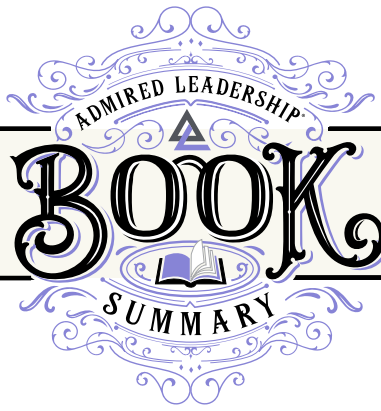




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



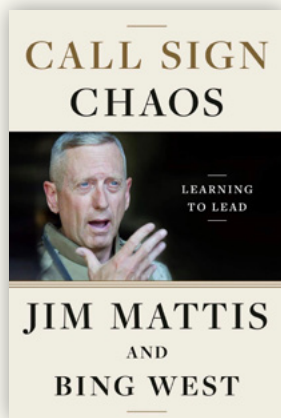
December 2021

# Call Sign Chaos

Learning to Lead

Published 2019

BOOK AUTHOR: JIM MATTIS AND BING WEST



General James N. Mattis, the 26th United States Secretary of Defense, recounts the lessons learned during his many years in the Marine Corps and illustrates how his service at all levels shaped his leadership style. His mentorship style has two main components. The first is to help your team master the fundamentals through reading, visualization, and rehearsal. The second is to trust them to use these skills to carry out the strategy autonomously. This method empowers teams to operate with incredible speed and efficiency, especially in new and challenging situations.

## KEY QUOTE

*“By traveling into the past, I enhance my grasp of the present.” — Jim Mattis*

## Key Concepts

Building a team of leaders: “Recruit for attitude and train for skill” (p. 15). While skills are important to success, they can be shaped and transformed far more easily than attitudes, mindsets, and values. “In any organization, it’s all about selecting the right team. The two qualities I was taught to value most in selecting others for promotion or critical roles were initiative and aggressiveness... Institutions get the behaviors they reward” (p. xii).

## Leadership Fundamentals: The Three C's


1. **Competence:** "Be brilliant in the basics. Don't dabble in your job; you must master it" (p. 11).
2. **Caring:** Show your subordinates that you care. The best leaders are able to strike a balance between fostering relational closeness and maintaining authority (p. 12).
3. **Conviction:** Don't make exceptions to the rules. "Know what you will stand for and, more important, what you won't stand for" (p. 12).

### Learn From Reading


Read widely, especially history. You can learn from the mistakes of others so that you don't make them yourself. "We have been fighting on this planet for ten thousand years; it would be idiotic and unethical to not take advantage of such accumulated experiences. If you haven't read hundreds of books, you are functionally illiterate, and you will be incompetent, because your personal experiences alone aren't broad enough to sustain you" (p. 42).

Reading provides context for situations you have yet to experience. "Slowly but surely, we learned there was nothing new under the sun: properly informed, we weren't victims – we could always create options" (p. xii).

Having a common reading list can ensure everyone builds a base of shared knowledge and understands certain fundamental concepts. This makes complicated discussions easier (pp. 42-43).



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### Learn From Visualizations

Mattis uses visualization, or "imaging," as a form of communication to help the group understand how their individual roles fit into the overarching strategy on the battlefield. For certain exercises, they use "a map the size of a basketball court, nicknamed the 'BAM' – the Big-Ass Map" (p. 202).

Visualizations, like reading, are a way to create a better understanding of unfamiliar situations. For example, "the Polish Minister of Defense, Bogdan Klich, flew me in a helicopter from Warsaw to the Baltic so I could see with my own eyes the lack of natural obstacles in his country" (p. 174).

### Learn From Rehearsal

Mastery comes as a result of repetition. Therefore, you should never do something for the first time during a critical moment. Leaders should instead build rehearsals that simulate high-stakes events to allow their reports time to build situational recognition (pp. 150-151).

"I knew that if we kept a Marine alive through his first three firefights, his chances of survival improved. We needed a simulator to train and sharpen cognitive skills until a young leader could swiftly appraise a situation and not hesitate before taking action. He had to develop the cognitive equivalent of muscle memory in order to instinctively seize the initiative" (pp. 150-151).

