as they arise, quickly and decisively.

You must calculate what will happen and lay plans to deal with it. Think of the worst that the competition and the customer may throw at you, and draw up your plans in advance, for example, if your customer has budgetary constraints, what will you do; offer a cheaper solution, defer payment, offer a rental rather than a capital purchase, or perhaps sell to individual departments rather than a group-wide deal? Or give up and hand the account to your competitors.

Expenditure of Offensive Power

Only use as much offensive power as required to move towards your objective. Save your decisive blow until you are concentrated in the right place, and at the right time. Save your killer blow until in a good position to deliver it. You need to identify the centre of Gravity of your prospect, the “Schwerpunkt” and hit it hard and decisively leaving no room for your competition.

When you do deliver it do so with supreme force and confidence. It must be done as effectively and efficiently as possible. Make it “an event” do not hold back on your delivery, make it stick in your customer’s mind.

If possible apply successive blows to a limited area, but always with the intention of breaking through any initial organized resistance in order to reach the real decision makers and budget holders thereby winning them over and effectively “decapitating” the customer’s command and control structure, if you can do this, the rest of resistance will collapse much faster.

The Three Accentuating Factors

Economy of force

Choose your forces carefully and precisely. Give them specific tasks which will avoid overlaps in responsibility and shared responsibilities between groups and individuals, this will prevent different groups reinventing the wheel and tripping over each other in the customer account.

Delegate responsibility, accountability, and above all else power to carry out tasks. If your people aren't empowered then you cannot expect them to take either responsibility or accountability for actions and outcomes.

Do not waste time on unnecessary meetings, and when meetings are necessary make sure that you set them up with the objective in mind, do not invite anyone other than those absolutely required, do not take any minutes other than actions given to people with the timescales for their completion.

Plan ahead to ensure that you will have the necessary resources available when you require them, and get commitments from other groups if necessary to ensure that this happens. In most situations where salespeople complain of a lack of resources, what they generally are suffering from is a lack of planning.

Concentration of force

The key to any campaign is to be in the right place and at the right time, one without the other will lead to a failure or only a partial success.

You must bring your forces to bear on a limited front, so that your numbers have a greater effect, and in relatively greater numbers than your competition, or better still somewhere where your competition are absent. All else being equal, these circumstances on their own should be enough to guarantee the success of your offensive.

Once you have identified the customer's Schwerpunkt, concentrate on that one area (or as few as possible) at any given time, focus the customer's mind on that one area, and have all your arguments and resources ready to deliver a series of successive blows in the shortest possible time frame to that area. Ensure that each blow either weakens customer resistance or moves past resistance to further your progress to your objective; each blow should ideally get you past a level of resistance to another level within the customer's decision making process. Make sure that when you deliver each blow success criteria and outcomes are agreed upfront with the customer, i.e. when I deliver x you will give me y.

Surprise

You will achieve surprise through security of action and mobility of action. Keep your plans on a need to know basis, internally with your colleagues, and externally with your partners and the customer. Focus your resources on each component of the plan, do not let them drift into other areas which may expose more of your plan than would be helpful to the customer or your competition.

Move quickly and quietly within the customer account until you find the *schwerpunkt*. Engage with unexpected areas and departments within the customer, socialize with the customer to find their personal needs and wants, what will give them a personal win and you a surprise advantage over your competition? Once found, hit these areas quickly and silently.