

# LESSONS FROM HANNIBAL AND ME

*Applying Hannibal's strategies to current events*

By Andreas Kluth

## **Audacity**

The best defense is a good offense, and Sarah Palin has adopted this principle as her own. Wherever she appears, she attacks. When she feels cornered, she attacks harder. Palin might want to study the Roman generals Sempronius, Flaminius, and Varro. Each was ruined by this strategy when he met a shrewder opponent, the Carthaginian Hannibal. All three had only one approach: audacious attack. All had a history of success. But this made them inflexible. Hannibal turned this inflexibility against them. In three separate battles, Hannibal goaded them into attacking, then waited until their forces, through their own momentum, lost their balance. When they did, Hannibal fell upon them.

## **Freedom**

In one of her debates with then-candidate Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton said, "Everyone here knows I've lived through some crises." She could only have been referring to the Monica Lewinsky scandal. That humiliation could have shattered her marriage to Bill Clinton, his presidency, and her own life. That it didn't and instead helped launch her onto a new path suggests that Clinton's psychological journey paralleled that of another former first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1918, Mrs. Roosevelt discovered love letters between her husband, Franklin, and her secretary, Lucy Mercer. She plunged into a deep depression. But in her rage and sorrow, she discovered a feeling of liberation. The Mercer affair freed her to redefine her life's meaning and her options. It also freed her to view her husband honestly, and the two formed a new, very different but ultimately stable bond.

## **Captivity**

At age thirty-eight, Larry Page takes over as chief executive of Google. He cofounded it with Sergey Brin when they were both twenty-five and students at Stanford, after Page invented his revolutionary PageRank search algorithm. In 2001 they hired an older man to be CEO, but ten years later the apprenticeship is over: It is Page's turn to run the company. He might want to review what happened to Albert Einstein at the equivalent juncture in life: At twenty-six, Einstein had produced four short but revolutionary papers that transformed physics. Einstein then kept refining his insights until he was thirty-eight, when he discovered general relativity. Although he did not know it then, this was a turning point. His imagination became a prisoner of its very success. A perplexing conservatism seized Einstein's mind and never let go. Page must make sure that this does not happen to him—or to Google.