



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



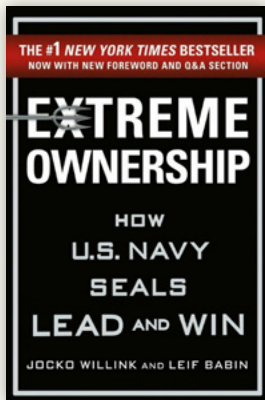
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Extreme Ownership

How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win

BOOK AUTHORS: JOCKO WILLINK AND LEIF BABIN

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In **Extreme Ownership**, former Navy SEALs Jocko Willink and Leif Babin document their experiences as part of Task Unit Bruiser in Iraq. Their specific mission involved helping U.S. forces secure the city of Ramadi during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Bearing the responsibility for the lives of Americans and Iraqi allies, the authors owned operational failures. This “extreme ownership” enabled them to make critical changes, defeat Iraqi insurgents, and save lives. Willink and Babin believe that leadership is the most critical factor in determining a team’s success. Their book outlines several fundamental principles leaders should fully embrace to exercise extreme ownership.

Key Quote

“On any team, in any organization, all responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader. *The leader must own everything in his or her world*” (p. 30). — Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

Key Points

Extreme Ownership. “The best leaders don’t just take responsibility for their job. They take Extreme Ownership of everything that happens” (p. 30).

No Bad Teams, Only Bad Leaders. “When leaders who epitomize Extreme Ownership drive their teams to achieve a higher standard of performance, they must recognize that when it comes to standards, as a leader, *it’s not what you preach, it’s what you tolerate*” (p. 54).

Believe. The leader “must be a true believer in the mission” (p. 76).

Check the Ego. “Ego clouds and disrupts everything” (p. 100).

Cover and Move. Teamwork is essential. “All the elements within the greater team are crucial and must work together” (pp. 121-122).

Simple. “Plans and order must be communicated in a way that is simple, clear, concise” (p. 140).

Prioritize and Execute. As complicated and messy as things may get, rather than get bogged down in multiple issues all at once, “leaders must determine the highest priority task and execute” (p. 161).

Decentralized Command. “Junior leaders must be empowered to make decisions on key tasks necessary to accomplish that mission in the most effective and efficient manner possible” (p. 183).

Plan. Clear directives are followed by a plan for a course of action. “**Leaders must delegate the planning process down the chain as much as possible to key subordinate leaders,**” and the entire team should be briefed (p. 204). “The test for an effective brief is simple: Do the team and the supporting elements understand it?” (p. 205).

Leading Up and Down the Chain of Command.

Leaders and subordinates each have their unique roles, but there must be understanding between them of what others’ roles are. And junior members must understand how they contribute to the goal. As a junior member of the team, convince the leader what you need to succeed, using “caution and respect” (p. 238).

Decisiveness Amid Uncertainty. Leaders rarely have the whole story, but they must be able to “make the best decisions they can based on only the immediate information available” (p. 254).

Discipline Equals Freedom. Leaders must demonstrate discernment and navigate between ideas like discipline and freedom, leading and following, etc.

Key Concepts:

“BLUE-ON-BLUE”

During an attack in Ramadi, Iraq, a SEAL sniper team occupying a nearby building compound was mistaken by Iraqi allies as enemy forces, and the two parties engaged in friendly fire, which resulted in one death and several injuries (p. 21).

“Despite all the failures of individuals, units, and leaders, and despite the myriad of mistakes that had been made, there was only one person to blame for everything that had gone wrong on the operation: me” (p. 26).

“I had to take complete ownership of what went wrong. That is what a leader does – even if it means getting fired” (p. 26).



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take responsibility for their job.
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“Looking back, it is clear that, despite what happened, the full ownership I took of the situation actually increased the trust my commanding officer and master chief had in me.” In fact, “The SEALs in the troop, who did not expect me to take the blame, respected that I had taken full responsibility for everything that had happened” (p. 28).

“While some commanders took full responsibility for blue-on-blue, others blamed their subordinates for simulated fratricide incidents in training. These weaker commanders would get a solid explanation about the burden of command and the deep meaning of responsibility: the leader is truly and ultimately responsible for **everything**” (p. 29).

“As a result of this tragic incident, we undoubtedly saved lives going forward. While we were mistakenly engaged by friendly elements again many times during the rest of deployment, we never let it escalate and were always able to regain control quickly” (p. 29).

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Own it. “The leader must own everything in his or her world. There is no one else to blame. The leader must acknowledge mistakes and admit failures, take ownership of them, and develop a plan to win” (p. 30).

