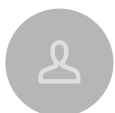




Hamid Karzai with U.S. Special Forces ODA 574: U.S. Army/Public Domain

# The Art of What? The Strategy Book You Need Isn't 'The Art of War'



K.S. Anthony | [Follow](#)

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Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is one of the most widely read – and wildly interpreted – books co-opted by business and corporate thinkers. The gist is fairly simple: it's an extension of the aphorism offered by [von Clausewitz](#): "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means." *Prima facie*, it makes sense, especially when coupled with the personas – the corporate raider, the slick insider, the media kingpin, the "angel" investor, the tech billionaire – adopted by those who play the high-stakes games of

imaginative interpretation of von Clausewitz' maxim, in which business is also a continuation of policy, can be safely assumed. The von Clausewitz book of the same title seems to be less widely adopted, though I'm not sure why. Perhaps age has granted Sun Tzu more clout.

Most business isn't about cocaine-fueled plunder and pillage. Beyond the banalities that come with economic survival, most business is about building relationships, understanding people, and negotiation. It's about rapport and communication. It's about the exchange of values. Those things aren't really covered in *The Art of War* or the "corporate warrior" spin-offs it has engendered.

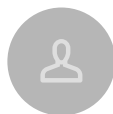
There is, however, a book written for warriors that covers those things. In fact, I would argue that if there's one book that should be in every executive, sales pro, and job-seeker's briefcase – and *not* just collecting dust on their desk or shelf – it's the innocuously titled [TC 31-73 Special Forces Advisor Guide](#). This training circular has more worthwhile reflections on navigating cultural waters than the entirety of most business sites. The preface unpacks its purpose. The publication is intended to define "the subjective, intangible nuances of human interaction. It is designed to assist the SF Soldier in understanding and navigating the complexities of human behavior as it relates to cross-cultural communication." Nearly every interaction between you and a potential client, partner, employer, or employee is an exercise in cross-cultural communication: think of each of those things as a society in miniature.

The *Guide* writes that "culture is the set of opinions, beliefs, values, customs, and mores that defines the identity of a society." It is incumbent on you to do your due diligence from that perspective: to objectively and dispassionately understand their values, to assess their beliefs and biases, to determine their strengths and weaknesses – in short, to get a grasp on their culture or the culture that exerts the most influence on their identity – and to develop a [rapport](#) and ability to communicate with them regardless of your opinion of that culture.

The manual takes nothing for granted, taking care to discuss psychological considerations like [compartmentalization](#), cultural perceptions of time and personal space, and the concepts of concession, personal pride, saving face, and honor in negotiation. The lessons taught are as applicable to a New England yankee in a southern boardroom as they are to an ODA working alongside tribal leaders halfway around the world. Don't think so? Consider [Colin Woodard's](#) analysis of the United States as [11 rival regional cultures](#). The geographical differences – and all differences – that we take for granted in America *matter*. No amount of wishful thinking can change that. That a business culture is inorganic is irrelevant: it nevertheless possesses the same qualities that need to be understood if you are going to operate outside the confines of your cubicle with any social agility. The Special Forces Advisor Guide will, at the very least, provide an [OODA](#)-compatible pathway into thinking and acting with the right mindset – adaptive, flexible, open – rather than reaching for your sword. More often than not, the art of business is the art of "what," and *not* the art of war.

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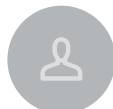
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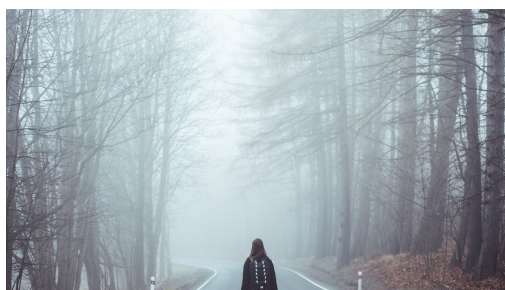
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