

**“Extreme Ownership”**  
**How U.S. Navy SEAL’s Lead and Win**  
**by Jocko Willink, Leif Babin**  
**Book Note by Dave Kraft**

There can be no leadership where there is no team.

Effective leaders lead successful teams that accomplish their mission and win. Ineffective leaders do not.

The best leaders are not driven by ego or personal agendas. They are simply focused on the mission and how best to accomplish it.

Extreme Ownership. Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame.

The leader is truly and ultimately responsible for everything.

That is Extreme Ownership, the fundamental core of what constitutes an effective leader in the SEAL Teams or in any leadership endeavor.

If the underperformer continually fails to meet standards, then a leader who exercises Extreme Ownership must be loyal to the team and the mission above any individual.

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

One of the most fundamental and important truths at the heart of Extreme Ownership: there are no bad teams, only bad leaders.

Leaders must accept total responsibility, own problems that inhibit performance, and develop solutions to those problems.

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.

I learned that good leaders don’t make excuses. Instead, they figure out a way to get it done and win.”

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.

Every leader must be able to detach from the immediate tactical mission and understand how it fits into strategic goals.

Many of the disruptive issues that arise within any team can be attributed directly to a problem with ego.

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.

Our standard operating procedures were always kept as simple as possible. Prioritize and Execute.

SEAL combat leaders utilize Prioritize and Execute. We verbalize this principle with this direction: “Relax, look around, make a call.”

When overwhelmed, fall back upon this principle: Prioritize and Execute.

“With so much going on in the chaos and mayhem, they would try to take on too many tasks at once. It never worked. I taught them to Prioritize and Execute.

I explained how a leader who tries to take on too many problems simultaneously will likely fail at them all.

With my leaders running their teams and handling the tactical decisions, it made my job much easier by enabling me to focus on the bigger picture.

Human beings are generally not capable of managing more than six to ten people, particularly when things go sideways and inevitable contingencies arise.

“Without a clear chain of command—people knowing who is in charge of what—you cannot have empowered leadership.

Teams and the U.S. military, much like militaries throughout history, are based around building blocks of four-to-six-man teams with a leader.

“But the truth is, even with all those men out there, I could only truly lead, manage, and coordinate with about four to six, max.”

Proper Decentralized Command requires simple, clear, concise orders that can be understood easily by everyone in the chain of command.

“With clear guidance and established boundaries for decision making that your subordinate leaders understand, they can then act independently toward your unified goal.”

A broad and ambiguous mission results in lack of focus, ineffective execution, and mission creep.

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.

Most importantly, Jocko explained to us that, as leaders, we must not get dragged into the details but instead remain focused on the bigger picture.

It was a realization for him that even when a leader thinks his troops understand the bigger picture, they very often have difficulty connecting the dots between the tactical mission they are immersed in with the greater overarching goal.

Leaders must routinely communicate with their team members to help them understand their role in the overall mission.

“We have to own everything in our world. That’s what Extreme Ownership is all about.”

It is critical for leaders to act decisively amid uncertainty; to make the best decisions they can based on only the immediate information available.

Instead of letting the situation dictate our decisions, we must dictate the situation.

The best SEALs I worked with were invariably the most disciplined.

The temptation to take the easy road is always there. It is as easy as staying in bed in the morning and sleeping in. But discipline is paramount to ultimate success and victory for any leader and any team.

Instead of making us more rigid and unable to improvise, this discipline actually made us more flexible, more adaptable, and more efficient.

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.

Of course, a leader must be confident but never cocky. Confidence is contagious, a great attribute for a leader and a team. But when it goes too far, overconfidence causes complacency and arrogance, which ultimately set the team up for failure.

The Dichotomy of Leadership A good leader must be:

- Confident but not cocky;
- Courageous but not foolhardy;
- Competitive but a gracious loser;
- Attentive to details but not obsessed by them;
- Strong but have endurance;
- A leader and follower;
- Humble not passive;
- Aggressive not overbearing;
- Quiet but not silent;
- Calm but not robotic,
- Logical but not devoid of emotions;
- Close with the troops but not so close that one becomes more important than another or more important than the good of the team; not so close that they forget who is in charge.
- Able to execute Extreme Ownership, while exercising Decentralized Command.

“As a leader, you have to be close to your people,” I told him. “And just like I said in the brief, the balance is that you can’t be so close that one person becomes more important than the mission or the good of the team.