

John Boyd. Ace fighter pilot. Real-world, cutting-edge aircraft designer. Teacher of the already elite. Ground-breaking strategist. Antagonistic military misfit who ultimately helped change that very military. Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer, captures his truly unique story engagingly and exquisitely.

Colonel Boyd was a complex, fault-ridden, yet still amazing man, someone who impacted multiple spheres that he was appointed to in very unusual ways, several times while being a virtual outsider with regard to those spheres. This podcast episode on "redesigning war" is part of a series on Boyd that follows several episodes about Boyd: for example, building snowmobiles...and the art and science of high performance...and being relentlessly curious to completion...and designing for stewardship. Go listen!

In this current episode, Boyd captures our attention because he was foundational in helping to *redesign war* in the modern era. But, you say, John Boyd is not a household name and is not even that well-known in military circles...how can that be, if he actually redesigned war? Not surprisingly, that's a story full of twists and turns that combine large egos and vast bureaucracies and competing agendas and the best and worst of human nature—all a part of the mosaic of life in the most powerful nation on earth.

As we selected key elements of Boyd's experiences as lessons for us, we have seen his unyielding efforts to pursue best practices for the military—for example, designing aircraft as part of being the best steward for optimal effectiveness in saving pilots' lives and defeating the enemy. Of course, a whole lot was always at stake in each of these chapters in Boyd's life, like whenever there was a huge new or expanded defense program to fund. So, just what was specifically at stake? Well, massive amounts of money, the prestige and sheer enjoyment that arises from winning the hearts and minds of others, and substantial career advancement—both civilian and military. These never-ending political clashes surrounding aircraft design and the related contract procurement attracted many very powerful people who were thrust into constant conflict with each other. After many battles like these, Boyd migrated elsewhere.

And in doing just that, Boyd surprised some of his closest collaborators and friends—he started devoting his time to reading classic works...yes, some sources that were military-focused but others that extended well beyond that. His friends were astonished that this brilliant aircraft designer and active organizational battler was going all "passive" on them—can you imagine, *just reading*?

As we would expect, Boyd emerged from this phase having read a whole lot about military history and strategy. And, unsurprisingly, he settled in on two great thinkers about war, Sun Tzu from many centuries ago and the more modern strategist Carl von Clausewitz. Boyd's conclusions? No flaws in Sun Tzu—the only military thinker that Boyd awarded that lofty assessment—while von Clausewitz missed the full mark.

As was typical, Boyd dove in to every facet of the topic at hand and, to narrow that down for our sake, reached a vital conclusion of "maneuverability." Now Boyd's conception of this idea really flew in the face of ruling dogma that was in favor pretty much across the board within the military establishment. You know *that* drill—even the most crucial of bureaucracies cluster around comfortable but wrong answers! Accordingly, Boyd got little meaningful traction with his long-time home branch of the military, the Air Force. But then Boyd got invited to teach at a training session for a group of Young Turks in the Marine Corps. For those fearless Marines who were used to losing a lot of troops as a matter of course in the most difficult battles, and especially for those who did so in Vietnam in a seemingly needless fashion, well, now, Boyd's thinking that was strongly grounded in the deep study of battles over millennia struck a deep chord.

Here's where it gets very interesting. A couple of Marines highly placed in the hierarchy ultimately caught the vision and sponsored Boyd's strategic and tactical ideas. To put the idea bluntly, throwing many bodies into direct battle could well be trumped by a few Marines capturing many using great maneuverability. Now, Boyd had key disciples about his approaches, including, at one point in time, the Commandant of

the Marines himself. So, Boyd's thinking, grounded in experiential gleanings and history, worked itself into key people in the military. But, make no mistake, there was *not* a broad embracing of Boyd's ideas.

Until. Yes, until the first Gulf War. Years before, Dick Cheney has listened carefully and lengthily to John Boyd. And when war came around this time, Cheney was the U.S. Secretary of Defense, the civilian responsible for calling the shots in that war. But Cheney did not receive positive advice encompassing Boyd's thinking from the field general in charge—no, quite the opposite. Indeed, the popular General “Stormin’ Norman” Schwarzkopf recommended traditional approaches. But here's what happened. Boyd met with Cheney afresh at key meetings in Washington, and ultimately, Cheney overruled Schwarzkopf.

