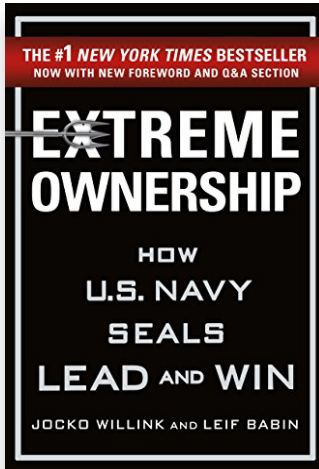


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Extreme Ownership

THE SUMMARY

St. Martin's Press 2015

Preface

This book isn't meant to be an individual's glorified war story. As SEALs, we operate as a team of high-caliber, multitalented individuals who have been through perhaps the toughest military training and most rigorous screening process anywhere, but the SEAL program is all about *the Team*. The sum is far greater than the parts. We refer to our professional warfare community simply as "the Teams." We call ourselves "team guys." This book describes SEAL combat operations and training through our eyes and applies our experiences to leadership and management practices in the business world.

Far from being ours alone, the war stories in this book are of the brothers and leaders we served with and fought alongside who are the Team. The combat scenarios describe how we confronted obstacles as a team and overcame those challenges together. After all, there can be no leadership where there is no team.

Our SEAL combat experiences depicted in this book have been carefully edited to conceal specific tactics, techniques, and procedures, and to guard classified information about specific operations and who participated in them. The manuscript was submitted and approved through the Pentagon's Security Review process in accordance with U.S. Department of Defense requirements.

Extreme Ownership

The idea for this book was born from the realization that the principles critical to SEAL success on the battlefield, including how SEALs train and prepare their leaders, how they mold and develop high-performance teams, and how they lead in combat, are directly applicable to success in any group, organization, corporation, business, and, to a broader degree, life. This book provides the reader with our formula for success. It explains the mind-set and guiding principles that enable SEAL leaders and combat units to achieve extraordinary results. It demonstrates how to apply these directly in business and life to likewise achieve victory.

Introduction: Leadership: The Single Most Important Factor

This book is about leadership. Though it contains exciting accounts of SEAL combat operations, this book is not a war memoir. It is instead a collection of lessons learned from our experiences to help other leaders achieve victory. Among the legions of leadership books in publication, we found that most focus on individual practices and personal character traits. But without a team, a group of individuals working to accomplish a mission, there can be no leadership. The only meaningful measure for a leader is whether the team succeeds or fails.

For all the definitions, descriptions, and characterizations of leaders, there are only two that matter: effective and ineffective. Effective leaders lead successful teams that accomplish their mission and win. Ineffective leaders do not. The principles and concepts described in this book, when properly understood and implemented, enable any leader to become effective and dominate his or her battlefield.

Some may wonder how Navy SEAL combat leadership principles translate outside the military realm to leading any team in any capacity. But combat is reflective of life, only amplified and intensified. Decisions have immediate consequences, and absolutely everything is at stake. The right decision, even when all seems lost, can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The wrong decision, even when a victorious outcome seems all but certain, can result in deadly, catastrophic failure.

We hope to dispel the myth that military leadership is easy because subordinates robotically and blindly follow orders. On the contrary, U.S. military personnel are smart, creative, freethinking individuals. They must literally risk life and limb to accomplish the mission. For this reason, they must believe in the plan they are asked to execute, and most important, they must believe in and trust the leader they are asked to follow. This is especially true in the SEAL Teams, where innovation and input from everyone (including the most junior personnel) are encouraged.

Combat leadership requires getting a diverse team of people in various groups to execute highly complex missions in order to achieve strategic goals. This is something that directly correlates with any company or organization. The same principles that make SEAL combat leaders and SEAL units so effective on the battlefield can be applied to the business world with the same success.

This book derives its title from the underlying principle or mind-set that provides the foundation for all the rest: Extreme Ownership. Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame.

Extreme Ownership

PART I: WINNING THE WAR WITHIN

Chapter 1: Extreme Ownership

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.* 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.

The best leaders don't just take responsibility for their job. They take Extreme Ownership of everything that impacts their mission. When subordinates aren't doing what they should, leaders that exercise Extreme Ownership cannot blame the subordinates. 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.

