

Sam Houston: smart, brave, skilled

He was smart: He studied law and passed the bar in six months. He was honorable: He never spoke a word against his wife after a mysterious marital blowup that ended his career as Tennessee governor. He was brave: His mother exhorted him not to disgrace the musket she gave him, and he never did.

But Sam Houston had hard skills, too. Having lived among the Cherokee as a teenager, Houston actually knew how to do things. If he were alive today, he would blow past the executive whose greatest asset is that he can “hire well.”

Example: While Houston led the ragtag band of volunteers he would use to defeat Santa Anna and win Texas its independence, a soldier walked up and said the lock on his rifle wouldn’t work. Houston told him to leave the gun and come back in an hour. When the soldier returned, he apologized profusely to Houston. He hadn’t known that the man pointed out to him as a blacksmith was actually the commander.

“My friend, he told you right,” Houston answered. “I am a very good blacksmith.” With that, Houston picked up the gun, snapped the lock and gave it back, fixed.

Lesson: Know your business. You may never be able to do a particular job as well as your top specialists, but you need hard skills to lead.

— Adapted from *The Raven*, Marquis James, University of Texas Press.