The 33 Strategies of War
Robert Green

The Big Idea
It has been a customary perception that peace-loving people triumph more in life. Few realize that this is the very idea that acts as a barrier to realizing and identifying indispensable provisions to thrive in the challenges of day-to-day living.

Day after day, you will be faced with numerous conflicts that demand the need to engage in constant struggle or battle. Bestselling author Robert Greene shares 33 effective strategies of war to guide you through the realistic battlefield called life.

Self-Directed Warfare

The mind indeed is so powerful that it can propel anything to action. A mind that is too emotional and clouded by past resentments may not see the world clearly and generate inappropriate strategies.

1 - Declare War On Your Enemies: The Polarity Strategy

Struggle is indeed an inevitable part of life. Enemies come everywhere, sometimes explicitly but more often than not, subtly. It is important that you recognize these enemies and from there, start strategizing.

Yet again, everything starts from within. You should face the world with an open anticipation of this battle. It is your responsibility to program yourself to be in battle mode most of the time. Otherwise, you may easily be overpowered and end up a loser.

Discovering that you have too many enemies may entice you towards the safer side; which is to act in accordance to the enemies’ ways and be one of them. You should prevent this from happening or else, you will lose your identity.

A magnet best demonstrates the polarity strategy. Opposite poles create movement. Consider your enemies as your opposites. Without enemies, you might lose your drive to go on with life.

2 - Do Not Fight The Last War: The Guerilla-War-Of-The-Mind Strategy

Some people linger so much on the successes of the past, thinking that any change will hamper luck’s persistence. There is nothing wrong in celebrating past achievements. However, having a notion that previously effective strategies are perpetually the best is not at all beneficial.

A mind that is locked up in the past gets a blurred version of reality. The past may be a good teacher but it should not be the focus and sole basis of all your thoughts and actions. Move forward and get hooked by present endeavors and their conditions.

Holding on so much to past successes and resentments may indeed cause the mind to languish somewhere along the way. To restore the mind’s natural course forward, here are some tactics that you can employ:
1. Reexamine all your cherished beliefs and principles. Get out of your paradigms and think out of the box based on the present.
2. Erase the memory of the last war. Whether it was a triumph or a failure, make each war a fresh new start.
3. Keep the mind moving. Be as sensitive as you can to what the current circumstance has to offer and work your way around it.
4. Absorb the spirit of the times. Adapt to the demands of the present. Strategize based on current state of affairs, not on theories of the past.
5. Reverse course. In certain transactions, actions and reactions may be very predictable. Get out of the trend and be more innovative.

3 - Amidst The Turmoil of Events, Do Not Lose Your Presence of Mind: The Counterbalance Strategy

At war, you are not expected to be cautious. Too much carefulness is a manifestation of fear. Do not be afraid to commit mistakes or to take risks. Fear will only hinder you from moving forward.

Remember that presence of mind is an essential armor. It counters your tendency to drift away from the conflict and go back to the comfort zone. It boosts your confidence and gives you assurance that you can successfully tackle all your encounters and recuperate from your mistakes. It positively overpowers doubt as it fills you with determination and drive.

Nevertheless, presence of mind may not be that easy to achieve. Preparation is key. This means you must delve into the battle in advance to foresee possible scenarios and conceptualize corresponding courses of action. During actual war, in spite of the chaos that comes with it, you should not lose confidence because you should already know what to do. Do not allow pessimism to affect you. Instead, try to influence the people around you with your tranquility.

Here are some ways by which you can enhance your mind’s strength in any kind of situation:

1. Expose yourself to conflict. Confront your fears. The wider your experience in conflict is, the more practice you get.
2. Be self-reliant. Equip yourself with the necessary skills so that you do not have to depend on other people.
3. Suffer fools gladly. You encounter a lot of fools everywhere. Thus, you are not required to expend all your limited resources to all of them. Do not be too involved.
4. Crowd out feelings of panic by focusing on simple tasks. Visualize things that are easy and familiar to you to divert your attention from anxiety.
5. Unintimidate yourself. Picture the enemy as way inferior compared to you.
6. Develop your fingertip feel. Follow your intuition and make quick decisions based on it.

4 - Create A Sense of Urgency And Desperation: The Death-Ground Strategy

In addition to establishing and strengthening connections with current circumstances, consider the present as not offering a gray area. It is either you make it or break it. This leaves no room for wasted time.

Death, inevitable as it is, may be seen as a good motivator to maximize every single moment available. There is a psychological phenomenon called death ground where a certain situation seems to offer zero options. The only way to get out of the trap is to act without much ado. Otherwise, failure may be expected. There is pressure, of course, but its effects are ultimately beneficial.