Once you have mastered the basics through rehearsal, you can start to improvise and adapt. “My intent was to rehearse until we could improvise on the battlefield like a jazzman in New Orleans. This required a mastery of the instruments of war, just as a jazz musician masters his musical instrument” (p. 26).

### **Define the Problem**

Before taking action, it is essential to define the problem you are trying to solve. “Reviewing my self-assigned reading, one fact stood out repeatedly about militaries that successfully transformed to stay at the top of their game. They had all identified and defined to a Jesuit’s level of satisfaction a specific problem they had to solve” (p. 172).

Without a defined objective, you are wasting the time and talent at your disposal (p. 234). “In some cases, I could see what our policymakers didn’t want to happen – we didn’t want Israel attacked, didn’t want Iran with nuclear weapons or mining the Straits of Hormuz, and so on – but I couldn’t find an integrated end state we were trying to achieve: What does it look like when we’re done?” (p. 191)

Share information to get a richer perspective on the problem. “‘What do I know? Who needs to know? Have I told them?’ I repeated it so often that it appeared on index cards next to the phones in some offices” (p. 201).


### **Place Trust in Your Team**

Once your team knows how to improvise, don’t guide them too closely. Make clear your intention but let them plan and execute it themselves.

“Business management books often stress ‘centralized planning and decentralized execution.’ That is too top-down for my taste. I believe in a centralized vision, coupled with decentralized planning and execution” (p. 59).

“Operations occur at the speed of trust” (p. 156). You can never anticipate every element of what your soldiers will face in battle, so you must trust in their ability to navigate the unforeseen. Demonstrating trust by delegating decision-making authority is essential to achieving outcomes in a timely manner.

“The Marine Corps demanded that, as young officers, we learn how to convey our intent so that it passed intact through the layers of intermediate leadership to our youngest Marines. For instance, you may say, ‘We will attack that bridge in order to cut off the enemy’s escape.’ The critical information is your intent, summed up in the phrase ‘in order to.’ If a platoon seizes the bridge and cuts off the enemy, the mission is a success. But if the bridge is seized while the enemy continues to escape, the platoon commander will not sit idly on the bridge. Without asking for further orders, he will move to cut off the enemy’s escape. Such aligned independence is based upon a shared understanding of the ‘why’ for the mission. This is key to unleashing audacity” (p. 44).



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## Take Action

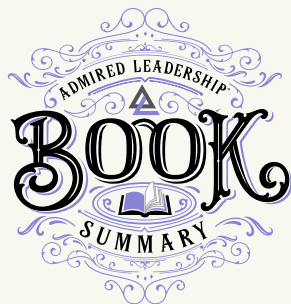
You can't make a perfect decision every time, but it is better to make fast decisions that are sometimes wrong than to take so long that a decision is made for you. This is where you must rely on your extensive background reading and mastery of the basics to guide your instincts (p. 72).

"A military lawyer asked me a list of questions, one of which caused a stir. 'General, how much time did you consider before authorizing the strike?' He knew from the record that the time from when I was awakened until I authorized a strike had been less than thirty seconds. 'About thirty years,' I replied. I may have sounded nonchalant or dismissive, but my point was that a thirty-second decision rested upon thirty years of experience and study" (p. 141).

Set aside time each week to reflect on the bigger picture and your larger strategic goals so they are top of mind when asked to make a quick decision (p. 200).

Sound decisions are more important than desirable outcomes. "When [team members] make mistakes while doing their best to carry out your intent, stand by them. Examine your coaching and how well you articulate your intent. Remember the bottom line: imbue in them a strong bias for action" (p. 45).

Mattis, J. and West, B. (2019). **Call Sign Chaos: Learning to lead.** New York: Random House Publishing Group.



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## The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

We work hard to stay abreast of the current writings on leadership, especially those books our clients are reading or have been recommended to read. As a benefit to our clients and to facilitate our own learning, the Admired Leadership team has long maintained a tradition of summarizing the newest books of interest to leaders. Better to read a summary for eight minutes before investing eight hours in the entire book.

After reading a good summary, we believe leaders are able to make better choices as to what to ignore, what to peruse and what to make the time to read closely.