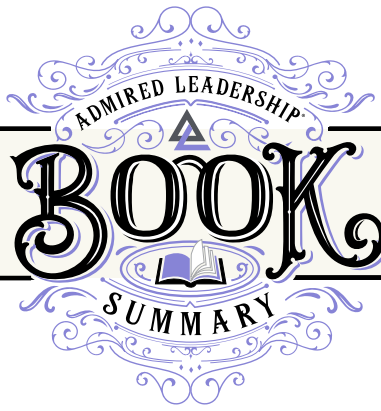




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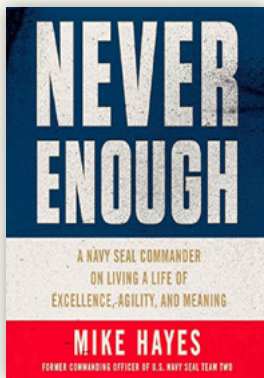
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# Never Enough

A Navy SEAL Commander on Living a Life of Excellence, Agility, and Meaning

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Mike Hayes has devoted his life to persistent growth, and his book *Never Enough* develops and champions his personal manifesto against complacency. Continual growth in all aspects of life is something Hayes has sought not only for his own good, but also for the sake of the families, teams, and country he serves. Hayes tells amazing stories, from his work as a Navy SEAL Commander in Afghanistan to being kidnapped by armed men in Peru to serving as the Director of Defense Policy and Strategy for the National Security Council. Through these stories, he shares life and leadership lessons on how we can think, act, and lead strategically, even in the most dire of conditions. We may never be enough, but we can and must push ourselves to do and be better for the sake of others.

## Key Quote

“No matter what journey you’re on, my intent with this book is to help you figure out what’s truly important, and then provide some ideas and skills to help you get there” (p. 12). — *Mike Hayes*

## Key Concepts

### NEVER EXCELLENT ENOUGH

**Choose the Hard Path: Excellence in Knowledge and Capacity.** It is easy to choose the path of least resistance, but the difference in the kind of life you live is made by choosing the right path, even if it is the harder one. Decisions like choosing the right goals and battles and sticking to your values and beliefs are not showy, but they are harder, better choices. “The greatest trajectory to excellence is trying really hard things” (p. 24).

**Build Comfort With Discomfort: Excellence in Strength and Control.** Uncomfortable situations, whether manufactured or organic, give us the opportunity to hone who we are in difficult moments and build the skills we hope to utilize in bad circumstances. It is key to practice how to remain cool-headed in a tough spot – to be the master of your emotions, so that you do not compromise your values or goals.

**Live With Incredible Confidence and Extreme Humility: Excellence in Accountability and Orientation.** Admit what you don't know and can't do. Be bold and forthcoming about what you do know and can do. You operate as part of a community, and your integrity matters. "Assume everything you do will end up on the front page of the newspaper" (p. 77).

## NEVER AGILE ENOUGH

**Be a Leader and a Follower, and Know When to Be Which: Agility in Roles You Play.** "Dynamic subordination" is the approach high-performance teams have internalized, knowing when to move to the forefront and when to move to the back. Nimble members of a team make sacrifices for the team, work on behalf of the whole team not just themselves, and submit their own personal wishes to the overall goal of the mission – all for the sake of broad versus personal success.

**Learn How to Think, not What to Think: Agility in Decisions You Make.** Think about the **why** behind the decision; think about the bigger picture and context. Surround yourself with people with a broad range of experience and expertise, keeping your eyes on the main point, not the "noise" around the situation. Develop the instinct to know when you have enough vital information to make a decision, and "bring your values to bear in every decision you make" (p. 131).


**Gain Authority by Giving it Away: Agility in the Organizations You Lead.** Use the power you have judiciously and to lift others up. "Share credit, share blame" (p. 157). Be always assessing and always acting, don't lock in to one mode or the other.

## NEVER MEANINGFUL ENOUGH


**Push Your Values Out Into the World: Finding Meaning as an Individual.** Be a person who believes in something bigger than yourself, then walk into each day acting according to that grand framework. Prepare to do what serves the bigger purpose. You cannot predict your future, but you can make decisions now that make sense given who you are and what you value.

**We Live and Die for People, not Causes: Meaning in the Bonds We Build With Others.** Asking hard questions and being vulnerable – this is how we show people we truly care. Listening isn't enough. We must be willing to **act** to truly be a good friend. "Impacting the lives of others is how we bring meaning to our own life" (p. 213).