Below are five actions that can easily put you on psychological death ground:

1. Stake everything on a single throw. This gives no room for failure as there is simply too much at stake.
2. *Act before you are ready.* Push yourself to move forward and take advantage of the pressure that you encounter once you are there.

3. *Enter new waters.* Get out of your comfort zone and be challenged.

4. *Make it “you against the world”.* Always think that you are putting your entire person at stake. Deprive your enemies the opportunity to celebrate your failure.


Organizational (Team) Warfare

The subsequent strategies emphasize the need to understand a team as a whole as well as its composition. A clear perception not only will pave the way for changes but will also identify better strategies to attain the team’s purpose.

5 - Avoid The Snares Of Groupthink: The Command-And-Control Strategy

Since an organization is composed of different people with varied personalities, intentions, and goals, it is important that you, as a leader, are aware of the strengths and weakness of your people. This will tell you how to approach each part of the chain of command to get them more involved.

You further your knowledge of what is taking place and ascertain if you are all directed towards your goal. This you accomplish without falling into “groupthink” or the senselessness of merely arriving at a collective decision.

Furthermore, you must recognize the fact that it is time-consuming and beyond human capacity to monitor and give direction to everyone all at the same time. Therefore, it is wise to recruit people who have the same vision as you do and who would willingly work for that vision on your behalf. This significantly saves you a lot of time since you will not have to deal with difficult people.

6 - Segment Your Forces: The Controlled-Chaos Strategy

Everything transpires quickly at war. You are not given the luxury of time. You have to make decisions and act before the enemy does. Conversely, with the progression of time, more and more information becomes available. This further contributes to the complexity of decision-making.

Controlling a huge team will not be able to fulfill this requisite for speed and adaptability. Creation of smaller teams that are directed towards particular and clear goals is more effective.

This may be a risk on your part, though, since you are delegating some part of your control. However, it is more strategic as it provides you mobility. The teams are dispersed but focused at the same time. This gives each of them a clearer view of what is actually happening and allows them to respond accordingly.

7 - Transform Your War Into A Crusade: Morale Strategies

It is man’s natural tendency to protect his own interests to survive. Thus, even in an organization, members may have their own goals and intentions. It is your responsibility, as a leader, to encourage them to put aside their individual concerns and crusade altogether against a certain enemy. Instill in them that only by working wholly can everyone turn out victorious.

The following steps will help you focus and convert into an undivided system the dynamics of a certain group:

1. *Unite your troops around a cause.* A cause gives more meaning to efforts.

2. *Keep their bellies full.* Do not take some of their needs for granted. Otherwise, their selfishness
3. *Lead from the front.* Experience what your people are experiencing to sustain their motivation. Be a leader of action, not just words.

4. *Concentrate their ch‘i.* Ch‘i is an energy that all living things have. Having not much to do lowers one’s ch‘i or spirit. Keep your people active.

5. *Play to their emotions.* However, be careful not to target the emotional aspect right away. Find the best manner and timing first.

6. *Mix harshness and kindness.* There should be a good balance of punishment and reward. Correct mistakes but do not forget to reinforce positive actions.

7. *Build the group myth.* Build a tradition of success that will make the members appreciate their belongingness.

8. *Be ruthless with grumblers.* Otherwise, they will simply influence those who are motivated and disciplined.

**Defensive Warfare**

When using defensive warfare, you attack only when necessary. You also capitalize on the enemy’s confusion as it instigates unwise attacks working to your advantage.

**8 - Pick Your Battles Carefully: The Perfect-Economy Strategy**

All human beings have certain strengths and, at the same time, weaknesses. At some point, you will have limitations. Realistically, you cannot tackle everything. Thus, it is important that you balance the costs and benefits of any situation before plunging into it.

At times, your desire to get something that you really want propels you to be impulsive and blocks off your capacity to identify further costs. You are blinded by merely the benefits. Extra effort must indeed be exerted to see beyond the obvious and look at reality in its entirety - including the not-so-good side of it.

**9 - Turn The Tables: The Counterattack Strategy**

Warriors often take into consideration only two options: to fight offensively or defensively. Offensive attacks immediately create an enemy and may result in reckless decisions that encumber self-control. Defensiveness, on the other hand, leads to passiveness and avoidance of enemies as much as possible.

There is a third option that is often disregarded. This is a balance of both offensive and defensive strategies. When enemies sense weakness in the opponent, they lower their guard. This is the best time to let your offensive strategies come into play. Catch your enemies off guard. Make your actions as unpredictable as possible.

