



U.S. Navy Adm. William H. McRaven makes remarks during his retirement ceremony on August 28, 2014. (DoD photo by Staff Sgt. Sean K. Harp)

Make Your Bed

Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe The World

By William H. McRaven

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Sometimes the simple is profound: *Stop, drop, and roll* (“Stop, Drop, and Roll,” n.d.), *keep it simple, stupid* (KISS) (Anderson, 2014), or even *be, know, do*, the Army’s old leadership model (Reuter, 2016). These are all short, yet effective strategies to plan, lead, or even save lives. Being elegantly simple can be important, as often over-complicating things can add stress, unnecessary steps in planning, and more problems. Luckily, retired Adm. William H. McRaven, U.S. Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL), and former commander of Joint Special Oper-

ations Command has written a book that details how to keep a plan, and ultimately one’s life, simple and effective. In his book, *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...and Maybe the World*, he describes 10 life lessons derived from his time as a SEAL, taken from his 2015 University of Texas at Austin commencement speech, his alma mater (“Adm. McRaven,” 2014). At 130 pages long, and no thicker than the standard Field Supply Service green notebook most leaders carry, McRaven delivers a powerful, yet simple, plan to instill daily



A U.S. Army Soldier takes down a U.S. Air Force Airman during a U.S. Army Combatives course at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, on Feb. 19, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Adan Cazarez)

behaviors that increase productivity and build character.

At the onset, McRaven suggests people should start the day by making their bed. This is a small victory, and provides a sense of accomplishment early in the day that can set someone up for success with the rest of their day. There is a science behind small wins and productivity. In Amabile and Kramer's (2011) study on moods and progress, they state that "we found that the most common event triggering a 'best day' was any progress in the work by the individual or the team. The most common event triggering a 'worst day' was a setback" (para. 11). Therefore, loading one's morning with small victories early on primes the day for a success, even when there are setbacks.

In his book, McRaven does not overdo or overthink his subject matter. Packaged tightly, his principles include: you cannot go it alone; only the size of the heart matters, life's not fair—drive on; failure can make you stronger; you must dare greatly; stand up to the bullies; rise to the occasion; give people hope, and never, ever quit. These are all beneficial life lessons and are important for self-development, but in this review, we'll only be looking at the four sections that stand out as the most beneficial to creating needed leaders in today's Army.

Failure Can Make You Stronger

Although the U.S. Army has lessons learned programs, and religiously conducts after action reviews, it rarely addresses and considers failure openly, despite its benefits toward self and organizational improvement. Dan Maurer states in his 2017 essay for the *Modern Warfare Institute*, "Nowhere does Army doctrine pro-

mote the virtue of failing. We want winners studding the ranks, after all, and certainly we wish for winners among our leaders" (para. 3). Yet in this section, McRaven displays an appreciated candor and transparency as he talks about his injuries, subsequent self-doubt, and failures.

Leaders, Army or otherwise, should have open, candid conversations about their successes and how far they have come, but should also be comfortable talking about their downfalls as well. McRaven provides such an assessment as he suggests that complete reflection, both positive and negative, prove beneficial in long-term self-development.

Stand up to the Bullies

In this section, McRaven invites readers to a portion of Basic Underwater Demolition School (BUDS), where SEAL candidates swim four miles from San Clemente Island into the Pacific Ocean, often in shark-infested waters—home to leopard, mako, hammerhead, and great white sharks (McRaven, 2017). All of this done at night.

McRaven argues that without courage he would not have been able to complete the challenge. People encounter predatory foes throughout their daily lives, whether at work, school, or other social settings. Bullies, much like the sharks, are real and prevalent today, even in the U.S. Army (Vergun, 2012). They come in all shapes and sizes: subordinates, peers, and supervisors. The U.S. Army recognizes bullying as a problem and is cracking down on this behavior (Zwerdling, 2014). Because bullying has disastrous effects on its targets (and organization), it is imperative that bullies are confronted ("Bullying Facts," 2017). McRaven encourages readers to stand up to bullies in classrooms, conference rooms, and board rooms.



U.S. Navy Adm. William H. McRaven, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command in MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., speaks to U.S. service members deployed overseas Nov. 28, 2013, at Bagram Air Field, Parwan province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Osvaldo Equite)

Instill Hope in Others

In this section of his book, McRaven shares a story where he is neck-high in grime in the Tijuana mudflats. He and his fellow classmates are half-way through Hell Week, the seminal event of phase one of SEAL training. This event is characterized by non-stop events and sleep deprivation, and designed to eliminate the mentally weak. Most candidates quit during this week more than any other time in SEAL training (McRaven, 2017). As the cold and fatigue set in, and the instructors were encouraging them to quit, a candidate began singing. His singing signified hope. It convinced those that were beginning to waver to stand firm and focus on getting through that particular moment without quitting.

To further his point, McRaven uses a poignant moment that occurred at Dover Air Force Base, where the coffins of dead service members return to the United States. He remembers how Lt. Gen. John Kelly, former White House Chief of Staff, who also lost a loved one in combat, was able to provide the appropriate and comforting words of hope and encouragement, while McRaven struggled to find the right words.

McRaven reminds readers that there is power and grace when looking out for one another. He encourages all readers to inspire hope and be compassionate to one another. Great achievements are never accomplished alone.

Never, Ever Quit

This final section serves as a reminder that despite experiencing hardships, challenges, and setbacks, quitting is never the answer. Life presents us with a myriad of challenges, hardships, and setbacks that often stretch and test our determination and perseverance. SEAL candidates who ring the bell indicate to the instructors, other candidates, and most importantly to themselves, that they have chosen to quit. And like his SEAL instructors state, you never forget quitting.

Additionally, McRaven weaves in a story about an Army Ranger who lost his limbs on his first combat patrol (McRaven, 2017). Through it all, he maintained a positive attitude, never felt sorry for himself, and eventually recovered. McRaven implores readers to not get down about the bad things that happen in their lives. Instead, he implores them to follow their dreams and stand tall against the odds (McRaven 2017).

Conclusion

The author's message is wonderfully simple. Make your bed. Fill your day with victories. Stand up to tyrants. Be a role model and inspire others. And never quit. This book is a blueprint for becoming not just a great leader, but a decent human being. ■

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