Put Practical Leadership Principles to Use

By Maj. Gen. Raymond Carpenter
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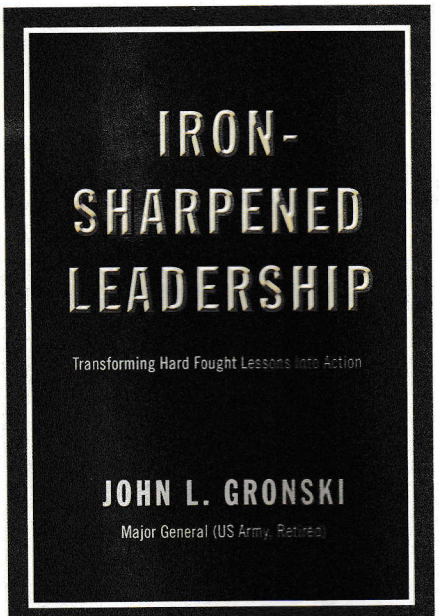
Retired Maj. Gen. John Gronski's *Iron-Sharpened Leadership: Transforming Hard Fought Lessons Into Action* is true to its title as it examines a full range of leadership elements and brings each into sharp focus.

Gronski piques the reader's interest at the outset with the title of the book. What is iron-sharpened leadership? It turns out that the answer can be found in a biblical quotation: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." In Gronski's words, "When we are at our best, we make one another stronger and better—'sharper,' if you will." With that as a starting point, the author launches into the simple but complex subject of leadership.

Gronski spent some 40 years in the Army National Guard and the active component, including a combat tour in Ramadi, Iraq, in 2005–06 as a brigade commander. He also has a solid background in private industry, both as an entrepreneur and a corporate consultant. He draws on that rich and diverse background throughout the course of the book.

Character, competence and resilience are the three elements that make up Gronski's leadership philosophy. He uses these elements to format the book into three sections, exploring underlying principles in separate chapters. The chapters are short, succinct and to the point, making the book a quick read. Gronski reinforces the material with examples, some biblical, some historical, and many from his personal experience.



Iron-Sharpened Leadership: Transforming Hard Fought Lessons Into Action

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) John Gronski
Fidelis Publishing. 296 pages. $17

At the conclusion of the chapter, he tells the reader how to implement that leadership attribute by calling out actions to be taken. The result is a practical leadership primer waiting to be put into use by the reader.

Gronski discusses dozens of leadership principles throughout the book. Many of these leadership attributes not only have application in the military and corporate world, but also can be applied to the daily lives of individuals. For example, as he discusses resilience, he makes the point that dealing with adversity will happen to everyone in the course of their lives.

So, how is one to overcome adversity and the associated challenges? Gronski advises the reader to "Face tough situations with a pragmatic view but also be hopeful and optimistic."

Another example that will resonate with leaders, especially military leaders, is the discussion about remaining calm in times of crisis. As Gronski puts it, "When a leader remains calm, even the most frantic begin to get their feet beneath them. When people lose their heads, matters get exponentially worse." And his suggested action is to "Work on skills that improve ... self-control." Good advice to anyone in crisis, military or otherwise.

As I read this book, I found myself comparing the words on the page to my leadership and life experiences. In each case, I found the descriptions of the

Maj. Gen. John Gronski, right, then deputy commanding general of U.S. Army Europe, meets with soldiers during an October 2018 visit to Bemowo Piskie Training Area, a NATO base camp in Poland.

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