

CHAPTER 10

Leading Up and Down the Chain of Command

Leif Babin

CAMP MARC LEE, RAMADI, IRAQ: LEADING DOWN THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

The night sky suddenly lit up like a laser light show at a rock concert. Some distance across the river, U.S. security positions in the heart of Ramadi were under attack. Almost immediately, American sentries returned fire with a massive barrage from heavy machine guns, sending their own streaks of brilliant orange-red tracers back at enemy positions. Seconds passed before the distant rattle and boom of machine gun fire mixed with intermittent explosions reached us. As any military veteran knew, tracers were generally placed every fifth round in belt-fed machine guns, which meant there was a hell of a lot of hot lead flying around in the darkness that we couldn't see. The distant firefight continued for sometime. As Jocko and I watched, flaming streaks from the engines of an unseen U.S. attack aircraft (likely a Marine F/A-18 Hornet) appeared in the sky over the distant fight. Light flashed as a missile ignited off the wing, streaked across the sky, and exploded

in a brilliant burst of light. Hopefully, they had smoked the enemy without any American casualties. It was all quite a show. But here in Ramadi, it was nothing out of the ordinary.

It had been a still and clear evening until the distant firefight lit up the night. The baking temperatures of the Iraqi summertime heat had recently given way to a tolerable, cooler fall. Jocko and I sat on the dusty rooftop of the large three-story concrete building that served as our tactical operations center on the base that had been our home, Camp Marc Lee. Our SEAL task unit had been in Ramadi for nearly six months. Soon, we were scheduled to return to the States. With no combat operations pending that evening, Jocko and I had a rare moment to reflect as we looked across the peaceful, dark waters of the Euphrates River and the lights of Ramadi on the far bank and beyond. We reminisced about the combat operations our task unit had participated in and all that had happened here.

Task Unit Bruiser had conducted hundreds of operations and endured many an onslaught from enemy attacks like the one we just witnessed. We had been in dozens of firefights, had thousands of rounds shot at us, shot back thousands of our own, and frequently called in fire support from U.S. tanks or aircraft. Our SEALs had done substantial damage to the enemy. Witnessing the triumph of success, we knew we had made a difference. But we had also endured extraordinary loss. Two months earlier, in the midst of a huge battle for the heart of the city, we had lost Marc Lee, the first SEAL killed in action in the Iraq War and the man in whose honor we named the camp. Marc's death was devastating. It left a hole that could never be filled. The same day we lost Marc, another beloved Charlie Platoon SEAL, Ryan Job, had been hit in the face by an enemy sniper round. Ryan lost an eye and took substantial damage to his face. But we waited for hopeful news from the doctors that sight would return in his remaining eye. Three weeks later, as he recovered in a hospital in Germany,

those hopes were dashed when we learned Ryan would never see again: he was blind. This news was absolutely crushing. Then, just as our deployment came to a close, a Task Unit Bruiser SEAL in Delta Platoon, Mike Monsoor, was out on what would likely have been his last combat operation before returning home, when an enemy hand grenade was tossed into Delta Platoon's position. Mike dove on top of that grenade, shielding his teammates around him from the bulk of the blast and sacrificing himself for them. Each of these fallen SEALs were beloved teammates, friends, and brothers. We would forever mourn their loss.

On the rooftop that night, as Jocko and I talked about all we had been a part of in Ramadi, we knew Task Unit Bruiser had fulfilled a key role in the U.S. Army Ready First Brigade's (1st Armored Division) strategy that successfully wrested control of key Ramadi neighborhoods from the insurgents. After months of effort and countless firefights, U.S. forces and their Iraqi Army partner forces now had a presence where they previously had none. They could now secure the populace from the savage insurgents who had long controlled most of the city. This, and the foresight of the Ready First Brigade's leadership, set the conditions for tribal sheiks to successfully rise up against al Qaeda in Iraq and unite with U.S. forces in what would become the Anbar Awakening.

Task Unit Bruiser was proud to have played a role in the Ready First Brigade's success. We had killed hundreds of insurgent fighters, helped to eliminate many of their safe havens, and deeply disrupted their freedom of movement. Now, with the Ready First's combat outposts in place throughout much of the city, the enemy no longer exercised complete control over many neighborhoods of Ramadi. But the distant firefight we had just witnessed from the rooftop was a reminder that the enemy was still capable, deadly, and determined to fight back for control of the city.

What lasting impact did we truly have here? I wondered.

• • •

Soon afterward, we turned over our operations to the next SEAL task unit that took our place. Our time in Ramadi came to an end as the last of us from Task Unit Bruiser boarded a big U.S. Air Force C-17 cargo aircraft for the flight home.

Once back stateside, it was quite a transition from the intense violence in the bloody streets of Ramadi to the peace and tranquility of San Diego, California. For many of us it was an emotional return. After all the blood, sweat, and tears that Task Unit Bruiser—and our brothers- and sisters-in-arms in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps—had spilled there, I felt torn. We had lost the first SEALs killed in action in the Iraq War. As a leader, nothing had prepared me for that monumental burden I must forever carry for not bringing all my guys home to their families. If only I could trade places with them. When Ryan got shot and Marc was killed, they were doing exactly what I had asked of them. I was in charge; I was responsible. My fellow platoon commander felt the same way about Mike Monsoor. I knew Jocko felt that burden for each man.

Hearing American pundits in the media talking about all the “blood and treasure” spent in Iraq, I reacted with fury. To them, the casualty figures were just statistics—numbers on a page. To us, they were teammates and friends—brothers. Their families suffered the greatest hardship. These men were deeply missed and painfully mourned. Others had been seriously wounded and some would never fully recover. Their lives, and those of their families and friends would likewise never be the same. The true sacrifices endured by the troops who fought this war were far beyond anything that most Americans could comprehend.

Within our own beloved SEAL community, we heard the mutterings of criticism about our operations from the armchair quarterbacks in the rear echelon, far from the battlefield. They clearly didn't understand what we had done and why. They didn't witness the impact of our operations or the difference we had made.

With angry emotion, I wrestled with how best to professionally respond to those critics, particularly from senior officers with no real combat experience. Part of me wanted to punch them in the mouth. But a bigger part of me just wanted them to understand what we had accomplished and why. I knew that anyone who truly comprehended what Task Unit Bruiser had done and who understood the incredible victory the U.S. Army Ready First Brigade had achieved in Ramadi would respect not only the bravery and dedication of the troops but also the strategic success—securing Ramadi and Anbar Province from the brink of disaster. It had been a monumental triumph for U.S. forces on one of the toughest battlefields anywhere, when many doubted we could win. The doubters had been proved wrong.

Some within the SEAL community said we took too much risk, that our sniper operations were just playing “whac-a-mole.” Used to a paradigm of traditional Special Operations, they could not comprehend the adaptations we had made or the risk those adaptations held. Nor did they understand the nature of counter-insurgency and the spectacular reversal toward peace and security that had been achieved.

Some of the politicians and most senior military brass in Washington felt that killing bad guys only created more enemies. But they didn’t have a clue. Our lethal operations were crucial to securing the populace. Each enemy fighter killed meant more U.S. Soldiers and Marines came home alive; it meant more Iraqi soldiers and police lived to fight another day; and it meant more of Ramadi’s civilian populace could live in a little less fear. No longer could the enemy ruthlessly torture, rape, and murder innocent civilians. Once the local people no longer feared the insurgents, they were willing to join with U.S. and Iraqi forces to defeat them.