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 under-performer. But if that under-performer continually fails to meet standards, then a leader who exercises Extreme Ownership must be loyal to the team and the mission above any individual. If under-performers cannot improve, 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.

As individuals, we often attribute the success of others to luck or circumstances and make excuses for our own failures and the failures of our team. We blame our own poor performance on bad luck, circumstances beyond our control, or poorly performing subordinates. In other words, we blame anyone but ourselves. Total responsibility for failure is a difficult thing to accept, and taking ownership when things go wrong requires extraordinary humility and courage.

As the officer in charge of training for the West Coast SEAL teams, I've observed that the best performing SEAL units have leaders who accept responsibility for everything. Every mistake, every failure or shortfall is owned by those leaders. During the debriefing session after a training mission, those good SEAL leaders took ownership of failures. The best leaders checked their egos, accepted blame, sought out constructive criticism, and took detailed notes for improvement. They exhibited Extreme Ownership, and as a result, their SEAL platoons and task units dominated.

Chapter 2: No Bad Teams, Only Bad Leaders

As the officer in charge of Hell Week for a particular class of SEALs, I observed that one seven-man "boat crew" of students placed dead last in virtually every competition. Rather than working together, the men operated as individuals, furious and frustrated at their teammates. Another boat crew won or nearly won every single race. They pushed themselves hard every time, worked in unison and operated as a team. They had a strong leader, and each of the individual members seemed highly motivated, performed well, and morale was high.

"Let's swap out the boat crew leaders from the best and the worst crews and see what happens," suggested the Senior Chief. All the other controls would remain the same. The heavy and awkward rubber IBS boats manned by the same exhausted crews, cold water, gritty and chafing sand, wearied men competing in challenging races all remained constant. Only a single individual, the leader, would change.

Extreme Ownership

A miraculous turnaround took place. The last place crew went to first place because boat crew members had begun to work together as a team, and *won*. The other team still performed well, though they narrowly lost the race. Each of these teams outperformed all the rest. Had I not witnessed this amazing transformation, I might have doubted it.

How is it possible that switching a single leader had completely turned around the performance of an entire group? The answer: whether a team succeeds or fails is all up to the leader. The leader's attitude sets the tone for the entire team. The leader either drives performance or doesn't.

Leaders must accept total responsibility, own problems that inhibit performance, and develop solutions to those problems. A team could only deliver exceptional performance if a leader ensured the team worked together toward focused goals and enforced high standards of performance, working to continually improve.

Leadership is the most important thing on any battlefield; it is the single greatest factor in whether a team succeeds or fails. A leader must find a way to become effective and drive performance within his or her team in order to win. Whether in SEAL training, in combat on distant battlefields, in business, or in life, there are no bad teams, only bad leaders.

Chapter 3: Believe

In order to convince and inspire others to follow and accomplish a mission, a leader must be a *true believer* in the mission. Even when others doubt and question the amount of risk, asking, "Is it worth it?" the leader must believe in the greater cause. If a leader does not believe, he or she will not take the risks required to overcome the inevitable challenges necessary to win. Neither will they be able to convince others, especially the frontline troops who must execute the mission, to do so. Leaders must always operate with the understanding that they are part of something greater than themselves and their own personal interests. They must impart this understanding to their teams down to the tactical-level operators on the ground. Far more important than training or equipment, a resolute belief in the mission is critical for any team or organization to win and achieve big results.

In many cases, the leader must align his thoughts and vision to that of the mission. Once a leader believes in the mission, that belief shines through to those below and above in the chain of command. Actions and words reflect belief with a clear confidence and self-assuredness that is not possible when belief is in doubt. The challenge comes when the alignment isn't explicitly clear. When a leader's confidence breaks, those who are supposed to follow him or her see this and begin to question their own belief in the mission.

Every leader must be able to detach from the immediate tactical mission and understand how it fits into strategic goals. When leaders receive an order that they themselves question and do not understand, they must ask the question: *why*? Why are we being asked to do this? Those leaders must take a step back, deconstruct the situation, analyze the strategic picture, and then come to a conclusion. If they cannot determine a satisfactory answer themselves, they must ask questions up the chain of command until they understand *why*. If frontline leaders and troops understand *why*, they can move forward, fully believing in what they are doing. That is leadership.