**Make Differences Where They Will Count the Most: Meaning in Contribution to the World.** In this chapter, we read the account of a brave and devoted SEAL named Kyle who gives his life on his very last mission. His life reminds us of what Kyle believed: give and love as much as you can. "Kyle never missed an opportunity to help a friend or a teammate in need" (p. 223).



*Uncomfortable situations, whether manufactured or organic, give us the opportunity to hone who we are in difficult moments and build the skills we hope to utilize in bad circumstances.*



## BEING NEVER ENOUGH

Complacency is the enemy of excellence. The world needs people in every walk of life who strive to be better.

“This continuous striving to make a bigger difference – for yourself, for your organization, or for the world – is what I believe holds the key to great outcomes in almost any situation” (p. 4).

“[Is] it too negative to imply that we could never be enough, do enough, invest enough of ourselves? I don’t think so. I think we can simultaneously recognize how much we accomplish each day and also understand that our work is never done. There is always growth possible for each of us, ways we can push ourselves to be more excellent, more agile, and infuse our day-to-day with more meaning. There are always more people whose lives we can touch, more people we can lift up and inspire to get better and reach greater heights” (p. 223).

“It’s easy to be complacent. It’s harder to keep on figuring out the work that we need to do. But that work is what drives us to our greatest heights. That work is what drives us to make a real contribution to our world – and the truth is that we all want to contribute, because that’s what makes any of us feel fulfilled” (p. 223).

## LEADING LIKE A NAVY SEAL

SEALs understand that our true self is shown – and our true capabilities are revealed – when we are pushed outside of our comfort zone and beyond our perceived limits (pp. 47-48).

“At its core, being a SEAL is not just about living at the edge of human misery, but about thriving and achieving success in those conditions. In the non-SEAL world, there is still plenty we can each do to push our limits and make ourselves more comfortable with discomfort” (p. 49).

Training as a SEAL is “designed not just to be difficult, and not just to train SEALs to maintain their composure during the most challenging life-or-death situations, but to engender learning, growth, and the realization that you can do more than you think you can” (p. 25).



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## NEVER EXCELLENT ENOUGH

People oriented towards excellence never stop improving.

“The day you stop improving is the day you stop being a SEAL” (p. 27).

“On an individual level, we must look to be **Never Excellent Enough** and build our own capabilities in terms of knowledge and capacity, strength and control, and accountability and orientation” (p. 10).

“The growth that gets us to be more and more excellent over time is powered by hard work, absolutely, but it’s also powered by reflection and real learning” (p. 29).

“Being humble enough to admit what you don’t know, but still confident enough to explain where you can add value is a balance that is often hard to strike. But you need to recognize that it’s a strength, not a weakness, to know what’s beyond your knowledge or understanding at any point in time, instead of pretending otherwise” (p. 65).

## NEVER AGILE ENOUGH

Rigidity and tunnel vision are enemies of effective leadership.

Agile, nimble, flexible: these are the active traits of dynamic individuals, teams, and organizations.

“On a team and organizational level, we must aim to be Never Agile Enough and understand how to shift between roles to best serve our missions, how to put systems in place that lead to superior decision-making, and how to keep our teams as flexible and responsive as possible” (pp. 10-11).

“We’re never going to be in the exact same situation a second time, so the decisions themselves – the “what” – don’t matter. It’s the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ we have to think about” (p. 116).

“We need to be flexible in our roles, moving seamlessly between leading and following, and we need to be flexible in our decisions, setting up a framework that enables the most useful information to emerge and guide us even as situations change” (p. 166).

“Dynamic subordination,” or serving as both a leader and as a follower, and knowing when to be which, is an idea adopted by effective teams (p. 91).

“If hierarchy is getting in the way of the best decision being made, or precluding the best person from taking on any particular role, then something is deeply wrong” (p. 98).

It’s important to have people with a range of experiences and perspectives to have the broadest diversity of thought possible. It is true that “all the things that make us different provide the range of perspectives and points of view we absolutely need whenever we’re making decisions” (p. 121).

“You train the next generation at the same time as you execute your own duties. You set the tone that you want the entire organization to embody” (p. 144).

## NEVER MEANINGFUL ENOUGH

“On an impact level, we must act to be **Never Meaningful Enough**, knowing what will make the biggest difference for the people in our lives and in our communities, and potentially on an even larger scale” (p. 11).

