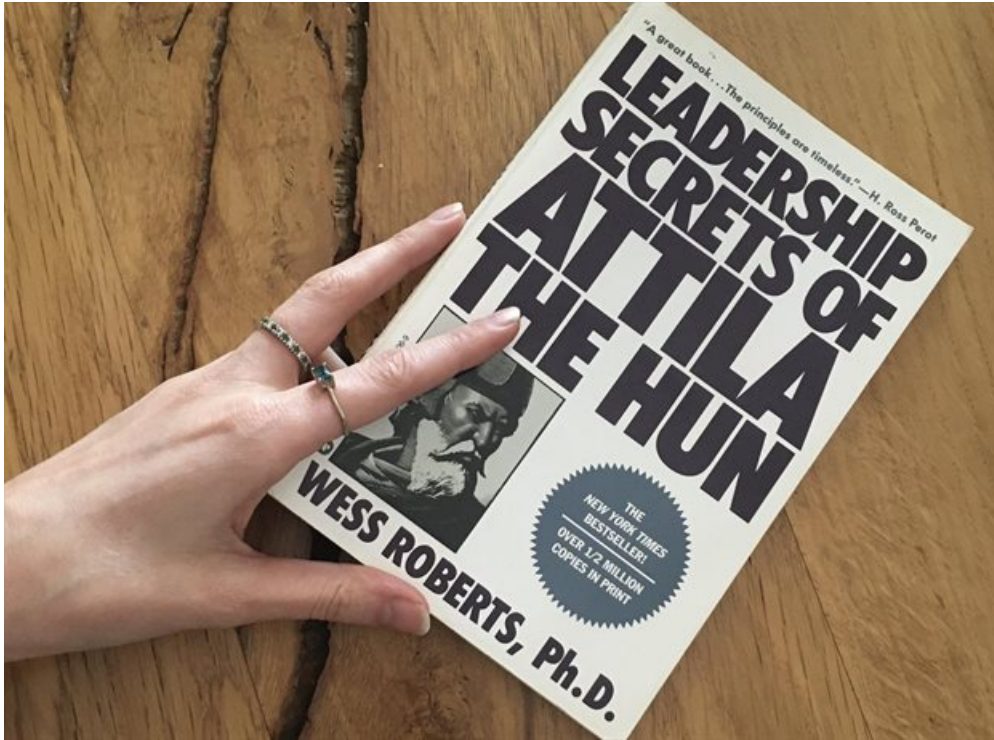


Leadership lessons from terrible people

 By [Bronwyn Williams](#)

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I spend a lot of time reading, thinking and talking about leadership - what makes leaders effective, what makes them loved and what inspires people to follow someone else into an unknown future.



One thing that stands out very clearly to me, both from reading the rich histories of the kings, saints and emperors of bygone years and observing and working with powerful political and private sector leaders across the world today is that when it comes to leadership, goodness and greatness are not synonyms. Indeed, some of the most effective leaders are also some of the world's worst people. Like it or not, horrible bosses can and do build brilliant, profitable businesses. Ruthless tyrants have conquered nations and established great empires. Likewise, some of the best loved leaders were also among the least successful at actually actualising positive change or progress for and from their followers.

In other words, if good leaders want to become *great* leaders too they would do well to study the tactics and methods of effective leadership wherever those lessons are to be found. Of course, the aim should be to be both good *and* great, but even the most virtuous leader can do more good by learning to be as effective as their less benevolent but more successful peers.

It was with this train of thought in mind that I picked up a copy of Wess Roberts' *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*. This small book was first self-published by the author in 1985 and went on to become a cult-classic after readers discovered just how valuable the lessons it contains are.

Some of my favourite lessons from the book include:

“Beware the treacherous Hun who pledges loyalty in public and spreads discontent in private. Make every effort to identity and remove these ignoble characters, be they chieftains or your best warriors.”

“Once a chieftain has delegated responsibilities, he should never interfere, lest his subordinates come to believe that the duties are not truly theirs. Such superficial delegation yields fury in the hearts of subordinates.”

“Never reward a Hun for doing less than is expected of him. Otherwise he will doubt your sincerity in rewarding appropriate acts and, even worse, expect reward for performing deeds for which you hold no approval.”

“A chieftain who asks the wrong questions always hears the wrong answers.”

“Great chieftains accept failure in some things in order to excel at more important ones.”

This sort of not-so common-sense advice works for whoever is applying it, which is why it is wise to at least attempt to separate the validity of a particular idea, tactic or strategy from the person it originated from.

So, whatever your personal feelings about Attila’s ethics and actions (or the taste-levels Elon Musk tweets), we would do well to study the actions of the leaders who get things done and shape the world according to their own designs if we hope to shape the world according to our own.

ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

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