Extreme Ownership

Chapter 4: Check the Ego

Ego clouds and disrupts everything. It harms the planning process, the ability to take good advice, and the ability to accept constructive criticism. It can even stifle someone's sense of self-preservation. Often, the most difficult ego to deal with is *your own*. Everyone has an ego. Ego drives the most successful people in life, in the SEAL Teams, in the military, and in the business world. They want to win, to be the best. That is good. But when ego clouds our judgment and prevents us from seeing the world as it is, then ego becomes destructive. When personal agendas become more important than the team and the overarching mission's success, performance suffers and failure ensues. Many of the disruptive issues that arise within any team can be attributed directly to a problem with ego.

Implementing Extreme Ownership requires checking your ego and operating with a high degree of humility. Admitting mistakes, taking ownership, and developing a plan to overcome challenges are integral to any successful team. Ego can prevent a leader from conducting an honest, realistic assessment of his or her own performance and the performance of the team.

In the SEAL Teams, we strive to be confident, but not cocky. We take tremendous pride in the history and legacy of our organization. We are confident in our skills and are eager to take on challenging missions that others cannot or aren't willing to execute. But we can't ever think we are too good to fail or that our enemies are not capable, deadly, and eager to exploit our weaknesses. We must never get complacent. This is where controlling the ego is most important.

One critical component of leadership is dealing with people's egos. You must take Extreme Ownership. As a leader, if you approach conflicts as if *he* did something wrong, *he* needs to fix something, and *he* is at fault, it becomes a clash of egos and you two will be at odds. That's human nature. But if you put your own ego in check, meaning *you* take the blame, that will allow him to actually see the problem without his vision clouded by ego. It's on us as leaders to see where we failed to communicate effectively and help our troops clearly understand what their roles and responsibilities are and how their actions impact the bigger strategic picture. Remember, it's not about you. It's about the mission and how to best accomplish it.

PART II: LAWS OF COMBAT

Chapter 5: Cover and Move

When a battle squad travels through a hostile urban environment on foot, standard procedure is to break into small teams. One team "covers" or keeps their weapons trained on possible threats, while the other team "moves." Then those teams reverse roles. In this way, the teams are leapfrogging in bounds, constantly keeping one group covered as they move.

"Cover and Move" is the most fundamental tactic, perhaps the only tactic. Put simply, Cover and Move means teamwork. All elements within the greater team are crucial and must work together to accomplish the mission, mutually supporting one another for that singular purpose. Departments and groups within the team must break down silos, depend on each other and understand who depends on them. If they forsake this principle and operate independently or work against each other, the results can be catastrophic to the overall team's performance.

Extreme Ownership

Within any team, there are divisions that arise. Often, when smaller teams within the team get so focused on their immediate tasks, they forget about what others are doing or how they depend on other teams. They may start to compete with one another, and when there are obstacles, animosity and blame develop. This creates friction that inhibits the overall team's performance. It falls on leaders to continually keep perspective on the strategic mission and remind the team that they are part of the greater team and the strategic mission is paramount.

Each member of the team is critical to success, though the main effort and supporting efforts must be clearly identified. If the overall team fails, everyone fails, even if a specific member or an element within the team did their job successfully. Pointing fingers and placing blame on others contributes to further dissension between teams and individuals. These individuals and teams must instead find a way to work together, communicate with each other, and mutually support one another. The focus must always be on how to best accomplish the mission.

Alternately, when the team succeeds, everyone within and supporting that team succeeds. Accomplishment of the strategic mission is the highest priority. Team members, departments, and supporting assets must always Cover and Move, help each other, work *together*, and support each other to win. This principle is integral for any team to achieve victory.

Chapter 6: Simple

Combat, like anything in life, has inherent layers of complexities. Simplifying as much as possible is crucial to success. When plans and orders are too complicated, people may not understand them. When things go wrong, and they inevitably do go wrong, complexity compounds issues that can spiral out of control into total disaster. Plans and orders must be communicated in a manner that is simple, clear, and concise. Everyone that is part of the mission must know and understand his or her role in the mission and what to do in the event of likely contingencies. As a leader, it doesn't matter how well you feel you have presented the information or communicated an order, plan, tactic, or strategy. If your team doesn't get it, you have not kept things simple and you have failed. You must brief to ensure the lowest common denominator on the team understands.