“The leader bears full responsibility for explaining the strategic mission, developing the tactics, and securing the training and resources to enable the team to properly and successfully execute” (p. 30).

Prioritize. When overwhelmed with multiple problems or tasks, leaders must prioritize and promptly execute to avoid inaction and lead effectively (p. 161).

Decentralize. Leaders need to practice decentralized command. “It requires tremendous trust and confidence in those frontline leaders, who must very clearly understand the strategic mission and ensure that their immediate tactical decisions ultimately contribute to accomplishing the overarching goals” (p. 171).

Act. Leaders will not always have a complete picture or understanding of the enemy’s actions or reactions. However, “It is critical for leaders to act decisively amid uncertainty; to make the best decisions they can based on only the immediate information available” (p. 254).

Balance. Leaders must navigate the line between confidence and cockiness, bravery and foolhardiness, humility and passiveness, being aggressive but not overbearing, etc. Among other things, they also need the ability to both lead and to follow and to be both competitive and gracious. (p. 275-6).

FAILURE AND ATTITUDE

An attitude of ownership. “Total responsibility for failure is a difficult thing to accept, and taking ownership when things go wrong requires extraordinary humility and courage. But doing just that is an absolute necessity to learning, growing as a leader, and improving a team’s performance” (p. 31).



“Despite all the failures of individuals, units, and leaders, and despite the myriad of mistakes that had been made, there was only one person to blame for everything that had gone wrong on the operation: me.”



“When a bad SEAL leader walked into a debrief and blamed everyone else, that attitude was picked up by subordinates and team members, who then followed suit. They all blamed everyone else, and inevitably the team was ineffective and unable to properly execute a plan” (p. 37).

Check your ego and improve. “The best leaders checked their egos, accepted blame, sought out constructive criticism, and took detailed notes for improvement” (p. 37).

In sum, “leadership is the single greatest factor in any team’s performance. The leader’s attitude sets the tone for the entire team.” “The leader drives performance – or doesn’t” (p. 49).

MANAGING INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS

Mentor. “If an individual on the team is not performing at the level required for the team to succeed, the leader must train and mentor that underperformer.” That said, if the underperformer fails to rise to the challenge, “the leader must make the tough call to terminate them and hire others who can get the job done. It is all on the leader” (p. 30).

Believe. “In order to convince and inspire others to follow and accomplish a mission, a leader must be a true believer in the mission.” It is fundamental. “If a leader does not believe, he or she will not take the risks required to overcome the inevitable challenges necessary to win” (p. 76).

Simplify. “Simplifying as much as possible is crucial to success. When plans and orders are too complicated, people may not understand them. **And when things go wrong, and they inevitably do go wrong,** complexity compounds issues that can spiral out of control into total disaster” (p. 140).

Lead up, lead down. Leading up the chain involves “tactful engagement with the immediate boss (or in military terms, higher headquarters) to obtain decisions and support necessary to enable your team to accomplish its mission and ultimately win” (p. 237).

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Set expectations and act accordingly. “When it comes to standards, as a leader, **it’s not what you preach, it’s what you tolerate.** When setting expectations, no matter what has been said or written, if substandard performance is accepted and no one is held accountable – if there are no consequences – that poor performance becomes the new standard” (p. 54).

Push to improve, to raise the bar. “The best teams anywhere, like the SEAL teams, are constantly looking to improve, add capability, and push the standards higher. It starts with the individual and spreads to each of the team members until this becomes the culture, the new standard” (p. 55).



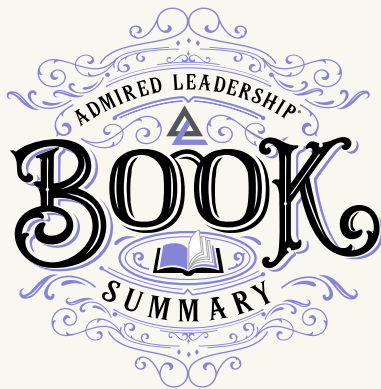
“The best leaders checked their egos, accepted blame, sought out constructive criticism, and took detailed notes for improvement.”



Pull your weight. In Task Unit Bruiser, there was a level of individual accountability associated with performance in that “each man was expected to maintain that high level of physical conditioning so that he could pull his weight and never falter on an operation. We had to be ready to carry a wounded comrade in full, heavy combat gear to safety across rugged terrain” (p. 66).

Never satisfied. “Leaders should never be satisfied. They must always strive to improve, and they must build that mind-set into the team” (p. 55).

Willink, Jocko and Leif Babin (2015). **Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win.** New York: St. Martin's Press.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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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.