Shortly after Task Unit Bruiser’s return to the United States in late October of 2006, Jocko was asked to build a presentation for the

chief of naval operations—the most senior admiral in the Navy, a member of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, and a direct advisor to the president. Jocko took a map of Ramadi and built an overlay that depicted the geographic areas that had been completely under enemy control—al Qaeda battlespace—when we first arrived. These were areas that, when I arrived in Ramadi, the SEAL platoon commander who had spent the previous six months there pointed to and said to me: “Don’t go in there. You will all get killed and no one [U.S. forces] will even be able to reach you to get you out.”

From this map of Ramadi, Jocko built a PowerPoint slide that depicted how the Ready First Combat Team’s Seize, Clear, Hold, Build strategy systematically, through months of effort, established a permanent presence in the enemy-held neighborhoods and pushed out the enemy fighters. U.S. forces and the Iraqi forces with them demonstrated to the people of Ramadi that we were now the strongest side. As a result, the local populace joined us and turned against the insurgents who had terrorized them. The slide depicted how Task Unit Bruiser SEALs had been the lead element for virtually every major operation to build a combat outpost in enemy territory and take those neighborhoods back.

When Jocko showed me the slide he had built, it all came together for me for the first time. Though I had been directly involved in the planning of almost all of these missions, had been on the ground leading a team of operators, coordinated with the other elements on the battlefield, and had written detailed reports of what had happened after each mission, I still had not linked them all together nor considered the strategic impact they had had. But now, Jocko’s brief captured in simple terms all that had been accomplished in the Battle of Ramadi.

This was a striking realization: I was Charlie Platoon commander, second in seniority only to Jocko in Task Unit Bruiser. And yet, immersed in the details of the tactical operations, I had

not fully appreciated or understood how those operations so directly contributed to the strategic mission with spectacular results beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

"Damn," I said to Jocko. "I never really put it all together like that before." This one slide made it immediately clear why we had done what we had done. While this knowledge could never ease the pain endured by the loss of incredible SEAL friends and teammates, it certainly helped to put in perspective why we had taken such risk and what had been accomplished.

As platoon commander, I had detailed insight into the planning and coordination with the Army and Marine battalions and companies that was far beyond most of the SEAL operators in my platoon. Yet, if I didn't fully comprehend or appreciate the strategic impact of what we had done, how could I expect my frontline troops—my junior SEAL operators not in a leadership role—to get it? The answer: I couldn't. For a young SEAL shooter with a very limited role in the planning process who was out working on his weapons and gear, conducting maintenance on our vehicles, or building demolition charges for the breacher, he walked into our mission briefs wondering: *What are we doing next?* He had no context for why we were doing the operation or how the next tactical mission fit into the bigger picture of stabilizing and securing Ramadi.

I realized now that, as their leader, I had failed to explain it to them. Clearly, there was some level of strategic perspective and comprehension that would only come with time and reflection. But I could have done a far better job as a leader to understand for myself the strategic impact of our operations and passed this insight to my troops.

When Jocko saw my reaction to the slide and the presentation he had built, he too realized that he should have more fully detailed the strategic impact of what we were doing and why. 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.

Looking back on Task Unit Bruiser's deployment to Ramadi, I realized that the SEALs in Charlie Platoon who suffered the worst combat fatigue, whose attitudes grew progressively more negative as the months of heavy combat wore on, who most questioned the level of risk we were taking on operations—they all had the least ownership of the planning for each operation. Conversely, the SEAL operators who remained focused and positive, who believed in what we were doing, and who were eager to continue and would have stayed on beyond our six-month deployment if they could—they all had some ownership of the planning process in each operation. Even if they only controlled a small piece of the plan—the route into or out of a target, the breach scene on an entry door, coordination with supporting aircraft, managing an assault force of Iraqi soldiers—those SEAL operators still better understood the mission, the detailed steps taken to mitigate those risks we could control, the Commander's Intent behind why we were conducting that specific operation. The SEALs with little or no ownership were somewhat in the dark. As a result, they had a harder time understanding why we were taking the risks we were taking and what specific impact we had in the campaign to liberate Ramadi.

Looking back, one of the greatest lessons learned for me was that I could have done a far better job of leading down the chain of command. I should have given greater ownership of plans to the troops—especially those who were negative and weren't fully committed to the mission. I should have taken the time to better understand how what we were doing contributed to the strategic mission. I should have asked those questions to Jocko and on

up my chain of command. I should have put together a routine strategic overview brief and regularly delivered this to Charlie Platoon's operators so that they could understand what we had accomplished and how our missions furthered the strategic goals of stabilizing Ramadi and securing the populace. With the physical hardship of operating in Iraqi summertime heat reaching 117 degrees Fahrenheit, carrying heavy loads of gear, and routinely engaging in fierce firefights with enemy forces, the SEAL operators in Charlie Platoon needed greater context to understand why that was necessary. Seeing the Ramadi overview slide that Jocko had built, I now understood what we had done and, more important, understood what leading down the chain of command was all about. It was a hard lesson to learn but one I will never forget.

PRINCIPLE: LEADING DOWN THE CHAIN

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 translate 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 operators' jobs. Still, it is critical that each have an understanding of the other's role. And 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—the day-to-day operations—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 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 into the Commander’s Intent. This enables the team to understand why they are doing what they are doing, which facilitates Decentralized Command (as detailed in chapter 8).

As a leader employing Extreme Ownership, if your team isn’t doing what you need them to do, you first have to look at yourself. 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.

CAMP MARC LEE, RAMADI, IRAQ: LEADING UP THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

“You gotta be kidding me!” I shouted as I burst into Jocko’s office inside the TOC. I was fuming. “Are they *serious?*”

Our TOC was located in a large three-story building on the bank of the Euphrates River, which previously housed some of Saddam Hussein’s senior military brass before the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Now the once elaborate building was battered and worse for wear. It was the centerpiece of our SEAL camp, just beyond the large U.S. forward operating base of Camp Ramadi at the edge of the war-torn city. Invading armies had camped along this very riverbank for millennia: Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Ottoman Turks, and British troops. Now American

forces, including Navy SEALs and support personnel of Task Unit Bruiser, were here for a time.

I was furious and venting my frustration at Jocko. "Unbelievable. How do they expect us to actually plan our operations when they are bombarding us with ludicrous questions?" I asked.

Jocko had just forwarded me an e-mail from our higher headquarters staff, led by our SEAL Team's commanding officer (CO). The e-mail in question asked for clarification on an upcoming operation that Charlie Platoon planned to execute in the next few hours.

As one of two platoon commanders in Task Unit Bruiser, I was Jocko's direct report, his immediate subordinate. Jocko reported directly to the CO, often through the CO's staff, who had sent the e-mail. While Task Unit Bruiser was located in Ramadi, the CO and his staff were some thirty miles to the east in Fallujah, a city that had been cleaned up by the massive U.S. Marine offensive in 2004. Now, two years later, Fallujah remained fairly stable. It was a far different environment than the constant violence of Ramadi. Our operational plans required the CO's approval and on up the chain of command to the next level. The CO and his staff also provided many of the resources and support we needed to execute our missions in Ramadi.

