Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALS Lead and Win

Written by a couple of former Navy SEALs who understand the demands and risks of leadership in ways most of us will only know in measure, ***Extreme Ownership: How Navy SEALs Lead and Win*** is one of those books that you find yourself repeating over and over again, "that's good!" The proverbial shelves of this book are stock to the ceiling with leadership wisdom and insight. It will challenge you. At times, it will convict you. And in the end, it will help you become a more effective team leader.

Check out these Book Notes to get an overview of why this book needs to find its way to your fall reading list.

Title: **Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALS Lead and Win**

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Book Description:

Sent to the most violent battlefield in Iraq, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin's SEAL task unit faced a seemingly impossible mission: help U.S. forces secure Ramadi, a city deemed "all but lost." In gripping firsthand accounts of heroism, tragic loss, and hard-won victories in SEAL Team Three's Task Unit Bruiser, they learned that leadership—at every level—is the most important factor in whether a team succeeds or fails. Willink and Babin returned home from deployment and instituted SEAL leadership training that helped forge the next generation of SEAL leaders. After departing the SEAL Teams, they launched Echelon Front, a company that teaches these same leadership principles to businesses and organizations. From promising startups to Fortune 500 companies, Babin and Willink have helped scores of clients across a broad range of industries build their own high-performance teams and dominate their battlefields.

Book Quotes:

We are Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, SEAL officers who served together in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. There, we became intimately familiar with the humbling trials of war. We were lucky enough to build, train, and lead high-performance, winning teams that proved exceptionally effective. We saw firsthand the perils of complacency, having served on a battlefield where at any time the possibility of our position being overrun by a large force of well-armed enemy fighters was quite real. We know what it means to fail—to lose, to be surprised, outmaneuvered, or simply beaten. Those lessons were the hardest, but perhaps the most important. We learned that leadership requires belief in the mission and unyielding perseverance to achieve victory, particularly when doubters question whether victory is even possible. As SEAL leaders, we developed, tested, confirmed, and captured an array of leadership lessons as well as management and organizational best practices. We then built and ran SEAL leadership training and helped write the doctrine for the next generation

of SEAL leaders. LOCATION: 77

The idea for this book was born from the realization that the principles critical to SEAL success on the battlefield—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: 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. LOCATION: 107

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. LOCATION: 213

For leaders, the humility to admit and own mistakes and develop a plan to overcome them is essential to success. The best leaders are not driven by ego or personal agendas. They are simply focused on the mission and how best to accomplish it. LOCATION: 219

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—human beings. They must literally risk life and limb to accomplish the mission. For this reason, they must believe in the cause for which they are fighting. 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. LOCATION: 276

The book derives its title from the underlying principle—the 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. LOCATION: 297

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. LOCATION: 499

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. But 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. If underperformers 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. LOCATION: 508

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. LOCATION: 513

The best leaders checked their egos, accepted blame, sought out constructive criticism, and took detailed notes for improvement. LOCATION: 608

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. LOCATION: 610

Had I not witnessed this amazing transformation, I might have doubted it. But it was a glaring, undeniable

example of one of the most fundamental and important truths at the heart of Extreme Ownership: there are no bad teams, only bad leaders. LOCATION: 755

How is it possible that switching a single individual—only the leader—had completely turned around the performance of an entire group? The answer: leadership is the single greatest factor in any team's performance. 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 drives performance—or doesn't. And this applies not just to the most senior leader of an overall team, but to the junior leaders of teams within the team. LOCATION: 757

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 a focused goal and enforced high standards of performance, working to continuously improve. With a culture of Extreme Ownership within the team, every member of the team could contribute to this effort and ensure the highest levels of performance. LOCATION: 777

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. 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. Therefore, leaders must enforce standards. Consequences for failing need not be immediately severe, but leaders must ensure that tasks are repeated until the higher expected standard is achieved. Leaders must push the standards in a way that encourages and enables the team to utilize Extreme Ownership. LOCATION: 833

Leaders should never be satisfied. They must always strive to improve, and they must build that mind-set into the team. They must face the facts through a realistic, brutally honest assessment of themselves and their team's performance. Identifying weaknesses, good leaders seek to strengthen them and come up with a plan to overcome challenges. 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. The recognition that there are no bad teams, only bad leaders facilitates Extreme Ownership and enables leaders to build high-performance teams that dominate on any battlefield, literal or figurative. LOCATION: 847

