



U.S. Navy Sea, Air, and Land Team Members conduct military field operations during exercise TRIDENT 18-4 at Hurlburt Field, Florida, July 11th, 2018. Exercise TRIDENT is a Joint Staff (J7) Joint National Training Capability (JNTC) accredited Joint Exercise Program. Exercise TRIDENT series is a United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) sponsored, Naval Special Operations Command (NSWC) executed, joint maritime certification and validation Mission Readiness Exercise (MRX) which provides realistic and relevant readiness training to U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), conventional forces, partner forces and interagency participants in an irregular warfare scenario. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Corban Lundborg)

Extreme Ownership

How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win

by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

Book Review By Lt. Col. Amy Thompson

E*xtrême Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* is a book that shares valuable leadership lessons learned from combat during the Battle of Ramadi in Iraq and relays them in a clear manner for any leader who wants to be more effective. In the profession of arms, the mission and the lives of Soldiers depend upon unwavering professionalism and effective leadership at every level. Soldiers deserve outstanding leadership, and it is a leader's job to strive for improvement while leading from the front. This review highlights

the authors' key points on effective leadership and why it matters to the U.S. Army.

Effective Leaders Take Ownership

"As a leader, if your team isn't doing what you need them to do, you first have to look at yourself" (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 230).

Extreme ownership is the core fundamental concept behind effective leadership. Effective leaders build and lead

successful teams that accomplish the mission and win. Ownership is the realization that a leader is ultimately responsible for everything the team does or does not do. The leader owns everything. Every success. Every failure. There is no one else to blame (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Humility and Leadership

“For leaders, the humility to admit and own mistakes is essential to success” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 8).

The authors portray humility as a critical character trait in effective leadership. Mission accomplishment and team success drive effective leaders, not ego. Level five leadership is a concept discussed in *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't*, in which the most effective leaders display a powerful combination of personal humility and ambition towards a higher team-oriented purpose (Collins, 2001). A humble leader is better able to acknowledge mistakes, problems, and friction points, and develop a plan to overcome challenges and win. They look through an objective lens without emotional attachments to agendas, or people, and set their ego aside. Ego distorts reality, blinds our ability to see clearly, and tells us we are better than we actually are. Ego prevents the direct and honest connection to the world around us. Effective leaders seek reality, no matter how uncomfortable, in order to improve, accomplish the mission, and win (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Mission First

“I will always place the mission first” (ARMY.MIL, n.d.b, para. 1).

According to Babbin and Willink’s (2015) style of direct leadership, accomplishing the mission is the highest priority. Everyone has an obligation to do his or her job with excellence and add value to the team. The leader must constantly remind the team they are part of a greater strategic mission. The Army’s top leaders make it clear that combat readiness is the number one priority because its mission is to deploy, fight, and win the nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force (Esper & Milley, 2018). Effective leadership depends on good communication (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012). An Army leader’s responsibility is to communicate what matters in a simple manner to the lowest level so everyone understands the mission. If the team does not understand the mission, the leader must accept responsibility. Clear



Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL students participate in Surf Passage at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado. Surf Passage is one of many physically demanding evolutions that are a part of the first phase of SEAL training. Navy SEALs are the maritime component of U.S. special forces and are trained to conduct a variety of operations from the sea, air and land. (Courtesy photo by Kyle Gahlau)

communication by the leader is critical to team understanding, success, and mission accomplishment (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Team Success

“All elements within the greater team are crucial and must work together to accomplish the mission” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 122).

The star of the team: is the team. No individual should take priority over the rest of the team. Effective leaders drive their teams to achieve high standards of performance and create a climate of accountability. Every person must operate effectively and appropriately for the team to succeed and accomplish the mission. When a subordinate is not doing his or her job, a leader must first look in the mirror and ask themselves if they communicated the mission clearly. If an individual is not performing at a level required for the team to succeed, the leader must provide further instruction and training. If under-performance continues, the leader must be loyal to the good of the team and mission, and remove the individual or help the individual become successful elsewhere (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Loyalty vs. Misguided Loyalty

“A leader must be loyal to the mission and the team above any individual” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 30).

Misguided loyalty is corrosive to the mission. In the profession of arms, loyalty takes place in a hierarchical manner given the greater purpose above self in defending the nation and the American people. We must first bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution,

the Army, the unit, and then a fellow Soldier (Army.mil, n.d.a). Misguided loyalty occurs when the protection of an individual occurs at the expense of the team or the mission. Tolerating poor performance, problems, or allowing any individual, including the leader, to become more important than the team or the mission will contribute to low morale and failure. To avoid misguided loyalty the leader must take extreme ownership and make decisions objectively with a mission focus (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Balance in Leadership

“Leaders must balance opposing forces and lead with maximum effectiveness” (Willink & Babin, 2015, p. 274).

In the last section of the book, the authors stress the importance of balance in effective leadership. Maintaining balance takes continuous self-awareness and introspection. Great leaders seek feedback and constantly strive for improvement. To remain effective for the team and mission, leaders must adjust and stay balanced. In general, when a leader struggles, they have leaned too far in one direction and steered off course. Polarity

thinking is a concept that allows leaders to navigate a healthy tension between two opposing forces by leveraging the advantages of both to remain steadfast for the mission (Johnson, 2014). The dichotomies of leadership are worth reflecting upon, because a strength can easily become a weakness, and a leader must continuously navigate a healthy tension. One must lead yet be ready to follow. Be aggressive but not overbearing. Calm yet not robotic. Confident while not arrogant. Courageous but not foolish. Competitive yet a gracious loser. Humble but not passive. Detail-oriented but not obsessive. Strong but with endurance. Engaged but not too close. All while realizing that as a leader you have nothing to prove, but everything to prove (Willink & Babin, 2015).

Life-long Leadership Development

I recommend *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* to anyone across the ranks who wants to be a more effective leader. Mission success depends on every team and individual operating at their best. There is no finish line in leadership development. Everyone wins when a leader improves, and the Army depends on effective leadership.

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