"What's the issue?" Jocko asked me, seeing that I was fired up. "The e-mail?" He too was frustrated with the frequent questions and scrutiny.

"Yes, the e-mail," I replied. "Every little thing we do, *they* don't get!" The oft blamed "they," in this case, was anyone outside of my immediate group of Charlie Platoon and Task Unit Bruiser.

Jocko laughed. "I know you're frustrated. . . ." he said. "I'm frustrated too—"

I cut him off. "It's actually insane. We are busting our butts,

risking our lives and kicking some serious ass on the toughest battlefield in Iraq. And I have to answer idiotic questions like whether we have a QRF lined up?"

The QRF, or quick reaction force, consisted of U.S. Soldiers or Marines who would respond with armored vehicles, a couple of dozen troops, and heavy firepower when our SEALs got into a serious bind and were pinned down by enemy forces. Many of us in Task Unit Bruiser had been to Iraq previously, and a few had seen some decent combat. On those previous deployments, activating the QRF was virtually unheard of. But here in Ramadi, it was a common occurrence. On any operation at any time, we knew we could be attacked by an overwhelming number of enemy fighters and our position overrun. In just the first few months on the ground here, we (Charlie Platoon and our brethren in Delta Platoon) activated our QRF more times than I could count.

The e-mail Jocko had just forwarded to me from our higher headquarters asked a series of questions that our CO wanted to know prior to approving our pending operation. One of the questions read, "Did you coordinate an appropriate QRF?"

I found this question almost an insult. "Do they really think we would do any type of operation whatsoever here without a significant QRF package fully coordinated and on standby?" I asked. "We even set up QRFs for our administrative convoys. This is Ramadi. Going out there without a QRF would be suicide."

Jocko smiled. Over the previous weeks, he had vented similar frustration to me, probably more so than he should have. We would privately laugh at some of the questions that flowed from our higher headquarters. On one recent operation Charlie Platoon had planned, we were asked whether mortars were a danger for us. Mortars—with up to twenty pounds of high-explosive cased in half-inch-thick steel—fell from the sky and exploded

with a tremendous concussion that threw lethal shrapnel in all directions. Often, enemy fighters fired mortars with impressive accuracy. Mortars were a danger for us on *every* operation, even while sitting on base. We selected buildings with thicker concrete walls that could provide some protection, and we tried never to be predictable so the enemy could not anticipate our next move. Besides that, mortars were a risk largely beyond our control. We had to focus our planning efforts on the risks we could control.

Jocko had been every bit as frustrated with some of the questions and shared that with me. But since that time, he had come to the realization that the frustrations we had with our superiors were misguided. The CO and his staff weren't bad guys out to make our lives harder and stifle our operations. They were good people trying to do their jobs the best they could and give us what we needed to accomplish our mission. But they weren't on the battlefield with us. They didn't fully understand the threats we dealt with on a daily basis and how hard we were working to mitigate every risk we possibly could. Still, this was combat and there were inherent risks. In Ramadi, U.S. troops were killed or wounded almost every day.

"We waste our time answering question after question," I said. "It takes effort away from our planning and preparation for the actual op itself. It's actually dangerous!"

Jocko knew I had a point. But he needed me to see beyond the immediate front-sight focus of my team—Charlie Platoon—and understand the bigger picture. Jocko tried to calm me down and help me see our combat operations through the CO's eyes; from the perspective of his staff in the special operations task force. "The CO has to approve every mission. If we want to operate, we need to put him in his comfort zone so that he approves them and we can execute," Jocko said.

"The more we give them, the more they ask for," I fired back.

"They want an updated seating chart for our vehicles five minutes before the launch of every op, even though we have to make last-minute changes. They want the names of every individual Iraqi soldier working with us, even though I won't know that until just prior to launch."

Jocko just nodded, realizing that I needed to vent. He knew I was a capable and already proven leader. He had trained and mentored me for the past year to prepare me for the rigors of combat operations and then unleashed me to lead Charlie Platoon on the battlefield. But he also knew I needed to see the importance of pushing information up the chain, beyond my platoon and task unit. I needed to understand how to lead up the chain of command and why it was important.

The amount of information we had to gather and the required paperwork we were forced to submit just to get approval for each combat mission was staggering. It wasn't what people saw in war movies or television shows. Never in my boyhood dreams of battlefield glory had I envisioned such things would be required. But it was the reality.

"We know our combat operations are making an impact on the battlefield here. They are important," said Jocko. I nodded in agreement.

Jocko continued: "But all of these operations need the CO's approval. He has to be comfortable with what we are doing. And we need his support to get additional approvals from higher up the chain. So we can complain about this all day and do nothing, or we can push the necessary information up the chain so that the CO is comfortable and gives us approval."

Jocko had a point. The CO and his staff were not here with us in Ramadi. They couldn't fully understand or appreciate the efforts we had made at risk mitigation and the excellent working relationships we had built with the U.S. Army and Marine battalions and companies that supported us with QRFs.

"We can't expect them to be mind readers," Jocko said. "The only way they are going to get this information is from what we pass to them, the reports we write and the phone calls we make. And we obviously aren't doing a good enough job if they still have major questions."

"Well, they should come out here then," I responded.

"They should," Jocko answered. "But have we told them they should or scheduled a convoy to pick them up? I know I haven't," Jocko admitted.

This contradicted popular thinking. Typically, the frontline troops wanted senior leaders as far away as possible to avoid questions or scrutiny on the smallest of things like grooming standards and whether or not our camp was squared away.

"We are here. We are on the ground. We need to push situational awareness up the chain," Jocko said. "If they have questions, it is our fault for not properly communicating the information they need. We have to lead them."

"They are in charge of us," I questioned. "How can we lead them?"

This epiphany had come to Jocko in examining his own frustrations up the chain. "Leadership doesn't just flow down the chain of command, but up as well," he said. "We have to own everything in our world. That's what Extreme Ownership is all about."

I nodded, coming around to his logic. Jocko's guidance had not yet steered me wrong in the year we had worked together. He had taught me to be the combat leader I needed to be. But this was a whole new attitude, a completely different mind-set from anything I had seen or been taught. Instead of blaming others, instead of complaining about the boss's questions, I had to take ownership of the problem and lead. This included the leaders *above* me in our chain of command.

"We need to look at ourselves and see what we can do better,"

Jocko continued. "We have to write more-detailed reports that help them understand what we are doing and why we are making the decisions we are making. We have to communicate more openly in calls, and when they have questions, we need to immediately get them whatever information they need so that they understand what is happening out here."

I now understood. Far from simply trying to overburden us with questions, our CO and his staff were working hard to get the information they needed so that they could approve our plans, forward them up the chain for further approval and enable us to launch on combat missions to get after the enemy. I needed to check my negative attitude, which was corrosive and ultimately only hampered our ability to operate.

I now accepted Jocko's challenge full on. "You're right," I said. "I can bitch about their questions and scrutiny all I want, but at the end of the day, it gets us no closer to getting our operations approved. If I get them the information they need and put the CO in his comfort zone with what we are doing, we are going to be much more effective getting ops approved, which will enable us to inflict greater damage on the bad guys and win."

