

**MOVING MOUNTAINS:
LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP AND LOGISTICS
FROM THE GULF WAR¹**

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I. Introduction

“Running logistics for the Gulf War has been compared to transporting the entire population of Alaska, along with their personal belongings, to the other side of the world, on short notice.”³ Between August 1990 and August 1991, the logisticians of the U.S. Armed Forces in Southwest Asia served over “122 million meals, pumped 1.3 billion gallons of fuel, and drove nearly 52 million miles.”⁴ This can be compared to “feeding all the residents of Wyoming and Vermont three meals a day for forty days;” supplying “the [twelve]-month fuel consumption of the District of Columbia, Montana, and North Dakota combined;” and making “more than 100 round trips to the moon.”⁵

Lieutenant General (Retired) William G. Pagonis and his 22d Support Command (SUPCOM) completed these unprecedented logistical feats. In response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the United States rapidly deployed forces to Saudi Arabia. This short-notice deployment created an immense logistical task. How do the Armed Forces move over 560,000 soldiers and their equipment to a remote side of the globe, sustain them in the field indefinitely, and then reverse the process?

This incredible challenge fell on General Pagonis, a career Army logistician with a unique style of leadership and management. Under his leadership, the 22d SUPCOM met the challenge with resounding success.

1. LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM G. PAGONIS (U.S ARMY, RETIRED) & JEFFERY L. CRUIK-SHANK, *MOVING MOUNTAINS: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP AND LOGISTICS FROM THE GULF WAR I* (1992).

2. United States Army. Written while assigned as a student, 47th Judge Advocate Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General’s School, United States Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

3. PAGONIS, *supra* note 1, at 1.

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

General Pagonis' logistical success enabled the quick, decisive U.S. victory against Iraq.

In *Moving Mountains*, General Pagonis, with Jeffery L. Cruikshank, presents lessons learned in leadership and logistics from his Gulf War experience. He uses his logistical success as a platform to present lessons in three areas: (1) lessons that leaders, military or civilian, can learn from his leadership style; (2) lessons the Army can apply to its doctrine; and (3) lessons private industry can learn from the military. This review examines the first area. General Pagonis devotes nearly two-thirds of *Moving Mountains* to the leadership theme of this area and presents various lessons to consider.

Unfortunately, General Pagonis fails to provide a cogent formula for leadership success. In his attempt to validate his leadership style as a model, he sends mixed messages to the reader. General Pagonis presents his leadership lessons in two sections: his life-long memoirs and a textual leadership outline. In his memoirs, he sends mixed messages by presenting lessons with conflicting leadership values. He highlights positive leadership values in some lessons and then contradicts them with lessons that convey negative or questionable values. Next, in his leadership outline, General Pagonis sends mixed messages through the conflicting application and superficial treatment of his lessons. First, this review provides a synopsis of *Moving Mountains*. Second, it focuses on the mixed messages presented in his memoirs. Last, this book review explores the mixed messages within the text of his leadership outline.

II. Synopsis

General Pagonis effectively piques the reader's interest at the beginning of *Moving Mountains* by immediately describing the Gulf War. He astounds the reader with the sheer size and complexity of the Gulf War logistical effort and describes how the three main phases of the logistics operation—deployment, combat, and redeployment—were planned and executed. By the end of the first chapter, the reader anticipates that General Pagonis will explain how he achieved these monumental tasks.

General Pagonis takes a detour, however, by presenting his memoirs. Instead of meeting the reader's expectation of how he achieved these great logistical feats, he spends the next 140 pages telling his life story, in the context of what he has learned about leadership and logistics management.

General Pagonis begins his memoirs by telling of his days delivering newspapers as a boy in Pennsylvania and continues through to his management of the Gulf War redeployment phase nearly forty-five years later. General Pagonis justifies this detour by explaining that to understand his leadership style, the reader must know the source. Throughout the vivid narrative of his life, Army career, and Gulf War experience, General Pagonis orients the reader to his essential lessons in leadership as he learned them.

General Pagonis then transitions from the narrative to the descriptive and expository with a text-like leadership outline entitled the “Building Blocks of Leadership.”⁶ He organizes leadership into eight broad functions and presents leadership lessons under each function as steps to success. After making brief tangential observations, General Pagonis distills the lengthy leadership outline into seven essential lessons.

II. Memoirs

At the outset of this section, the reader expects that General Pagonis will weave the lessons of leadership from his life experiences. General Pagonis uses the term “lessons” loosely, and in this section, “lessons” equates to common values or leadership traits. General Pagonis effectively highlights several lessons. Most lessons seem positive and reinforce the expectation he initially creates. Some lessons, however, seem negative or questionable and send a mixed message to the reader about what is truly important.

Before General Pagonis begins to narrate his life and career, he represents that his life experiences contain valuable “lessons” for potential leaders to learn. After the reader learns about his fantastic Gulf War accomplishments in the preceding chapter, he states: “I’m convinced that all of my experience before the Gulf War added up to a unique and highly specialized sort of training; and *it was only this training* that allowed me to accomplish a series of very complex logistical tasks in Saudi Arabia.”⁷ Here, General Pagonis introduces an underlying premise—that his leadership style is a model for success. At this point, the reader is already impressed with his Gulf War accomplishments. This, combined with General Pagonis’ emphasis on the value that only this training can bring, cre-

6. *Id.* at 59.