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. LOCATION: 1127

It takes courage to go to the CEO's office, knock on her door, and explain that you don't understand the strategy behind her decisions. You might feel stupid. But you will feel far worse trying to explain to your team a mission or strategy that you don't understand or believe in yourself. And, as you pointed out, you are letting the boss down because she will never know that her guidance is not being promulgated properly through the ranks. If you don't ask questions so you can understand and believe in the mission, you are failing as a leader and you are failing your team. So, if you ever get a task or guidance or a mission that you don't believe in, don't just sit back and accept it. Ask questions until you understand why so you can believe in what you are doing and you can pass that information down the chain to your team with confidence, so they can get out and execute the mission. That is leadership. LOCATION: 1259

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.

LOCATION: 1459

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. And 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. LOCATION: 1950

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. LOCATION: 2240

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. LOCATION: 2533

Leading up the chain of command requires tactful engagement with the 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. To do this, a leader must push situational awareness up the chain of command. LOCATION: 3228

Leading up the chain takes much more savvy and skill than leading down the chain. Leading up, the leader cannot fall back on his or her positional authority. Instead, the subordinate leader must use influence, experience, knowledge, communication, and maintain the highest professionalism. LOCATION: 3230

Leaders in any chain of command will not always agree. But at the end of the day, once the debate on a particular course of action is over and the boss has made a decision—even if that decision is one you argued against—you must execute the plan as if it were your own. LOCATION: 3240

In combat as in life, the outcome is never certain, the picture never clear. There are no guarantees of success. But in order to succeed, leaders must be comfortable under pressure, and act on logic, not emotion. This is a critical component to victory. LOCATION: 3438

The answers are almost never immediately obvious. In some cases, the answers to who attacked and how will never be known. 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. LOCATION: 3446

This realization is one of the biggest lessons learned for our generation of combat leaders—both in the SEAL Teams and throughout other U.S. military branches—through the years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no 100 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 100 percent right and certain solution 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. LOCATION: 3448

Discipline starts every day when the first alarm clock goes off in the morning. I say “first alarm clock” because I have three, as I was taught by one of the most feared and respected instructors in SEAL training: one electric, one battery powered, one windup. That way, there is no excuse for not getting out of bed, especially with all that rests on that decisive moment. The moment the alarm goes off is the first test; it sets the tone for the rest of the day. The test is not a complex one: when the alarm goes off, do you get up out of bed, or do you lie there in comfort and fall back to sleep? If you have the discipline to get out of bed, you win—you pass the test. If you are mentally weak for that moment and you let that weakness keep you in bed, you fail. Though it seems small, that weakness translates to more significant decisions. But if you exercise discipline, that too translates to more substantial elements of your life. LOCATION: 3646

By discipline, I mean an intrinsic self-discipline—a matter of personal will. The best SEALs I worked with were invariably the most disciplined. They woke up early. They worked out every day. They studied tactics and technology. They practiced their craft. Some of them even went out on the town, drank, and stayed out until the early hours of the morning. But they still woke up early and maintained discipline at every level. LOCATION: 3660

A leader must lead but also be ready to follow. Sometimes, another member of the team—perhaps a subordinate or direct report—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. If the team is successful, then recognition will come for those in charge, but a leader should not seek that recognition. A leader must be confident enough to follow someone else when the situation calls for it. LOCATION: 3699

Leaders must be humble but not passive; quiet but not silent. They must possess humility and the ability to control their ego and listen to others. They must admit mistakes and failures, take ownership of them, and figure out a way to prevent them from happening again. But a leader must be able to speak up when it matters. They must be able to stand up for the team and respectfully push back against a decision, order, or direction that could negatively impact overall mission success. LOCATION: 3728

While there is no guarantee of success in leadership, there is one thing that is certain: leading people is the most challenging and, therefore, the most gratifying undertaking of all human endeavors. So, with that humbling reward in the distance, embrace the burden of command and go forward onto your battlefield, in whatever arena that may be, with the disciplined resolve to take Extreme Ownership, lead, and win. LOCATION: 3912

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.