"Exactly," Jocko said.

From that day forward, we began a campaign of leading up the chain of command. We provided extremely detailed mission-planning documents and post-operational reports.

We pushed the understanding of this to our team leaders within the platoon. We invited the CO, our command master chief, and other staff to visit us in Ramadi and offered to take them along on combat operations. Our command master chief accompanied us on several missions. The more information we passed, the more our CO and staff understood what we were trying to accomplish. He better appreciated our detailed planning efforts, how we coordinated our quick reaction forces, and the substantial lengths to

which we went to mitigate the risks. The CO grew more comfortable with our combat operations. He and his staff developed trust in us. As a result, all the combat missions we submitted received approval, which allowed Charlie Platoon and Task Unit Bruiser to deliver huge impact on the battlefield.

PRINCIPLE: LEADING UP THE CHAIN

If your boss isn't making a decision in a timely manner or providing necessary support for you and your team, don't blame the boss. First, blame yourself. Examine what you can do to better convey the critical information for decisions to be made and support allocated.

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.

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.

While pushing to make your superior understand what you need, you must also realize that your boss must allocate limited assets and make decisions with the bigger picture in mind. You and your team may not represent the priority effort at that particular time. Or perhaps the senior leadership has chosen a different direction. Have the humility to understand and accept this.

One of the most important jobs of any leader is to support your own boss—your immediate leadership. 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.

As a leader, if you don't understand why decisions are being made, requests denied, or support allocated elsewhere, you must ask those questions up the chain. Then, once understood, you can pass that understanding down to your team. 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*.

When leading up the chain of command, use caution and respect. But remember, if your leader is not giving the support you need, don't blame him or her. Instead, reexamine what you can do to better clarify, educate, influence, or convince that person to give you what you need in order to win.

The major factors to be aware of when leading up and down the chain of command are these:

- Take responsibility for leading everyone in your world, subordinates and superiors alike.
- If someone isn't doing what you want or need them to do, look in the mirror first and determine what you can do to better enable this.
- Don't ask your leader what you should do, tell them what you are going to do.

APPLICATION TO BUSINESS

"Corporate doesn't understand what's going on out here," said the field manager. "Whatever experience those guys had in the field from years ago, they have long forgotten. They just don't get what

we are dealing with, and their questions and second-guessing prevents me and my team from getting the job done.”

The infamous *they*.

I was on a visit to a client company’s field leadership team, the frontline troops that executed the company’s mission. This was where the rubber met the road: all the corporate capital initiatives, strategic planning sessions, and allocated resources were geared to support this team here on the ground. How the frontline troops executed the mission would ultimately mean success or failure for the entire company.

The field manager’s team was geographically separated from their corporate headquarters located hundreds of miles away. He was clearly frustrated. The field manager had a job to do, and he was angry at the questions and scrutiny from afar. For every task his team undertook he was required to submit substantial paperwork. In his mind, it made for a lot more work than necessary and detracted from his team’s focus and ability to execute.

I listened and allowed him to vent for several minutes.

“I’ve been in your shoes,” I said. “I used to get frustrated as hell at my chain of command when we were in Iraq. They would scrutinize our plans, ask questions that seemed stupid, and load on a massive paperwork requirement that I had to submit both prior to and after every operation.”

“You had to deal with that as a Navy SEAL at war?” asked the field manager, surprised. “I wouldn’t have guessed that.”

“I absolutely did,” I said. “Before every combat mission, we had to get approval up the chain of command at least two levels from a faraway boss who didn’t fully understand what we were up against. That required me putting the intricate details of the operation in a multitude of PowerPoint slides and then an additional Word document of several typed pages, just to get approval. Once approved and we launched, then I had to generate even more

paperwork when we got back: a multislides storyboard brief with photographs, and a detailed multipage operational summary. If we killed any bad guys on a combat mission—which in Ramadi was virtually every operation—we had to provide sworn statements describing precisely what happened and how our actions complied with the rules of engagement for each enemy fighter killed. And that doesn't even include the pages of required intelligence paperwork we had to compile."

"I didn't figure you guys would have to deal with such stuff," said the field manager.

"No matter how big or bureaucratic your company seems," I said, "it pales in comparison to the gargantuan U.S. military bureaucracy. And imagine how much more emotional and frustrating it was for us when our lives were on the line everyday. I often worked myself into a rage over some very similar issues to yours here.

"But we had two choices," I said. "Throw our hands up in frustration and do nothing, or figure out how to most effectively operate within the constraints required of us. We chose the latter.

"Let me ask you a question," I continued. "Do you think the company senior executives at corporate headquarters want you to fail?"

The field manager looked puzzled. He had clearly never considered the question.

"Could they be scheming about how to make your job more difficult, how they can keep you and your team flustered with questions, scrutiny, and paperwork or how they might totally sabotage your mission?" I asked.

Of course, this wasn't the case. Having worked with the company's executive team, I knew they were a smart bunch of driven, eager overachievers who wanted their frontline troops to not only accomplish the mission but to eclipse all competitors and set the standard for the industry.

"No, they don't want me to fail," admitted the field manager.

"Alright," I said. "Then if they are asking questions, criticizing your plan, and requiring paperwork, it means they are in need of some critical information. When Jocko was my task unit commander, he had this same talk with me in Ramadi. That's what changed my mind-set about this and allowed us to become far more effective."

"What changed your mind?" the field manager asked.

"I realized that if my chain of command had questions about my plans or needed additional information or more detailed paperwork, it was not their fault," I said. "It was *my* fault. I knew we were making the right decisions and being careful to mitigate every risk we could control. I knew our combat operations were critical to achieving strategic victory in Ramadi. So if my boss wasn't comfortable with what I was doing, it was only because I had not clearly communicated it to him."

The field manager looked at me, beginning to understand.

"So if they have questions, it's my fault that they didn't get the information they need?" asked the field manager. This completely contradicted his way of thinking and everything he had experienced in his leadership upbringing. That "us versus them" mentality was common to just about every level of every chain of command, whether military unit or civilian corporation. But breaking that mentality was the key to properly lead up the chain of command and radically improve the team's performance.

"Listen: the senior leadership at corporate headquarters wants you to succeed," I said. "That's a given. It's up to you to inform them and help them understand some of the challenges you are dealing with here on the ground. If you have questions about why a specific plan or required paperwork is coming down the pipe, don't just throw up your hands in frustration. Ask those questions up the chain to clarify, so that you can understand it. Provide them with constructive feedback so they can appreciate the

impact those plans or requirements have on your operations. That is what Extreme Ownership is all about.”

“I guess I never really thought about it like that,” said the field manager.