A counterattack like this saves time as well. The circumstance found its way to you on its own. The best thing you can do is react suddenly, expending only a short period of time and resources.

**10 - Create A Threatening Presence: Deterrence Strategies**

Do not allow yourself to succumb to intimidation. You are more prone to it if enemies find you weak and vulnerable. Deterrence strategies simply reverse this kind of an impression.

The following are methods of deterrence and reverse intimidation:

1. *Surprise with a bold maneuver.* Take risks in the face of the enemy to highlight your strengths instead of weaknesses.
2. *Reverse the threat.* Identify areas that your enemy is most vulnerable and attack them there.
3. **Seem unpredictable and irrational.** Do not allow your enemies to find a pattern in your actions. Show them that, at times, you can really be irrational. A close encounter with you could definitely be risky.

4. **Play on people’s natural paranoia.** Inform your enemies of your strengths indirectly. The more vague the available information is, the more they become paranoid.

5. **Establish a frightening reputation.** Over the years, create a trend showing how intimidating you are.

11 - Trade Space For Time: The Nonengagement Strategy

Retreat is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is one way of utilizing and maximizing available resources. Get out of your paradigm that advancing is the best thing to do no matter what since it is not always the case. Retreat paves the way for reassessment of the situation and strategies. It saves time and effort for situations that really call for action.

**Offensive Warfare**

There are simply things that you cannot exactly anticipate. The discrepancy between your expectations and what is real is called “friction”. By practicing offensive strategies, you initiate the war by attacking first. Thus, you get a better hand at control and create actual circumstances based on your expectations. Friction then manifests at the enemy’s side.

12 - Lose Battles But Win The War: Grand Strategy

Reflect on where you really want to go and what you want your destiny to be. It may also be helpful to see where your skills seem to be bringing you right now. After which, think forward but be sure you are taking several steps ahead. Look at your final destiny as an entire campaign, not just individual battles to recover from. This is the so-called grand strategy. The ultimate end result is more essential than each phase.

The following are the four main principles of grand strategy:

1. **Focus on your greater goal, your destiny.** Start with a specific, defined, and focused goal in life that is in line with reality.
2. **Widen your perspective.** Expand your vision of the world. Do not limit yourself to what you simply want to happen. Be as realistic as possible but make sure you capture much of reality.
3. **Sever the roots.** Look beyond what is obvious. Observe your enemy and analyze what causes him to act that way.
4. **Take the indirect route to your goal.** Create a plan and do not be reactive to every single move of the enemy. Focus on your long-term plan and work your way through it.

13 - Know Your Enemy: The Intelligence Strategy

Be keener in your interactions with people and situations. The superficial does not always reveal the entirety of one’s thoughts and intentions. Narcissism is one’s tendency to perceive other people as always in accordance to his own values and goals. You always see yourself in other people. Thus, you have a distorted image of reality. In effect, you do not get to strategize appropriately.

Remember that your opponent’s mind is your real enemy. Having an accurate grasp of the enemy’s weaknesses will contribute much to your victory.

14 - Overwhelm Resistance With Speed And Suddenness: The Blitzkrieg Strategy
This does not pertain to impetuous speed as it should involve a carefully crafted plan. You must come up with a plan that will catch your enemies off guard. A certain level of order and strategy must initially be in place to harness the benefits of the speed and suddenness of your actions. Prepare yourself and carefully analyze your opponent. Identify his weaknesses. To lure him into lowering his guard, appear weak. Attack when the enemy least expects it.

As time progresses, modern life’s pace also increases, bringing with it more information, influences, and disturbances. Life has generally been perceived as unforgiving and ruthless. Thus, it is natural for human beings to withdraw themselves from reality. They also try to slow down to avoid committing mistakes. People have learned over the years to be cautious.

Blitzkrieg warfare seems to be the most fitting strategy for times like these. You take advantage of the opponent’s slowing down and surprise him with an attack. With this, he is left without an opportunity to be careful anymore and is forced to act impulsively. He gets confounded and you follow up with another attack that causes further confusion. This leads to a cycle of error on the opponent’s part leading to his downfall.

15 - Control The Dynamic: Forcing Strategies

At some point, you will encounter people who want to exercise control over you. You can easily reverse this by following these four basic principles and gain ultimate control:

1. *Keep them on their heels.* Take the initiative before the enemy does.
2. *Shift the battlefield.* You can confuse your enemies by making essential factors unfamiliar to them. Eventually, they will be exerting efforts that are to your advantage without them immediately realizing it.
3. *Compel mistakes.* Your enemies definitely have plans as well. Push them to become impulsive and commit a cycle of mistakes along the way.
4. *Assume passive control.* Let them believe they are in control. This way, they will lower their guards a little.

