

The Dichotomy of Leadership

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Part 1: Balancing People

Chapter 2: Own It All, but Empower Others

Charlie Medical Facility, Camp Ramadi, Iraq: 2006

Application to Business

“Fire - let’s cut down all the meetings. That is one of the reasons things aren’t moving. Instead of finding solutions, right now they just ask you for the solution. When you do have meetings, stop being the ‘Easy Button,’” I told him.

“The Easy Button? How am I an Easy Button?” the CEO asked.

“By answering every question, solving every problem, and making every decision,” I answered.

Chapter 3: Resolute, but Not Overbearing

South Ramadi, Iraq: 2006

As I reflected upon Jocko’s demonstration of a leader’s responsibility to ensure standards are maintained, I thought about the times in my career when I failed to do so. As a young leader, I knew there were times we needed to improve our performance, do another run-through in the kill house (where we practiced close-quarters combat), or add an additional rehearsal to ensure we were fully prepared. Yet in those moments, I sometimes hadn’t held the line; I hadn’t pushed the team hard enough. Any additional work assigned to the team was going to get pushback and generate complaints. And there were times when I let things slide, confusing the idea of “taking care of your people” with allowing them not to work as hard. But in the end, that resulted in mediocre performance. And the team never got better, never held each other accountable. This was a failure of leadership - my leadership.

Part 2: Balancing the Mission

Chapter 5: Train Hard, but Train Smart

Hostile Territory: 2009

____Of all the lessons we learned in combat in Ramadi, the most valuable one was this: Leadership is the most important thing on the battlefield. Leadership - at every level - is the critical factor in whether a team succeeds or fails. I witnessed this many times, under the most dreadful real-world circumstances imaginable. When a leader stepped up and took charge, got the team focused and moving together, the results were incredible. This training scenario proved yet again how when all seemed lost, just one person stepping up and making the call meant the difference between victory or defeat. Had we left Big Walt “dead” and out of the scenario, the task unit would have been completely destroyed by the enemy role-players. They would not have seen the importance of battlefield leadership. They would have thought that when things got too bad, nothing could be done to save them. But that is wrong. And as much as we wanted the scenarios to be hard, they also had to educate. It was crucial that the other SEALs in the platoon and task unit personally witnessed how a decisive call from a bold leader made all the difference, even in the most chaotic situations. Seeing this, many of those junior leaders would emulate that leader and step up to lead their teams. The whole point of training was to demonstrate this fundamental truth and build a culture of Decentralized Command where everyone leads, where leaders at every level take charge, act decisively to overcome obstacles and accomplish the mission. In order to achieve this, training had to be challenging; it had to be difficult. It had to push the team members far beyond their comfort zone so they understood what it was like to be overwhelmed, out maneuvered, and on the defensive. But training could not be so challenging that it overwhelmed the team to a point where no learning took place.

Chapter 8: Hold People Accountable, but Don’t Hold Their Hands

Baghdad, Iraq: 2003

Application to Business

“I hope he cares! It is his paycheck!” the ops manager yelled.

“Hope isn’t a course of action,” I said. “And, from his perspective, he has been getting a paycheck consistently for as long as he’s been employed here - regardless of how profitable the company is or isn’t. It simply doesn’t impact him.”

“He should still care about it,” the ops manager insisted.

“Of course he should,” I agreed. “And in a perfect world, every employee would care deeply about the profitability of the company he or she works for. But these folks have other things to care about. Husbands and wives. Kids. Soccer games. Bills and cars and mortgages and the game on Friday night and the broken water heater

and the kid heading off to college. They have a ton to care about - and like it or not, the profitability of the company is not high on their list.”

“So then what do we do?” the ops manager asked. “If they don’t care, why should they give any extra effort?”

“They have to understand *why* - but that *why* has to have a thread that ties back to them, to what is in it for *them*,” I told him.

“And how do I do that? He asked. “How can I make them care about the company’s profits?”

Part 3: Balancing Yourself

Chapter 9: A Leader and a Follower

South-Central Ramadi, Iraq: 2006

Application to BUsiness

“One of the toughest but most important lessons I learned from Jockco,” I explained, “is that you should strive to have the same relationship with every boss you ever work for, no matter if they are good or bad. Whether they are an outstanding leader whom you admire, a mediocre leader who needs improvement, or a terrible leader for whom no one on the team has respect, you must strive to form the same relationship with all of them.”

I explained that the relationship to seek with any boss incorporates three things:

- They trust you.
- They value and seek your opinion and guidance.
- They give you what you need to accomplish your mission and then let you go execute.

Chapter 11: Humble, Not Passive

Route Michigan, South-Central Ramadi, Iraq: 2006

...we did that and strove to do it better than anyone else. When the task group asked for serialized inventory lists of all equipment before departing on operations, we took the extra time and effort and made it happen. The list of seemingly unimportant requests we dealt with was significant, and with the high operational tempo of violent urban combat day in and day out, it was not easy to comply with these requests. But in Task Unit Bruiser, we didn’t complain about the little things that others might have pushed back on. Instead, we understood that there were important reasons for these administrative requirements and got them done. More important, we knew that in doing the seemingly small things well, we built trust that strengthened our relationships with our chain of command and enabled us to challenge an order in the rare circumstances when there truly was a strategic detriment to our mission and increased risk to our troops.

Staying humble was the key to developing trust with the chain of command. It was also crucial to building strong relationships with the U.S. Army and Marine Corps units we served so closely with in Ramadi - units we depended on for our survival and mission success.

I will also never forget the importance of humility for a leader. A leader must be humble, must listen to others, must not act arrogant or cocky. But a leader must balance that and know that there are times to question superiors, to push back, to stand up and make sure the right things are being done for the right reasons.

Application to Business

“Extreme Ownership,” I said, repeating the topic just covered in detail. “Let’s talk about where you are taking ownership of problems and getting them solved. More important, where is this *not* happening? Where can you take greater ownership? Where are you casting blame or waiting for others to solve problems that you should be solving?”

I took mental note that his comment was itself a lack of ownership, casting blame on the team for poor, ineffective implementation of the new system. True Extreme Ownership meant looking at yourself to examine what you could do better. That is what made it “simple, not easy.” Human nature was to blame others, to allow frustrations with a problem to see everyone else as the issue and not yourself. But his comment wasn’t Extreme Ownership. Such blame casting and excuse making only created more.

“If you’re passive, if you don’t push back,” I said, “you aren’t leading up the chain of command. The boss needs and wants your honest feedback on this. He may not even know it,” I said jokingly.

Chapter 12: Focused, but Detached

Western Ramadi, Iraq: 2006

“Roger,” Jocko responded simply. While other bosses might have asked for more information, such as why it

had happened and who had the AD and if there were casualties and if the target was secure, Jocko trusted that I had the situation under control - and that if I needed help, I would ask for it.