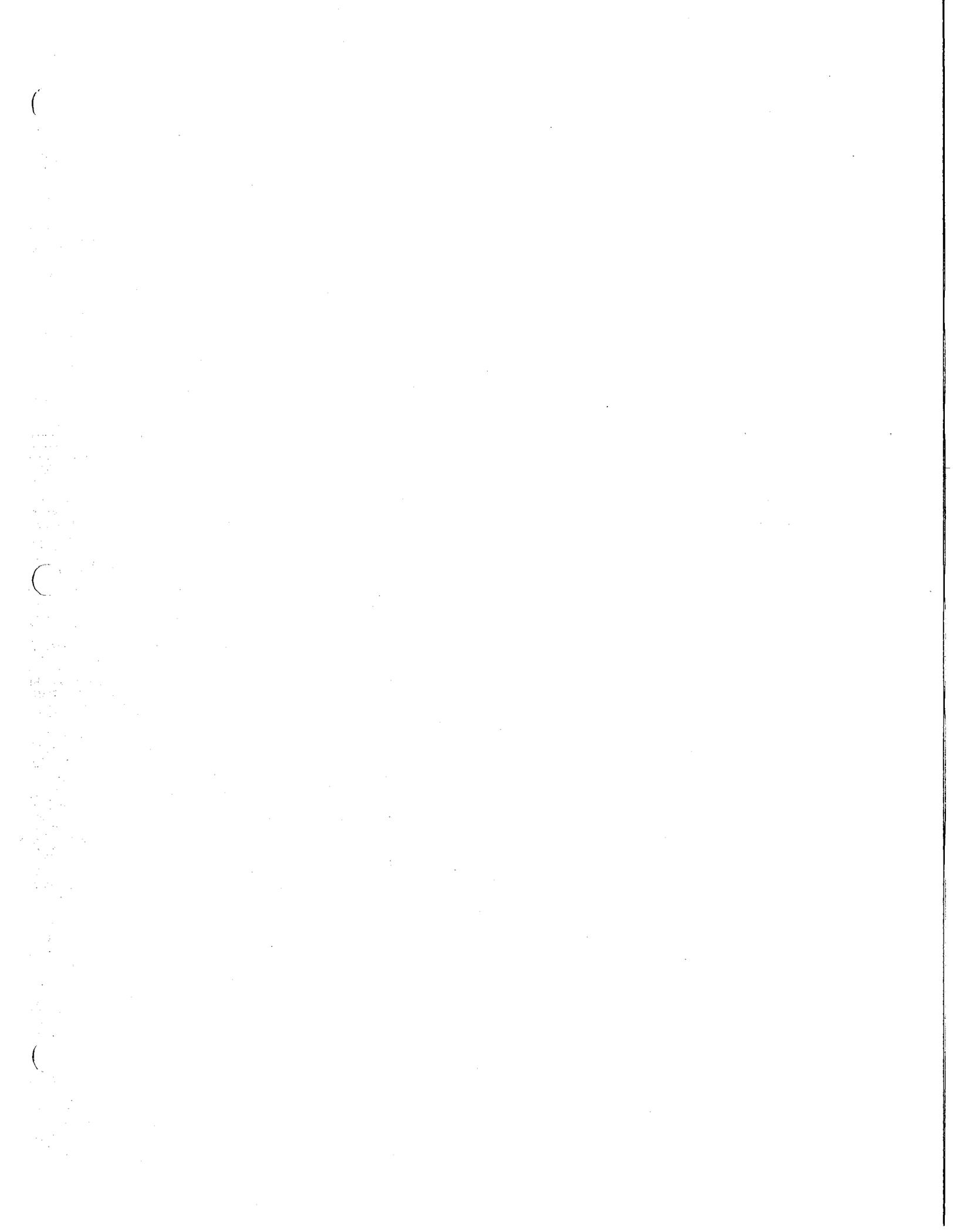
“That’s ‘leading up the chain of command,’” I explained.

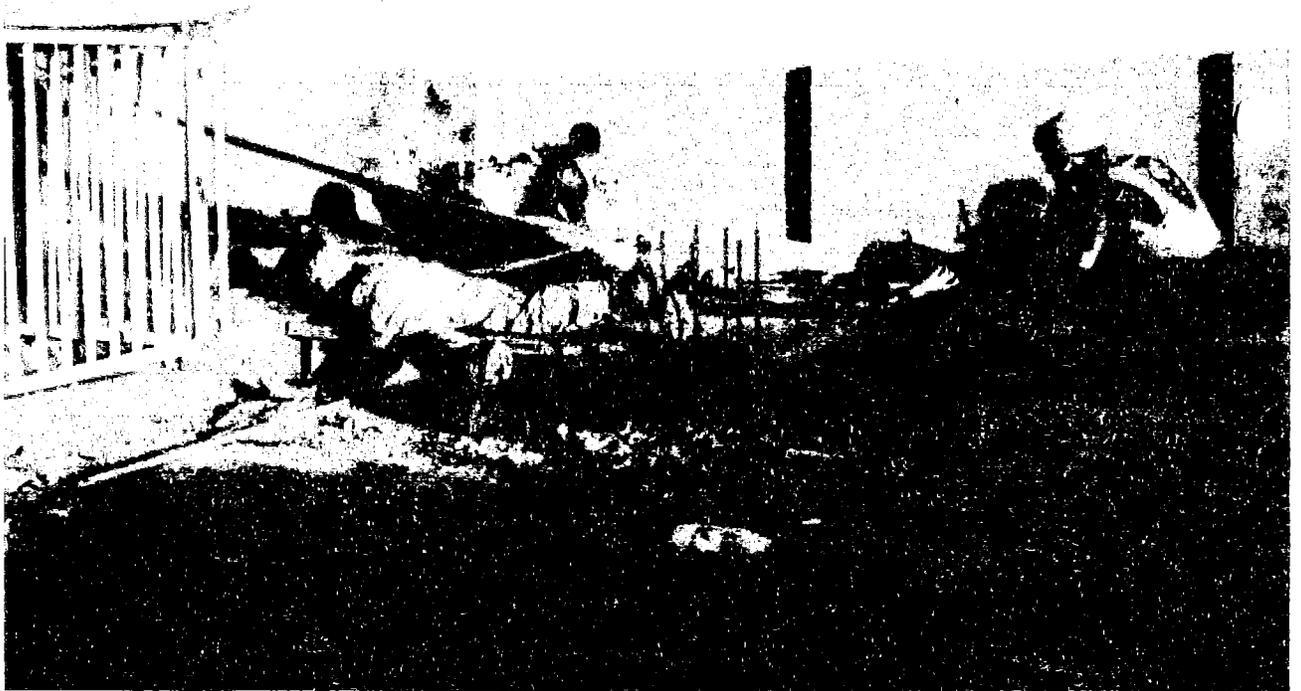
The field manager came around to this realization. He accepted that he needed to do better in pushing situational awareness, information, and communication up the chain.

“If you think they don’t fully understand the challenges you are facing here, invite your senior executives out to the field to see your team in action,” I said.

Over the following weeks and months, the field manager took a different tack with his senior leadership at corporate headquarters. He took the initiative to understand what specific information they needed and went overboard pushing that information to them.

He also hosted the senior executives in a field visit to their frontline troops. It built camaraderie between the corporate leadership team and the field manager’s operations team on the ground. The face-to-face interaction helped the senior executives understand some of the field manager’s challenges. And the field manager’s time with the senior executives made him realize all the more that his leaders were smart folks who wanted him to succeed. It went a long way toward breaking down the barriers that had built up between his field team and corporate headquarters. He was now ready to lead up the chain.