“It’s not the specifics of my belief that matter in terms of helping me better my life and making me more effective in everything I do – it’s the fact that I believe in **something**, that there’s a core set of values driving my actions.” “We all fall short, inevitably, but what matters is how we handle those moments, and whether we can get back on course” (pp. 170-171).



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To align your life and actions with meaning, you must (1) “believe in something,” (2) identify and act according to what is meaningful to you, and (3) not wait to make decisions (p. 171).

“If you’re ever having trouble figuring out what is most meaningful to you or what kinds of goals you ought to be chasing, think about what you would do if you could spend your time doing anything you wanted. The activities and causes to which you naturally gravitate are the best places to start searching for opportunities to contribute” (p. 185).

“Diversity of faith isn’t something we always think about in the same way we think about all the other diversities we need to celebrate, but it’s just as critical. Sharing our beliefs with others, baring our truest selves, [and] finding common elements and bonding because of them can be so powerful” (p. 177).

## PRACTICING EXCELLENCE, AGILITY, AND MEANING

“The way to extract maximum knowledge from these hard challenges we undertake is to be truly objective and reflective about our performance, in success just as much as in failure” (p. 29).

It’s not about doing hard things. It’s about recognizing that hard things and trying periods are opportunities to reflect, believe in our capabilities, and overcome the external and internal pressures to succeed (p. 50).

Decisions that force you to pick one option or the other result from learning what to think. Instead, you should practice how to think, where you have “a true thought process, considering the bigger picture, having confidence about the elements of a situation that you can control, realizing that the best decisions don’t just follow a simple algorithm but actually involve a consideration of the principles layered on top of the rules, and the specific circumstances of the situation” (p. 115).

“We can’t be good partners, friends, spouses, and parents without emotion, without feelings, without vulnerability and genuine honesty. But we also can’t be effective performers if we aren’t able to compartmentalize, to put those feelings aside when they’re not helpful to the situation at hand. We need to be able to react well to whatever circumstance presents itself, and we need to remember that calm breeds calm” (p. 62).

Enter every conversation with the assumption that everyone else is better, smarter, and superior in all ways to you. Never assume that your idea is the correct idea from the beginning. That way, you are poised to identify the best solution, and not solely focused on defending yours (p. 66).

## PRACTICING EXCELLENCE, AGILITY, AND MEANING WITH TEAMS

“There are three principles I live by in [cultivating relationships]: to be intrusive in people’s lives, to be a doer rather than a be-er, and to push to have real impact on those around me” (p. 200).

“Real networking comes from investing energy in other people, giving more than taking, without thinking about whether you’ll ever get paid back.” It is important to understand that “the people you invest in without an expectation of investment in return will be the first people who help you whenever it is they can” (p. 201).



*But we also can't be effective performers if we aren't able to compartmentalize, to put those feelings aside when they're not helpful to the situation at hand. We need to be able to react well to whatever circumstance presents itself, and we need to remember that calm breeds calm.”*



“High-performing teams – and not just in the military – succeed and fail together, with the best players understanding at all moments what will make the mission more successful and what role they need to play to best enable that success” (p. 92).

“We all have to do what we can to make the lives of those around us easier, not harder” (p. 97).

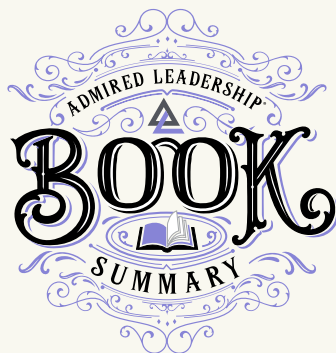
We get the best “return on investment” for any effort or mission “when we discuss in an honest and direct way what we could have done better. True, honest, specific, and shared feedback is how we improve” (p. 30).

Even if things are uncomfortable to share in front of the whole group, opinions and frustrations need to be owned and honestly communicated to the group to create trust (p. 30).

“When working in a situation where I can absorb some of a leader’s burdens – whether in the military, the White House, or in business – I’ve tried to divide the tasks we perform into three categories: what I can do that my boss doesn’t even need to think about, what I can do that I can tell my boss about later, and what I absolutely need to tell my boss about now to make sure we are on the same page” (p. 98).

Leaders should encourage others in their organization to “run” and “renovate.” Getting the job done in the moment (running) but also determining what needs to be figured out to enable long-term success (renovating) is paramount to influencing a system (p. 159).

Hayes, M. (2021). **Never Enough: A Navy SEAL Commander on Living a Life of Excellence, Agility, and Meaning.** New York: Celadon.



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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.