And the rest is history. The approach that Boyd advocated was instituted. And the war lasted just 44 days. That's right, just 44 days! Vastly superior Iraqi forces surrendered to small numbers of U.S. forces. A hiccup was when a field general didn't trust the Boydian approach and unnecessarily held up his troops for three extra nights in the desert. But Boyd's thinking, his strategies, had carried the day!

One of the key facets of Boyd's approach is to allow highly trained troops to have the latitude to maneuver despite what might have been expected or even ordered from higher-ups remotely in the planning phase. You see, planning is always important...but it's never, ever completely accurate. Boyd's approach was to promote significant maneuverability in the field, thus working to confuse and then overwhelm the enemy. You see, large top-down, bureaucracy-dependent plans can only go so far...and, frankly, oftentimes those plans are completely wrong due to bad data or flawed process or rapidly changing conditions.

Since the Gulf War, key parts of military leadership embraced Boyd's thinking—Boyd's redesigning of war. But Boyd never really got credit for all of that. Here, we're compelled to remember U.S. President John Kennedy's pithy quote that he recycled from an author centuries before: “Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.” So true—that's a downside of human nature, in action. And along those lines and consistent with his approaches, Boyd taught all those he trained to *not* focus on who gets the credit.

Of course, Boyd's maneuverability approach is exactly how highly effective Christian missions really, truly works. Missions boards and quarterbacking from afar may be foundational. But the real action for missions is the “ground game”—the effective witness for the gospel of the Kingdom of God, based solely on Christ and Him crucified. That happens when a fully committed, Bible-saturated Christian astutely responds to the situation at hand...by aptly maneuvering to address an unexpected, newly unfolding reality. That Christian is directly guided by the Holy Spirit in a way unique to that situation in that moment.

Now, *that* is the ultimate in maneuverability. And that is why every serious Christian is an ambassador for Christ, ready with Spirit-led, Bible-grounded truth crafted to an audience on-the-spot in a fast-changing situation—that's “boots on the ground,” to use an apt military metaphor. And while Boyd's thinking related to the battlegrounds in Korea and Vietnam and the Middle East, God's thinking is and always has been “where the action is” in daily life *worldwide*: the fifth floor of the office building where the Christian labors alongside unbelievers, a quiet meal with a relative long-absent from family ties, or a series of well-spoken words to a neighbor—perhaps culminating when that neighbor just suffered a tragedy.

You see, *God invented maneuverability in warfare*. We put on the armor of God daily. We access the Word of God for our equipping. We rely on Holy Spirit for guidance for the actions required for the events at hand. You see, highly effective maneuverability warfare is about the front lines of a “flat” organization—comprised of you and God—and not waiting on new orders from a human general. Indeed, it's about a fully equipped warrior responding, “on the ground.” John Boyd was very abrasive but just as brilliant, and he got this maneuverability thinking right. And through Dick Cheney, Boyd's thinking led to the redesigning of modern war, whether Boyd gets major credit or not. So, how often are you actively putting on the armor of God? And just how much do you and others in your organization apply Boyd's maneuverability?

A&A: Application & Action

1. If you as a leader have become convinced of the importance of maneuverability in *your church and its local outreaches and world missions*, have you trained, tested, and trusted your people sufficiently to successfully deploy this key facet of organizational success? If not, what is your plan to get there? Be specific.

2. If you as a leader have become convinced of the importance of maneuverability in *your business or nonprofit*, have you trained, tested, and trusted your people sufficiently to successfully deploy this key facet of organizational success? If not, what is your plan to get there? Be specific.

3. Do you believe that others ought to trust you completely to maneuver properly and effectively in your organizational roles, but you have difficulty similarly trusting others in your role as a leader directing them? Whatever your answer, what does your reply to this say about you as a leader? Be specific.