Charlie Platoon sniper overwatch: Leif (right) reports enemy activity and coordinates friendly movement via radio as SEAL snipers, including Chris Kyle (left), engage enemy fighters maneuvering to attack coalition forces.

(Photo courtesy of the authors)

CHAPTER 11

Decisiveness amid Uncertainty

Leif Babin

SNIPER OVERWATCH, RAMADI, IRAQ: TAKE THE SHOT

"I've got a guy with a scoped weapon in the second-story window of building 127," said Chris.

This was a bit out of the ordinary. Chris Kyle* was Charlie Platoon's point man and lead sniper—the most experienced sniper in the platoon and one of the best in the SEAL Teams. He had been nicknamed "The Legend" in jest on a previous deployment to Iraq. But as a driver of our sniper operations in Ramadi, he was racking up confirmed kills on enemy fighters at a rate that promised to surpass the most successful snipers in U.S. military history.

What made Chris Kyle such a great sniper was not that he was the most exceptional marksman. His secret was that he practiced Extreme Ownership of his craft. Intimately involved in planning and scouting potential sniper overwatch positions, he put himself in the right place at the right time to maximize his

* Chris Kyle, author of *The New York Times* bestseller *American Sniper*, and the inspiration for the movie *American Sniper*.

effectiveness. While others might get bored and lose focus after an hour of two of staring through the reticle of their sniper scope, Chris maintained discipline and stayed vigilant. He was lucky, but more often than not he made his luck.

If Chris or any of our SEAL shooters could PID—positively identify—a bad guy with a weapon committing a hostile act or determine reasonable certainty of hostile intent, they were cleared to engage. They didn't need my permission. If they asked for it, that meant reasonable certainty of hostile intent was in question.

"Can you PID?" I asked.

"Just saw a dark shape of a man with a scoped weapon for a split second," replied Chris. "Then he stepped back from the window and disappeared behind a curtain."

"Roger that," I said. "What building again?" I checked the battle map that labeled each building or structure in the sector with a number. All of us in this U.S. Army brigade task force operation, including a half dozen different U.S. Army and Marine Corps battalions and thousands of Soldiers and Marines on the ground, were operating on the same battle map, which was crucial. But matching the numbers and street names on the map to what we were seeing in front of us on the ground could be quite a challenge. Here there were no streets signs or address numbers. This was Ramadi. Amid the urban sprawl of trash-covered streets and alleyways were huge bomb craters and walls pock-marked by bullets and spray-painted with Arabic jihadist graffiti, which our interpreters translated for us, such as: "We will fight until we reach either of the two heavens: victory or martyrdom." We were here to ensure it was the latter.

Ahead of a huge Army force of U.S. Soldiers on foot, M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tanks and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, our SEAL platoon had foot-patrolled into the area in the early morning darkness. We set up our sniper overwatch position in a

two-story building a few hundred meters down the street from where a U.S. Army battalion would establish their newest combat outpost. Once again we were deep in the heart of enemy territory. We covered the Soldiers as they moved into the area on foot, accompanied by tanks and Bradleys.

Now the sun had risen and hundreds of U.S. Soldiers had arrived, clearing through the surrounding buildings. Chris and other SEAL snipers had already killed several enemy fighters maneuvering to attack—just another day in South-Central Ramadi. After every engagement, I relayed situational reports (or SITREPs) to the U.S. Army company in charge of the new combat outpost—Team Warrior of the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, assigned to Task Force Bandit.

The snipers did the bulk of the shooting. As an officer, my job wasn't to pull the trigger but to provide command and control and coordinate with the friendly units in the area.

However, the report from Chris of a guy with a scoped weapon in a second-story window raised some questions. U.S. Soldiers were clearing buildings just beyond the direction he was looking, and we needed to be absolutely clear as to what we were seeing. I crouched next to Chris and kept fairly low to try and prevent my head getting shot off. He held his sniper rifle steady and, through his high-power scope, carefully observed the window where he had last seen the dark silhouette of the man with a weapon.

"You still have eyes on?" I asked Chris, meaning did he still have a visual on the potential target.

"Negative," Chris responded without taking his eye from his riflescope.

Looking down the street he was observing, I could see a few hundred meters in that direction. The streets and alleyways were narrow and confusing. The maze of one-and two-story buildings

blended together. Our view was partially obstructed by low-hanging power lines and the occasional palm tree or parked car.

In recent weeks, enemy snipers had wreaked havoc in this area, killing a young Marine and an Army Soldier and critically wounding more. Ryan Job had been shot only a couple of blocks down the street from our position. Marc Lee had been killed just a few houses down from the building we now occupied. Their loss was devastating and this fight was extremely personal to us. We did our utmost to eliminate every enemy fighter to ensure more of our teammates and our U.S. Army and Marine Corps brothers-in-arms came home alive.

Killing an enemy sniper, who had likely killed our own, would exact some measure of vengeance and protect American lives. But there were friendlies—U.S. Soldiers—throughout this area so we had to be sure.

I got on the radio—the company communications net—and requested Team Warrior's company commander. He was a respected leader and an outstanding Soldier I had come to admire in the months we had worked together.

"Warrior, this is Red Bull,* I said, when he came up on the net. "We saw a man with a scoped weapon in the second story of building 127. Can you confirm you don't have any personnel in that building?" I listened as he contacted his platoon commander, responsible for the buildings in that area, on the company net. The platoon commander soon answered that they did not.

"Negative," the company commander replied (via radio) to my inquiry. "We don't have anyone in that building." His Soldiers had cleared through that area an hour or so before.

"Request you engage," said the company commander. His platoon commander had confirmed that none of his guys were in building 127. Therefore, the man Chris had seen must be an in-

* Our call sign at the time in that particular battlespace.

surgent sniper. And because the threat of enemy snipers was significant, the company commander (like me) wanted our SEAL snipers to take out any enemy snipers before they could kill Warrior's troops.

But Chris obviously didn't feel good about the situation, and I certainly didn't either. There were a lot of friendlies in the vicinity—Warrior's Soldiers—just a block beyond where Chris had seen the individual. Chris maintained eyes on the window in question through his sniper scope and waited patiently. He knew what he was doing and needed no direction from me.

"Just saw him again," said Chris. He described how, for a brief moment, the dark silhouette of an individual peered out from behind the window's curtain. Chris couldn't make out anything but the shape of a man and the faint lines of a weapon with a scope. Then, like a ghost, the man faded back into the darkness of the room and the curtain was pulled across the window, blocking any view into the room. We couldn't PID the individual.

I again called Warrior's company commander on the radio.

"We just saw the individual with the scoped weapon again, same location," I told him.

"Roger," the company commander responded. "Take that guy out," he insisted in an exasperated tone. It was clear he was wondering, *What the hell are these SEALs waiting for? An enemy sniper is a threat to my men: kill him before he kills us!*

We certainly did not want any of Warrior's Soldiers to get killed or wounded. We were here to prevent such attacks, and I felt the pressure to comply. Was it a bad guy or wasn't it? I couldn't say with any certitude. But I had to make a decision.

What if we don't take that shot, I thought to myself, and Warrior Soldiers get killed because we failed to act? That would be horrible. It would be a heavy burden to bear.