It is critical, as well, that the operating relationship facilitates the ability of the frontline troops to ask questions that clarify when they do not understand the mission or key tasks to be performed. Leaders must encourage this communication and take the time to explain so that every member of the team understands.

This principle isn't limited to the battlefield. In the business world, and in life, there are inherent complexities. It is critical to keep plans and communication simple. Following this rule is crucial to the success of any team in any combat, business or life.

When young SEAL leaders in training look at targets for training missions, they often try to develop a course of action that accounts for every single possibility they can think of. That results in a plan that is extraordinarily complex and very difficult to follow. While the troops might understand their individual pieces of the plan, they have a hard time following all the intricacies of the grand scheme. Perhaps they can even get away with that a few times if everything goes smoothly, but remember that the enemy gets a vote. Regardless of how you think an operation is going to unfold, the enemy gets

Extreme Ownership

their say as well, and they are going to do something to disrupt it. When something goes wrong, and it eventually does, complex plans add to confusion, which can compound into disaster. Almost no mission ever goes according to plan. There are simply too many variables to deal with. This is where simplicity is key.

Chapter 7: Prioritize and Execute

On the battlefield, countless problems compound in a snowball effect, every challenge complex in its own right, each demanding attention. A leader must remain calm and make the best decisions possible. To do this, SEAL combat leaders utilize “Prioritize and Execute.” We verbalize this principle with this direction: “Relax, look around, make a call.” Even the most competent of leaders can be overwhelmed if they try to tackle multiple problems or a number of tasks simultaneously. The team will likely fail at each of those tasks. Instead, leaders must determine the highest priority task and execute. When overwhelmed, fall back upon this principle: Prioritize and Execute.

Multiple problems and high-pressure, high-stakes environments are not exclusive to combat. They occur in many facets of life and particularly in business. Business decisions may lack the immediacy of life and death, but the pressures on business leaders are still intense. The success or failure of the team, the department, the company, the financial capital of investors, careers, and livelihoods are at stake. These pressures produce stress and demand decisions that often require rapid execution. Such decision making for leaders can be overwhelming.

A particularly effective means to help Prioritize and Execute under pressure is to stay at least a step or two ahead of real-time problems. Through careful contingency planning, a leader can anticipate likely challenges that could arise during execution and map out an effective response to those challenges before they happen. That leader and his or her team are far more likely to win. Staying ahead of the curve prevents a leader from being overwhelmed when pressure is applied and enables greater decisiveness. If the team has been briefed and understands what actions to take through such likely contingencies, the team can then rapidly execute when those problems arise, even without specific direction from leaders.

To implement Prioritize and Execute in any business, team, or organization, a leader must evaluate the highest priority problem, lay out in simple, clear terms the highest priority effort for your team, develop a solution (seeking input from key leaders and the team where possible), and direct the execution of the solution. Move on to the next highest priority problem. Repeat.

Chapter 8: Decentralized Command

Human beings are generally not capable of managing more than six to ten people, particularly when things go sideways and inevitable contingencies arise. No one senior leader can be expected to manage dozens of individuals, much less hundreds. Teams must be broken down into manageable elements of four to five operators, with a clearly designated leader. Those leaders must understand the overall mission, and the ultimate goal of the mission known as the “Commander’s Intent.” Junior leaders must be empowered to make decisions on key tasks necessary to accomplish that mission in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Teams within teams are organized for maximum effectiveness for a particular mission, with leaders who have clearly delineated responsibilities. Every tactical-level team leader must understand *not just what to do but why they are doing it*. If frontline leaders do not understand why, they must ask their boss to clarify the why.

Extreme Ownership

Decentralized Command does not mean junior leaders or team members operate on their own program. That results in chaos. Instead, junior leaders must fully understand what is within their decision-making authority or the “left and right limits” of their responsibility. Additionally, they must communicate with senior leaders to recommend decisions outside their authority and pass critical information up the chain so the senior leadership can make informed strategic decisions. SEAL leaders on the battlefield are expected to figure out what needs to be done and do it. They tell high authority what they plan to do, rather than ask, “What do you want me to do?” Junior leaders must be proactive rather than reactive.

To be effectively empowered to make decisions, it is imperative that frontline leaders execute with confidence. Tactical leaders must be confident that they clearly understand the strategic mission and the Commander’s Intent. They must have implicit trust that their senior leaders will back their decisions. Without this trust, junior leaders cannot confidently execute, which means they cannot exercise Decentralized Command.