7. *Id.* at 17 (emphasis added).

ates a powerful expectation. The reader expects General Pagonis to set forth the keys to successful leadership through his memoirs.

Throughout his memoirs, General Pagonis effectively uses his life experiences to illustrate many lessons he learned in leadership. While the lessons he illustrates tend to be anecdotal, he brings them to life by weaving them into an interesting narrative. Overall, the narrative holds the reader's attention and foreshadows many leadership concepts he presents in his leadership outline.

Through the lessons presented in the narrative, the reader identifies common leadership values or traits. This is especially true for the military reader, who is generally familiar with core leadership "values" and "norms."⁸ Most of these lessons are positive and comport with the expectation that they are keys to success. Two examples of these positive leadership lessons are "getting your hands dirty,"⁹ and "not being overcome by events."¹⁰

General Pagonis presents the first lesson from his experience working in his father's restaurant and hotel as a teenager. He describes how he started out performing menial tasks such as busboy or dishwasher, and how he moved up the ranks over the years to management positions. Through his rise in the business, however, his father assigned him regular stints of latrine duty. General Pagonis sums up this experience with the lesson that "you have to be involved in every aspect of an organization . . . if you're really going to understand how it works,"¹¹ or as his father put it, "never forget how to get your hands dirty!"¹²

From this illustrative experience, the reader can identify common traits such as "duty" and "setting the example." General Pagonis shows that "duty" goes beyond the confines of the office and that an effective leader must "set the example" by not being afraid to perform subordinate

8. See generally U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 22-100, MILITARY LEADERSHIP (31 July 1990). The Army's basic manual on leadership contains values and norms military leaders should follow.

9. PAGONIS, *supra* note 1, at 20.

10. *Id.* at 39.

11. *Id.* at 20.

12. *Id.*

tasks. This lesson comports with General Pagonis' premise that his style, developed through his life experiences, is a model of success to follow.

General Pagonis provides another positive lesson from one of his Vietnam experiences. Serving as a commander of an Army riverboat company, he describes an incident where one of the barges behind him in a riverboat convoy came under fire and became stuck. Pagonis made an immediate decision to turn the convoy around and go into the line of fire to rescue the stranded barge. He presents the lesson that "the good military leader will dominate the events around him,"¹³ by describing how his soldiers followed him during this incident, trusted him, and "did not panic under fire."¹⁴

This vignette also conveys a positive leadership message. The reader can identify leadership values such as "competence," "courage," and "selfless service." General Pagonis demonstrates that an effective leader is one who acts decisively and puts the needs of his subordinates above his own. Again, this lesson comports with General Pagonis' premise.

Unfortunately, General Pagonis uses his life experiences to present lessons that seem negative, objectionable, and raise doubt. At the very least, these lessons are confusing, and the reader is left wondering how they fit into his model for success. These lessons not only deflate General Pagonis' credibility as a source, they undermine his leadership style as a template for success. Two examples of these negative lessons are "bending the law can lead to good things,"¹⁵ and "not pulling [your] weight" in garrison.¹⁶

General Pagonis makes no reservation about ignoring rules to reach goals or to attain a desired outcome. In fact, he elevates what he describes as "bending the law" to a "lesson,"¹⁷ thereby giving this negative lesson equal status with the positive lessons already discussed. He illustrates this lesson with two separate life experiences. First, he describes how he got the profitable paper route he sought as an adolescent by disregarding the established rules and hierarchy. After controversy ensued, he eventually got

13. *Id.* at 39 quoted in WILLIAM A. COHEN, *THE ART OF THE LEADER* 165 (1990).

14. *Id.* at 39.

15. *Id.* at 22.

16. *Id.* at 45.

17. *Id.* at 22.

the route he wanted because the paperboy supervisor liked his aggressiveness.

Another vivid example is the prisoner of war issue he confronted in the Gulf War. General Pagonis details how he refused to provide cigarettes to Iraqi prisoners of war—even after he was made aware of Geneva Convention requirements. He staunchly opposed this requirement because “this was a foolish way to spend the scarce time of my soldiers, not to mention the taxpayers’ money.”¹⁸ General Pagonis finally capitulates to the requirement only after a military lawyer threatened to put his chief contracting officer in jail.

This lesson of “bending the rules” to meet other objectives sends a mixed message. The reader is left wondering how this comports with conventional leadership norms. Is General Pagonis saying that a successful leader is one who ignores rules to reach a specific goal or to conserve resources? If so, what rules can be ignored, or which goals justify bending or breaking the rules? At the very least, General Pagonis should have explained the parameters of this lesson. Nevertheless, as written, this lesson conflicts with the more positive lessons cited above, undermines his premise that his leadership style should be emulated, and damages his credibility as an authoritative source in leadership theory.