On the other hand, I thought, what if we take this shot and it turns out to be a good guy—a U.S. Soldier—in that window? That

outcome would be worst of all. I knew I could never live with myself if that happened. Despite the forceful pressure to comply, I had to take a step back and see the bigger picture. I remembered from my boyhood days in Texas a basic rule of firearms safety my father taught me: know your target and what is beyond it. That made the decision all too clear. We couldn't chance taking this shot. Regardless of the pressure, I couldn't risk it.

"Negative," I responded to Warrior's company commander. "Too many friendlies in the area, and we can't PID. I recommend you send some Soldiers to reclear that building."

I didn't work for the company commander and he didn't work for me. He couldn't order me to take the shot, and I couldn't order him to clear the building. But we had worked together before. I knew and respected him as a leader and I knew he probably felt the same for me. He would have to trust in my judgment.

I listened on the net as Warrior's company commander again called up his platoon commander to discuss my recommendation. From the tone in their voices, they were clearly not happy. What I was asking them to do—an assault on an enemy-occupied building—put their Soldiers at great risk. It could very well get some of them killed.

"Shoot him," came the response yet again from the company commander. "Take that guy out," he said, this time more forcefully.

"Negative," I said, sternly. "Don't feel comfortable with that." I wasn't backing down, no matter the pressure to comply.

The company commander's patience had worn thin. He had a hell of a lot on his plate managing more than 100 Soldiers, multiple tanks, and Bradleys as his men cleared through dozens of buildings. Responsible for the establishment of this new combat outpost deep in enemy territory, he also had to coordinate Warrior's movement with his battalion and the supporting compa-

nies. Now all he knew was that we had reported a potential bad guy with a scoped weapon, possibly an enemy sniper. And we were asking his Soldiers to leave the relative safety of the buildings they were in, run across a hostile street in broad daylight, and risk their lives because we didn't feel comfortable taking the shot.

I couldn't blame the company commander for his frustration. I empathized. But Chris was one of the best snipers anywhere. He had already single-handedly accounted for dozens of enemy killed and certainly didn't need any urging from me to pull the trigger on bad guys he could PID. His level of caution signaled that I, as his SEAL platoon commander, needed to make the tough decision—the best decision I could—based on the information I had. As the situation developed, if information suddenly changed, we would still have the opportunity to engage and could do so with a clearer picture of what was actually happening. Jocko had always encouraged us to be aggressive in decision-making. But part of being decisive was knowing and understanding that some decisions, while immediately impactful, can be quickly reversed or altered; other decisions, like shooting another human being, cannot be undone. If we waited to take this shot we could later change course, while a decision to pull the trigger and engage this shadowy target would be final.

With that in mind, I held my ground. "We cannot engage." I told the company commander over the radio. "I recommend you clear that building."

The radio was quiet for a few moments. I'm sure the company commander bit his tongue in frustration. Then, reluctantly, he directed his platoon commander to reclear the building. From his voice over the radio, I could tell the platoon commander was furious. But he knew he had to address the threat. He directed a squad of his Soldiers to break out of the building they were in,

re-clear building 127, and search for the mysterious "guy with the scoped weapon."

"We will cover your movement," I told the company commander.

"If he so much as moves while our guys are in the open," he replied, "shoot that son of a bitch."

"Roger," I responded. If the individual gave us even an inkling that he was hostile, Chris would take the shot.

Standing next to Chris with his sniper rifle trained on the window, I had my radio headset on, ready to coordinate with Warrior's Soldiers.

Suddenly, ten Soldiers from Warrior Company burst out of the door of a building and dashed across the street.

Immediately, all became clear!

"Halt the clearance team and return to COP," I directed Warrior's company commander over the net.

Instantly, I recognized our error. Chris and I had been looking one block farther than we had realized. Instead of looking at the building we thought was building 127 on our battle map, we were looking at one of the buildings where U.S. Soldiers from Warrior were gathered. Though it was a mistake easily made in this urban environment (and one that happened more often than any U.S. commanders wished to admit), it could have had deadly and devastating consequences. The guy with a scoped weapon Chris had seen in the window was not an enemy sniper. It was a U.S. Soldier standing back from the window with a Trijicon ACOG scope on his U.S. military issued M16 rifle.

Thank God, I thought, literally thanking God. I was grateful for Chris's initial judgment—an exceptional call not to take a shot he couldn't clearly identify. He had done exactly as he should have and notified me to ask for guidance. Others with less experience might have rushed decisions and pulled that trigger. I

was thankful I had held my ground and ultimately made the right decision.

Even still, it scared the hell out of me, to think just how close we had come to shooting a U.S. Soldier. Had we succumbed to the pressure, Chris would have put a large caliber round into an American soldier, almost certainly killing him. As the leader in charge, regardless of who pulled the trigger, the responsibility would have been mine. Living with such a thing on my conscience would have been hell. For me, the war would have been over. There would be no choice but to turn in my Trident (our SEAL warfare insignia) and hang up my combat boots. For Charlie Platoon and Task Unit Bruiser, it would have undone all the great work we accomplished, the many U.S. Soldiers and Marines we had saved. All that would be meaningless had I given the order and Chris pulled the trigger.

I keyed up my radio on Warrior's company net and explained what had happened to the company commander. He too understood how easily a building misidentification could happen. It happened all the time. He too breathed a huge sigh of relief that we hadn't engaged.

"I'm glad you didn't listen to me," he admitted.

In the uncertainty and chaos of the battlefield, despite the pressure to take the shot, I had to act decisively, in this case holding back my lead sniper from taking a shot on a target because we didn't have clear, positive identification. It was one of any number of combat examples from our time in Ramadi that demonstrated how critical it was for leadership to be decisive amid uncertainty.

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.

PRINCIPLE

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, nor even the knowledge of the immediate consequences for momentary decisions. On the battlefield, for those immersed in the action, the first recognition of an 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? If so, how badly? Where are other friendly forces? Is it possible they are friendly forces mistakenly shooting at us? 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.

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 in-

ability 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. With capital at risk, markets in flux, and competitors actively working to outmaneuver opponents, professional careers and paychecks are at stake. Outcomes are never certain; success never guaranteed. Even so, business leaders must be comfortable in the chaos and act decisively amid such uncertainty.

APPLICATION TO BUSINESS

"Which one do you believe?" Jocko asked. It was time to make a decision. But the executives didn't have an answer. There was much at stake for the company and the outcome was far from certain. They weren't sure what to do.

Jocko and I sat in a meeting room with the CEO of a successful software company and the CEO of one of the company's subsidiaries, an engineering company. Not yet five years from the software company's launch, the company had experienced rapid growth and exponentially increasing revenues.

Much of the company's leadership and that of their engineering company were young, talented individuals driven to succeed. Jocko and I were brought in to give them the tools to lead their teams, aggressively expand their reach, and dominate the competition.

The engineering company, led by a talented CEO, had already produced great results for the parent company. They had landed several lucrative contracts and rapidly established a good reputation for quality and service.

Jim, the CEO of the parent company, and Darla, the CEO of the subsidiary company, were proud of the effective teams and processes they had developed. They each had recruited substantial talent from their previous companies to join their current teams. Darla had five promising senior engineers, who each ran teams of half a dozen personnel or more. It had been an impressive year for Darla and her engineering company.