16 - Hit Them Where It Hurts: The Center-Of-Gravity Strategy

Gravitational pull is said to support the earth and keep it in place. At war, the opponent’s power rests on certain elements that work for them like gravity. Look beyond the obvious and identify what these gravity-like elements are and make it your target. Distressing it will certainly make them fall apart.

17 - Defeat Them In Detail: The Divide-And-Conquer Strategy

Instead of looking at the totality of your opponent, try to examine its parts and how you can defeat each of them. The whole may appear overwhelming and disheartening to conquer. The parts, however, seem easier to overcome.

Aside from the parts, you must also take into consideration the joints that connect them. In implementing change, for example, you can only get them to adapt the change if you understand what is causing their resistance. A connection to the past is normally the cause thus comes the need to disturb them out of it. This connection to the past is normally emotional in nature. In this case, the emotions involved serve as a joint and you need to tackle it to break it.

18 - Expose And Attack Your Opponent’s Soft Flank: The Turning Strategy

People tend to camouflage their weaknesses by presenting the opposite. The most effective way to overcome this kind of situation is to attack indirectly. Targeting the opponent’s strong front will only waste your time and energy. You may need to take a longer, but more effective, route. Consider areas least expected to be attacked. Eventually, because of surprise, they will unintentionally uncover their weak
aspect and will unconsciously make the rest of the attack easier for you.

19 - Envelop The Enemy: The Annihilation Strategy

When the enemy feels that there is not a single gap in your strategies that he can take advantage of, he starts to get weak and lose control of the situation.

Any form of manipulation of the mind, whether positive or negative, shall strongly influence corresponding actions. Remember that the mind is a mighty propeller.

Given these two facts, envelopment does not have to be physically accurate. You may approach psychologically by merely creating a feeling of being caught without any way to escape. Appeal to your opponent’s emotions and you will notice that things will automatically fall into place the way you expected it.

20 - Maneuver Them Into Weakness: The Ripening-For-The-Sickle Strategy

As mentioned earlier, as you go on through life, circumstances calling for war-like encounters are inevitable. Embarking upon them one after another can be really exhausting. A wise strategist will think of ways to weaken the opponent first before engaging in actual battle.

Here are four main principles by which you can contrive your enemies to weakness:

1. *Craft a plan with branches.* Analyze the situation in its entirety. Equip yourself with different options or ‘branches’. This provides you the necessary flexibility to cope with whatever the situation has to offer.

2. *Give yourself room to maneuver.* Be open to options. Prepare yourself physically and psychologically.

3. *Give your enemy dilemmas, not problems.* Problems can be solved but dilemmas will surely leave your opponents confused. Provide them options but make sure both are to your advantage. Thus, whatever they choose, they still fail.

4. *Create maximum disorder.* The opponent reads your every move the same way that you do. Do not hinder him from doing so but send out only meaningless and ambiguous information. This will simply lead him to spiraling disorder and confusion.

21 - Negotiate While Advancing: The Diplomatic-War Strategy

When things do not seem resolved at battle, people resort to negotiations. The strength that you have prepared for battle should be maintained during negotiations for these usually involve scheming for power and control.

Moreover, you should also study your opponents just like the way you analyze them before battle. A good understanding of their weaknesses and goals will give you advantage in terms of maneuver. Conversely, you should make sure that you remain as ambiguous and as unpredictable to them as possible. This will give you a better position when you maneuver them towards the corners of a certain circumstance and personally gain advancement.

22 - Know How To End Things: The Exit Strategy

Always put to mind your purpose for entering the war in the first place. Reevaluate and see if you have attained that in the end. Your goal is definitely not to create enemies who shall unendingly go after you. Winning the war is not what is ultimately important. How you win it and what the war made out of you bring more significance above all.
Given this, you have to know when to push through or when to retreat. If you feel that in no way will you be geared towards your goals, you might as well retreat. Otherwise, you will realize its negative effects when it is already difficult or impossible to remedy.

Remember that an ending is never a fundamental dead-end. Rather it is just the beginning of yet another opportunity. Thus, a war should end on a positive note, acting more as a teacher that will guide you in your next moves.

Unconventional (Dirty) Warfare

A warrior must adapt to changing times by constantly thinking of new ways of fighting. Sticking to tradition may not be effective as demands change with time. The following strategies present several helpful unconventional practices.