The same is true of the “pulling your own weight”¹⁹ lesson he presents. During his second tour of duty in Vietnam, he describes how he successfully completes his own branch transfer by not volunteering key information. Then Major Pagonis was a transportation officer with a key staff function at division level, but he had a deep, personal desire to be in the field where the “real” war was being fought. When the division commander asked for volunteers to fill executive officer vacancies in some infantry battalions, Pagonis immediately raised his hand to get one of the positions. Of course, the commander assumed Pagonis was an infantry officer, and Pagonis, knowing he would not get the position if his true branch was known, did not disclose that fact (Pagonis was wearing General Staff branch insignia which did not reveal that he was a transportation

18. *Id.* at 10.

19. *Id.* at 45.

officer). General Pagonis justified this with his gut feeling that “[he] couldn’t stand not pulling [his own] weight”²⁰ behind the lines in garrison.

Here, General Pagonis sends another mixed message about leadership. In this “lesson,” he put his personal desire to be where the action was above his less glamorous, but no less important, duty on the division staff. This vignette smacks of selfishness and noncommitment; it contradicts the positive leadership norms of “duty” and “selfless service” presented in earlier lessons. These conflicting norms not only destroy General Pagonis’ premise, they cause the reader to question the value of the positive lessons presented earlier.

III. Leadership Outline

After his memoirs, General Pagonis presents his “building blocks” of leadership. In this section, the term “lessons” is synonymous with “techniques” or actual practices he has used. The outline itself provides some substance for prospective leaders, but suffers in two respects. First, in his introduction of the outline, General Pagonis sends a mixed message about how the reader should apply these “building blocks.” Second, he leaves the reader craving details with the superficial treatment of suggested techniques.

The reader is immediately confronted with the problem of applying the “building blocks of leadership.” Before he presents the text of his leadership outline, General Pagonis sends a confusing message of application. First, he boldly proclaims the value of his particular leadership style. His leadership style “made it possible to solve our formidable logistical challenges,” it “became the property of hundreds of people,”²¹ and “it allowed other people to lead” successfully.²² In sum, General Pagonis claims that his logistical success in the Gulf War validated his leadership style. In effect, the reader anticipates that the outline will contain the “must do” list that will hold the fundamental keys to leadership.

Just before the outline itself, however, General Pagonis contradicts this “must do” impression with a disclaimer. He tells the reader that he will present his techniques “as orders: do this, do that.”²³ But the “last such

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.* at 159-160.

22. *Id.*

order . . . will be for the reader to ignore any advice that doesn't make sense for a specific context, or for them personally."²⁴ This is confusing. On one hand, he emphasizes the importance of using these techniques—that they were a key to victory and were emulated by others. On the other hand, he minimizes their usefulness by telling the reader to disregard those techniques that do not work for them personally. As a result, the reader wonders if there are any absolutes. Are there some techniques that every leader must apply to be successful?

The second problem in this section is the superficial treatment of suggested techniques. Overall, the outline contains useful substance for the reader to consider, but some techniques lack detail. Under eight broad leadership functions he describes as “ends,” he presents various “means” of accomplishing these ends. The means are his techniques or his “to do” list. For example, under the broad leadership “end” of “present yourself,” he lists “means” such as “learn to listen, learn to communicate, and MBWA” (management by walking around).²⁵

Despite the mixed message, many of these leadership techniques provide excellent “food for thought” and force readers to consider whether the technique might work in their own organizations. Two techniques that stand out are his “stand-up”²⁶ briefings and his “3x5 card”²⁷ problem-solving system. General Pagonis provides a wealth of detail about these unique leadership tools. He explains his rationale for using the techniques, explains how they work, describes how he used them in the Gulf War setting, and defends their value as leadership tools.

Conversely, General Pagonis presents some of his leadership techniques in a superficial fashion. These techniques are anecdotal suggestions without any meaningful discussion to support them. Due to the lack of detail, the reader cannot consider the value of the suggested technique to his own organization. One such instance is his “to do” entitled “augment yourself”²⁸ under the broad functional heading of “know yourself.”²⁹ General Pagonis defines this leadership “to do” as personal evaluation. He explains that a good leader engages in introspection but his discussion goes

23. *Id.* at 161.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 163-166.

26. *Id.* at 185.

27. *Id.* at 189.

28. *Id.* at 162.

29. *Id.* at 161.

no further. This creates questions on how to apply the technique. When should it be done? Is there a particular way? How did he use it successfully in the Gulf War? Once again, General Pagonis leaves the reader wondering what is truly important and how to apply it—another mixed message.

IV. Conclusion

In the Gulf War “we off-loaded 33,100 containers, which, if laid end to end, would have stretched 188 miles.”³⁰ No one can discount the immense challenge General Pagonis faced in the Gulf War and the unprecedented results he achieved. In *Moving Mountains*, however, General Pagonis fails to convince this reviewer that his leadership style is a formula to be duplicated. He proclaims the inherent value of his leadership style and then undermines it with mixed messages of conflicting norms, confusing application, and superficial explanation. General Pagonis deserves credit for illustrating key values and presenting alternative management techniques, but he leaves the reader with too many questions about who a leader is and what a leader must do.

30. *Id.* at 6.