With SEAL Teams, just as with any team in the business world, there are leaders who try to take on too much themselves. When this occurs, operations can quickly dissolve into chaos. The fix is to empower frontline leaders through Decentralized Command and ensure they are running their teams to support the overall mission without micromanagement from the top.

PART III: SUSTAINING VICTORY

Chapter 9: Plan

What’s the mission? Planning begins with mission analysis. Leaders must identify clear directives for the team. Once they themselves understand the mission, they can impart this knowledge to their key leaders and frontline troops tasked with executing the mission. A broad and ambiguous mission results in lack of focus, ineffective execution, and mission creep. To prevent this, the mission must be carefully refined and simplified so that it is explicitly clear and specifically focused to achieve the greater strategic vision for which that mission is a part.

The mission must explain the overall purpose and desired result, or “end state,” of the operation. The frontline troops tasked with executing the mission must understand the deeper purpose behind the mission. While a simple statement, the Commander’s Intent is actually the most important part of the brief. When understood by everyone involved in the execution of the plan, it guides each decision and action on the ground.

Leaders must delegate the planning process down the chain as much as possible to key subordinate leaders. Team leaders within the greater team and frontline, tactical-level leaders must have ownership of their tasks within the overall plan and mission. Team participation even from the most junior personnel is critical in developing bold, innovative solutions to problem sets. Giving the frontline troops ownership of even a small piece of the plan gives them buy-in, helps them understand the reasons behind the plan, and better enables them to believe in the mission, which translates to far more effective implementation and execution on the ground.

While the senior leader supervises the entire planning process by team members, he or she must be careful not to get bogged down in the details. By maintaining a perspective above the micro-terrain of the plan, the senior leader can

Extreme Ownership

better ensure compliance with strategic objectives. Doing so enables senior leaders to “stand back and be the tactical genius” by identifying weaknesses or holes in the plan that those immersed in the details might have missed. This enables leaders to fill in those gaps before execution.

Chapter 10: Leading Up and Down the Chain of Command

Any good leader is immersed in the planning and execution of tasks, projects, and operations to move the team toward a strategic goal. Such leaders possess insight into the bigger picture and why specific tasks need to be accomplished. This information does not automatically transfer to subordinate leaders and the frontline troops. Junior members of the team, the tactical level operators, are rightly focused on their specific jobs. They must be in order to accomplish the tactical mission. They do not need the full knowledge and insight of their senior leaders, nor do the senior leaders need the intricate understanding of the tactical level operator’s jobs. Still, it is critical that each have an understanding of the other’s role. It is paramount that senior leaders explain to their junior leaders and troops executing the mission how their role contributes to big picture success.

This is not intuitive and never as obvious to the rank-and-file employees as leaders might assume. Leaders must routinely communicate with their team members to help them understand their role in the overall mission. Frontline leaders and troops can then connect the dots between what they do every day and how that impacts the company’s strategic goals. This understanding helps the team members prioritize their efforts in a rapidly changing, dynamic environment. That is leading down the chain of the command. It requires regularly stepping out of the office and personally engaging in face-to-face conversations with direct reports and observing the frontline troops in action to understand their particular challenges and read them the Commander’s Intent. This enables the team to understand why they are doing what they are doing, which facilitates Decentralized Command.

As a leader employing Extreme Ownership, if your team isn’t doing what you need them to do, you have to look at yourself first. Rather than blame them for not seeing the strategic picture, you must figure out a way to better communicate it to them in terms that are simple, clear, and concise, so that they understand. This is what leading down the chain of command is all about.

Leading up the chain of command requires tactful engagement with your immediate boss (or in military terms, higher headquarters) to obtain the decisions and support necessary to enable your team to accomplish its mission and ultimately win. Leading up the chain takes much more savvy and skill than leading down the chain. *One of the most important jobs of any leader is to support your own boss.* In any chain of command, the leadership must always present a united front to the troops. A public display of discontent or disagreement with the chain of command undermines the authority of leaders at all levels. This is catastrophic to the performance of any organization.

