

# The Eagle Institute: Strategic Leadership Then and Now



**L**eadership. Strategy. Teamwork. Communication. Foresight. These attributes are as important to our personal and professional success today as they were in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in July 1863, when two armies and their formidable leaders came face to face for the largest battle ever fought on the North American continent.

What does history tell us about the leadership qualities of Generals Meade and Grant leading up to and during the heat of battle? Can a study of their successes and disappointments help us become more proficient leaders now and in the future?

In July 2013, 40 school business officials walked the battlefield that gave the nation both heroes and heartache. They were there to participate in the 2013 ASBO

International Eagle Institute, a powerful professional development opportunity focused on developing leadership skills.

The theme of this annual event, which is sponsored by AXA, was The Leader as a Strategist. The four-day program wove leadership, critical decision making, ethics, and education into a broad look at strategic leadership for school business officials.

## Leadership 101

Participants began with a lesson in Leadership 101. Jeff McCausland, Ph.D., a retired colonel with the U. S. Army and founder/CEO of Diamond6 Leadership and Strategy, addressed critical leadership questions and examined some of the “myths” that have been created around



leadership and strategy. McCausland noted that leaders must create realistic visions, because “vision without resources is a fairy tale.”

Participants also learned strategies for confronting and overcoming their own leadership challenges while continuing to grow themselves and others into great leaders.

### Overview of the Battle

The second day of the Eagle Institute was all about Gettysburg, beginning with an overview of the Battle of Gettysburg with McCausland and Tom Vossler, former director of the Military History Institute and a certified Gettysburg Park guide.

McCausland and Vossler explained that essential to understanding leadership decisions is an appreciation of the personalities involved and the strategic setting. They placed the events of July 1863 into a strategic context and discussed leadership lessons that can be drawn from the event. Participants also were able to tour the Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War, where they stepped back in time and learned about the consensus-building strategies used to create some of the most important documents in U. S. history.

Because the Eagle Institute was scheduled during the 150th

Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, participants were able to view special exhibits such as the Treasures of the Civil War: Legendary Leaders Who Shaped a War, which featured more than 90 artifacts from Civil War collections throughout the United States, exhibited in Gettysburg for the first time. In addition, they had an opportunity to view a film entitled *A New Birth of Freedom* and The Battle of Gettysburg Cyclorama.

### Leadership on the Battlefield

Touring the actual battlefield gave participants a first-person view of the challenges that both sides faced and helped them better understand the decisions the leaders made during the battle. How did General Meade’s relative newness to the position affect his decisions on the battlefield? Was General Lee’s decision to take an aggressive approach on the battlefield the right decision?

McCausland and Vossler discussed the impact of the Battle of Gettysburg on the course of the Civil War, weaving in the role of strategic leadership and how President Abraham Lincoln and his Gettysburg Address influenced the trajectory of U. S. history.

### The Strategic Leader

The third day of the seminar began with a more in-depth look at Abraham Lincoln and his role as a strategic leader. Edna Medford, Ph.D., professor and chair of the Department of History at Howard University, led participants in a discussion of how Lincoln’s extraordinary strategic leadership was partly a by-product of his habit of lifelong learning. Medford also led an analysis of the strategic lessons of the Gettysburg Address in terms of defining a strategic vision.

Gary Steele, retired U.S. Army colonel and a senior consultant with Learning Dynamics, continued the focus on strategic leadership with his presentation of Strategic Leadership 101. Steele examined the essence of strategic leadership, including how it differs from direct and organizational leadership and the various competencies that are important to strategic leaders, including

- Conceptual (thinking) skills such as an ability to envision the future and manage problems.
- Technical skills such as systems understanding and technology awareness.
- Interpersonal skills such as communication, consensus-building, and negotiation.

Steele also discussed ways to anticipate opportunities and threats in an environment of strategic leadership.

### Education and Common Core

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been adopted by the majority of the states, ushering in a new era of education. Where are education and the field of school business headed in the next few years? John Stoothoff, Ph.D., assistant professor in the College of Education at Frostburg State University in Maryland, considers CCSS a turning point for education, just as the

Battle of Gettysburg was a turning point in the War Between the States.

Stoothoff, a former teacher, school administrator, and district superintendent, shared his analogy that like battles, education reform has waves. The first wave in education corresponds with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the second with the ratification of *No Child Left Behind*, and the third with *The Race to the Top* and CCSS.

In addition to sharing the major changes and developing issues in education, Stoothoff explained how the knowledge and experience school business officials gained from their GASB-45 experiences enable them to contribute to their organizations' compliance with CCSS personnel evaluation requirements.

### Leadership in a Profession

Participants began their fourth day of the Eagle Institute exploring the differences between leadership in a vocational profession and leadership in a business or bureaucracy. Dan Snider, Ph.D., emeritus professor at the U. S. Military Academy in West Point, identified the current challenges facing leaders of professions, such as declining legitimacy, trust, certification, technology, and professional ethics, and offered the following advice on becoming a leader in the profession:

- Remember, it is not about you, it is about beneficence.
- If you must choose between competence and character, always choose character, but seek excellence.
- Beware of the institutional culture.
- Seek a mentor early on; develop yourself.



- Find motivation in intrinsic satisfaction: justice achieved, expert knowledge grown, relationships abided.
- Renew your calling frequently.

Snider identified several strategic leader competencies, including maturity beyond self-awareness, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, and professional astuteness.

### Strategy and Ethics

The focus turned to the critical importance of ethics and character as fundamental aspects of the “strategic leader of character.” George Lucas, professor of ethics and public policy at the Naval Postgraduate School, engaged participants in guided consideration of the many ethical dimensions of leadership and an exploration of specific dilemmas experienced in today’s schools. He emphasized the critical importance of ethics and character as fundamental aspects of a “strategic leader of character” and discussed the

importance of leading and working in an ethical environment and modeling ethical behavior.

Lucas also explained that when we treat goals as something that is given to us according to someone else’s strategy, we have left the strategic thinking to others.

### Looking Ahead

Participants of the 2013 Eagle Institute left with more self-awareness about themselves as strategic leaders. They also took back with them knowledge, resources, and tools to help them continue to develop their strategic leadership skills.

Strategic leaders are always looking ahead. ASBO International is looking forward to bringing you the 2014 Eagle Institute in Washington, D.C., this July. The theme, Leader as an Innovator, will guide an exploration of the innovative leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the mid-1900s and the characteristics of an innovative education leader today. Visit [asbointl.org/EagleInstitute](http://asbointl.org/EagleInstitute) for information.

**Mark Your Calendar Now for the 2014 Eagle Institute, July 15–18, in Washington, D.C. Visit [asbointl.org/EagleInstitute](http://asbointl.org/EagleInstitute).**