



## Finding lessons in Saddam's leadership

By Del Jones, USA TODAY

Dead or alive, there is something to be said for the leadership lessons of Saddam Hussein. For one, "If you cut someone's tongue out and nail it to the wall, that won't encourage others to share their views," says Bill Zollars, CEO of Yellow Corp.

As Saddam's regime collapsed, officers in the field were telling him that U.S. troops were being repelled and Iraq was winning. It seems bizarre, but experts say that corporate leaders are likewise fed a daily dose of tall tales. A pattern of ignoring ground-up concerns can produce a similar outcome.

Says Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams: Substitute the phrase "accounting irregularities" for "weapons of mass destruction."

Indeed, Saddam bordered on being a great leader. He was a narcissist, as was Abraham Lincoln and as are Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey, says Michael Maccoby, author of *The Productive Narcissist*. All came with a vision, but Saddam became the "ultimate malignant narcissist," characterized by paranoia and an inability to keep his superiority complex in check.

Regimes at WorldCom and Enron were built on false facts, grandiose dreams and fear, says Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, CEO of Yale's Leadership Institute.

"We learn a lot from great heroes and heels," says leadership guru Michael Useem, author of *Leading Up*. He predicts authors are rushing to be first out with a book on *The Leadership Lessons of Saddam*.

In the spirit of preemptive journalism, here's a first look at seven.

- **Lesson 1.** Don't shoot the messenger. Enough said.
- **Lesson 2.** Don't just tolerate bad news. Beg for it. Many well-respected leaders with open-door policies don't get bad news because they are believed to be so smart that everyone assumes they know when something is wrong, Useem says.

Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, asks for the opinion of the lowest-ranking person in the room first so that he can't repeat what was already said.

Yes men may be good for the ego, but they're worthless in a crisis because they can't think for themselves, says James Strock, author of *Theodore Roosevelt on Leadership*.

- **Lesson 3.** Corporate boards should be brave enough to fire "butcher" CEOs, even when they are getting results. If no one does anything, Saddamlike CEOs can hang around a long time, says Wess Roberts, author of *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*. The world has demonstrated repeatedly that it's capable of doing nothing. "The only explanation is that some people are as delusional as their leaders," he says.
- **Lesson 4.** Bad leaders eventually get what's coming to them. "Money, privileges and protection attract friends and allies," Roberts says. "But once they are removed, bottom feeders will abandon your cause and distance themselves from you."

The old industrial command and control system is over, says Stephen Covey, vice chairman of FranklinCovey and author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Formal authority is not enough. Leaders must have moral authority, he says.

Leaders must get to know people. "Saddam is not too good at team building," Zollars says.

- **Lesson 5.** Strategy matters. Saddam had a tin ear for what really mattered and misjudged the consequences.
- **Lesson 6.** Centralized authority is efficient but discourages others to think and act for themselves.
- **Lesson 7.** Even the worst leaders have something worthwhile to offer. "The body-double concept could free up a CEO from meetings," Adams says.

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