23 - Weave A Seamless Blend Of Fact and Fiction: Misperception Strategies

The more unclear your actions and strategies are to the opponent, the better. This makes it more complex for your enemies to fathom reality. Leave them to their own interpretations while you advance. Remember that, at times, perception is blinded by what one expects to see so strategize around this idea.

24 - Take The Line Of Least Expectation: The Ordinary-Extraordinary Strategy

Your enemies may anticipate your actions by basing it on certain patterns of actions and behavior. Fail them in their expectations and be as unpredictable as possible. You might want to confuse them by being conventional initially. Once they have established the idea that you work traditionally, veer away and work extraordinarily. Confusion and disorder then occur at their side, hindering them from executing the right strategies.

25 - Occupy The Moral High Ground: The Righteous Strategy

Question the value of your opponent’s campaign and efforts. Build up your own as more worthy. Make this fact obvious by proactively advocating it. Probe into some of your opponent’s intentions and make it appear as if they are doing the wrong thing. Capitalize on some points that may sever their reputation. Use guilt to disillusion them.

26 - Deny Them Targets: The Strategy Of The Void

Human beings always act for a certain purpose. At war, the opponent’s ultimate goal is certainly to target or capture you by tempting you to attack certain points that are intended to make you fall into a trap. Do not give away success. Do everything you can to make their efforts pointless. Let them go home empty-handed. The mere psychological effects of emptiness can negatively affect their strategies. They will desperately do anything just to achieve something.

27 - Seem To Work For The Interests Of Others While Furthering Your Own: The Alliance Strategy

You might have recognized already the importance of getting alliances to decentralize some tasks. However, this is not simply about getting whoever it is available. The emotional aspect should not take center stage this time. Moreover, an increase in number does not guarantee quality. There should be a healthy balance between quality and quantity.

Keep in mind as well that you are getting allies to complement you temporarily. In other words, they should be able to do things you cannot accomplish on your own and possess some of the resources that you lack. However, just like in other relationships, it has to be two-way. You should also be able to cater to their self-interests to sustain their support.
28 - Give Your Rivals Enough Rope To Hang Themselves: The One-Upmanship Strategy

Not all enemies come from outside. At times, you will find them in places you least expect, that is, inside. You may be working with people you think are working with you towards the same goal. However, you should not freely give away trust. There may be some who are good at pretending to be one with you while working for their own personal interests.

Defeat them by subtly making them feel inferior and dubious of their capabilities. Thereafter, you do not need to do anything else as the situation will run its own course. Doubt never does a person any good. Eventually, you will find them committing endless and pointless mistakes. They will soon realize their own defeat but there will be no one else to blame but themselves. You will then be able to isolate them without you seeming cruel.

29 - Take Small Bites: The Fait Accompli Strategy

To conquer something is not always straightforward as envy comes into the picture. Some simply cannot appreciate your successes but wish for your downfall instead. Such should not push you to lower your standards. You may still maintain your ambition but you must work towards it differently.

Taking small bites is the most suitable way of going about it. However, this manner requires that you be clear and specific in your objectives at the very start. Knowing your target well will make significant parts more evident and will allow you to strategically conquer each of them.

This strategy is too subtle that it does not capture much attention. In effect, you can freely move about and implement your plans. If and when they do notice, it will all be too late since you must have conquered much already. Constraining you at some point will only work to their disadvantage.

30 - Penetrate Their Minds: Communication Strategies

Effectively communicating your ideas can significantly alter another person’s behavior. They may primarily block you off in several ways but appealing to their emotions will certainly lower these defenses. As soon as you’ve penetrated their minds, everything will run in accordance to your expectations.

31 - Destroy From Within: The Inner-Front Strategy

The best way to truly know your enemy is to take their side and appear a supporter. You will be able to gain information not readily available and accessible to outsiders. Use this information to propel your subtle maneuvers leading to the opponent’s destruction.

32 - Dominate While Seeming To Submit: The Passive-Aggression Strategy

Outright expression of contradiction is often translated as a form of aggression. This mainly explains why some people are hesitant to implement something that is not in line with the usual as they are concerned about gaining resistance and dislike. Therefore, to block off this notion before it even surfaces, you must project yourself as in submission to your opponent. In this way, you get zero resistance. You, in turn, resort to subtly influencing them as you go with the flow.


A person can easily be influenced and affected by the emotions of those surrounding him. Introducing fear instigates extreme emotional reaction that spreads almost automatically. A great sense of fear makes anyone more vulnerable than usual and less resistant. Strategic capabilities seem to take the back seat as well. You can take advantage of this if you want to easily conquer an enemy.