Chapter 11: Decisiveness amid Uncertainty

Books, movies, and television shows can never truly capture or articulate the pressure from uncertainty, chaos, and the element of unknown with which real combat leaders must contend. The combat leader almost never has the full picture or a clear and certain understanding of the enemy’s actions or reactions, or even the knowledge of the immediate consequences for momentary decisions. On the battlefield, for those immersed in the action, the first recognition of an

Extreme Ownership

attack might be the wicked snap and violent impact of incoming rounds, flying shards of concrete and debris, or the screams of pain from wounded comrades. Urgent questions arise: Where are they shooting from? How many are there? Are any of my men wounded? Where are other friendly forces? Is it possible they are friendly forces mistakenly shooting at us? The answers are almost never immediately obvious. Regardless, leaders cannot be paralyzed by fear. That results in inaction. It is critical for leaders to act decisively amid uncertainty; to make the best decisions they can, based on only the immediate information available.

There is no one-hundred percent right solution. The picture is never complete. Leaders must be comfortable with this and be able to make decisions promptly, then be ready to adjust those decisions quickly based on evolving situations and new information. Intelligence gathering and research are important, but they must be employed with realistic expectations and must not impede swift decision making that is often the difference between victory and defeat. Waiting for the one-hundred percent right and certain solutions leads to delay, indecision and an inability to execute. Leaders must be prepared to make an educated guess based on previous experience, knowledge of how the enemy operates, likely outcomes, and whatever intelligence is available in the immediate moment.

This “incomplete picture” principle is not unique to combat. It applies to virtually every aspect of our individual lives, such as personal health-care decisions or whether or not to evacuate from the predicted path of a major storm. It particularly applies to leadership and decision making in business. While business leaders may not generally face life or death situations, they are certainly under intense pressure. Outcomes are never certain; success is never guaranteed. Even so, business leaders must be comfortable in the chaos and act decisively amid such uncertainty.

Chapter 12: Discipline Equals Freedom—The Dichotomy of Leadership

Every leader must walk a fine line. That’s what makes leadership so challenging. Just as discipline and freedom are opposing forces that must be balanced, leadership requires finding the equilibrium in the dichotomy of many seemingly contradictory qualities, between one extreme and another. The simple recognition of this is one of the most powerful tools a leader has. With this in mind, a leader can more easily balance the opposing forces and lead with maximum effectiveness.

A leader must lead but also must be ready to follow. Sometimes, another member of the team might be in a better position to develop a plan, make a decision, or lead through a specific situation. Perhaps the junior person has greater expertise in a particular area or more experience. Perhaps he or she simply thought of a better way to accomplish the mission. Good leaders must welcome this, putting aside ego and personal agendas to ensure that the team has the greatest chance of accomplishing its strategic goals. A true leader is not intimidated when others step up and take charge. Leaders that lack confidence in themselves fear being outshined by someone else.

A leader must be aggressive but not overbearing. SEALS are known for their eagerness to take on tough challenges and accomplish some of the most difficult missions. Some may even accuse me of hyper-aggression. But I did my utmost to ensure that everyone below me in the chain of command felt comfortable approaching me with concerns, ideas, thoughts, and even disagreements. If they felt something was wrong or thought there was a better way to execute, I encouraged them, regardless of rank, to come to me with questions and present an opposing view. I listened to them,

Extreme Ownership

discussed new options, and came to a conclusion with them, often adopting some part or perhaps even all of their idea if it made sense. If it didn't make sense, we discussed why and we each walked away with a better understanding of what we are trying to do. That being said, my subordinates also knew that if they wanted to complain about the hard work and relentless push to accomplish the mission I expected of them, they best take those thoughts elsewhere.

Afterword

With a mind-set of Extreme Ownership, any person can develop into a highly effective leader. Leaders may not always be the ones who generate the specific strategies, tactics, or directions that lead their teams to success. But leaders who exhibit Extreme Ownership will empower key leaders within their teams to figure out a way to win. Extreme Ownership is a mind-set, an attitude. If leaders exhibit Extreme Ownership and develop a culture of Extreme Ownership within their teams and organizations, the rest falls into place.

The goal of all leaders should be to work themselves out of a job. This means leaders must be heavily engaged in training and mentoring their junior leaders to prepare them to step up and assume greater responsibilities. When mentored and coached properly, the junior leader can eventually replace the senior leader, allowing the senior leader to move on to the next level of leadership.