But like any organization, there were challenges. Constant pressure from competitors' recruiting efforts, trying to lure away their most talented people, presented the most substantial impediment to the company's long-term success. The five senior engineers were primary targets. Companies knew that if they could convince a good senior engineer to join their firm, the engineer's team—his or her most talented players—might follow.

The senior engineers were highly competitive. Rather than collaborate and support one another as the company expanded, some tried to outdo each other, hoping to position themselves for promotion ahead of their peers.

Two senior engineers, Eduardo and Nigel, had built up particular animosity for each other and had become quite cutthroat. The two engineers constantly bickered and butted heads. They blamed each other when their own projects hit delays or ran over budget. Each criticized the other's work and passed that criticism to their CEO, Darla, to try to undermine each other.

For months Darla had done her best to quell their issues and animosity. She held conference calls and face-to-face meetings with them. Darla had even taken Eduardo and Nigel to dinner several times to help them try to bury the hatchet. But nothing seemed to work. Now their relationship had deteriorated to a

point that it had become dysfunctional and destructive to the rest of the team.

Jocko and I joined an off-site meeting with the senior executives from the parent company and the subsidiary companies to deliver a presentation on leadership and teamwork. During the off-site, Darla's two senior engineers' head butting reached crisis mode. She received an e-mail from Eduardo that stated he could no longer work with Nigel and insisted that Nigel be fired. Eduardo also mentioned a rumor that Nigel had met with a recruiter from another company and was considering leaving. Shortly thereafter, Darla received an e-mail from Nigel saying that he had caught wind that Eduardo had discussed a possible move to another company with some of his team. Not to be outdone, Nigel insisted that he could no longer work with Eduardo and that Eduardo must be fired.

Darla showed the e-mails to Jim, the parent company CEO, during a break in the off-site schedule. The two CEOs, Jim and Darla, asked Jocko and me for our thoughts on the dilemma with the two engineers. Darla was frustrated and nervous as to how the situation might play out. Concerned about a potential mass exodus, much of the technical knowledge on current projects could be lost. That would mean missed deadlines and degradation in quality and services. It might cost Darla's company future contracts.

When Jocko asked, "Which one do you believe?" Jim just listened quietly, waiting for Darla's input.

"I'm not sure which one, or if I believe either," Darla finally responded, "but this could get bad very quickly. Losing either one of them and some of their key folks would be painful for us. Losing both of them—and key members of their teams—could be devastating."

"Not exactly a position of strength to negotiate from," Jim added.

"Does anything in their contract prevent them from leaving and taking people with them?" Jocko asked.

"Nothing that will hold up," said Jim. "As hot as this industry is right now, people won't sign non-competes. No one likes to be locked down."

"How good are their teams?" I asked.

"Surprisingly good, despite all this drama," Darla replied.

"And how loyal are the teams to Eduardo and Nigel?" Jocko asked.

"Hard to tell," said Darla, "but there are no real die-hard fans in either group, from what I have seen."

The break was over and the off-site agenda started again. Strategic discussions took place but Darla wasn't engaged. She was clearly frustrated by the drama within her team, and with so much at stake, she seemed uncertain and unclear on what to do about it.

When the next break in the leadership off-site came, again, Jim, Darla, Jocko, and I assembled in a meeting room to discuss options.

"I think I better just let this play its course," Darla stated. She had decided not to decide.

"What makes you say that?" I asked. In the SEAL Teams, we taught our leaders to act decisively amid chaos. Jocko had taught me that, as a leader, my default setting should be aggressive—proactive rather than reactive. This was critical to the success of any team. Instead of letting the situation dictate our decisions, we must dictate the situation. But for many leaders, this mind-set was not intuitive. Many operated with a "wait and see" approach. But experience had taught me that the picture could never be complete. There was always some element of risk. There was no 100-percent right solution.

"Well, I'm really not sure what is going on," Darla responded.

"Eduardo and Nigel could both be lying, or they could both be telling the truth. There is no way to know. And there isn't enough information for me to act, so I think I just have to let it play out."

"How do you think this will most likely play out?" I asked.

"Time will tell. But they don't like working with each other," Darla responded. "When they realize I'm keeping them both, one will leave. If they choose to leave, they will have offers from our competitors very quickly. They will likely take some key players from the team with them."

"Are there any other options?" Jocko inquired.

"Well, I could fire one of them. But which one?" Darla asked. "What if I fire the wrong one? I just don't think I know enough to make a decision."

"I think you might," Jocko said. Darla knew enough to determine how the scenario was likely to play out, and thus she knew enough to make a decision. "There is another option," said Jocko.

"What's that?" Darla said incredulously.

"You could fire them both," said Jocko. Darla and Jim looked at each other, puzzled. "When Leif and I were in Task Unit Bruiser together," Jocko continued, "another task unit at our SEAL Team had a major issue between the task unit commander and one of the platoon commanders. Both were key leaders in positions critical to the task unit's performance. But these guys just couldn't get along. They hated each other. Each bad-mouthed the other to our SEAL Team's commanding officer and his staff. Finally, our commanding officer—our CEO—declared he had had enough. He gave them the weekend to figure out a way they could work together. On Monday morning, they both still insisted they could not work together and each demanded that the other be fired.

Instead, and to their surprise, the commanding officer fired them both."

It took a moment to sink in. Darla was surprised. She had not considered this option.

"I don't want to lose either of them, much less both of them!" Darla replied.

"Let me ask you this," I asked Darla. "Are either one of them stellar leaders?"

"Not exactly," Darla admitted.

Jocko responded, "They haven't found a way to work together. They are both possibly interviewing at other companies. And now, they are plotting against each other. All this has detrimental impact to your company's performance. *Not exactly* the kind of leaders I would want working for me."

"But, if I do that, what happens to their teams?" Darla asked. She was concerned about the immediate consequence that the loss in technical knowledge and expertise would mean to the company and how their teams might react.

"You said that you didn't think there are any die-hard fans of either within the team," said Jocko. "Even if there are one or two loyalists, do you really want people loyal to these types of leaders working at your company? Let me ask you this: Are there any high-potential frontline personnel that could take their jobs? It may be time for a battlefield promotion. It's likely the real in-depth knowledge on the various projects is with the frontline troops, not with Eduardo and Nigel."

"That's probably true," Darla said.

"Absolutely true," Jim added, who had been quietly listening to the conversation.

"How do you want to be perceived?" I asked Darla. "Do you want to be seen as someone who can be held hostage by the demands—the threats—they are making? Do you want to be seen as indecisive?"

"No," Darla said, flatly.

"As a leader, you want to be seen—you *need* to be seen—as decisive, and willing to make tough choices. The outcome may be uncertain, but you have enough understanding and information to make a decision," I said.

"This is one of those moments," said Jocko. "The people on the front lines, they understand these dynamics. They know what is going on. They will respect this, and their loyalty to you and your company will increase."

"That makes sense," Darla admitted.

"I'll tell you something else," I added. "These guys are cancers. Their destructive attitudes will metastasize within the team and spread to others. The quicker you cut them out, the less damage they will do, the less negativity they will spread, and, most important, the fewer people they will pull away with them."

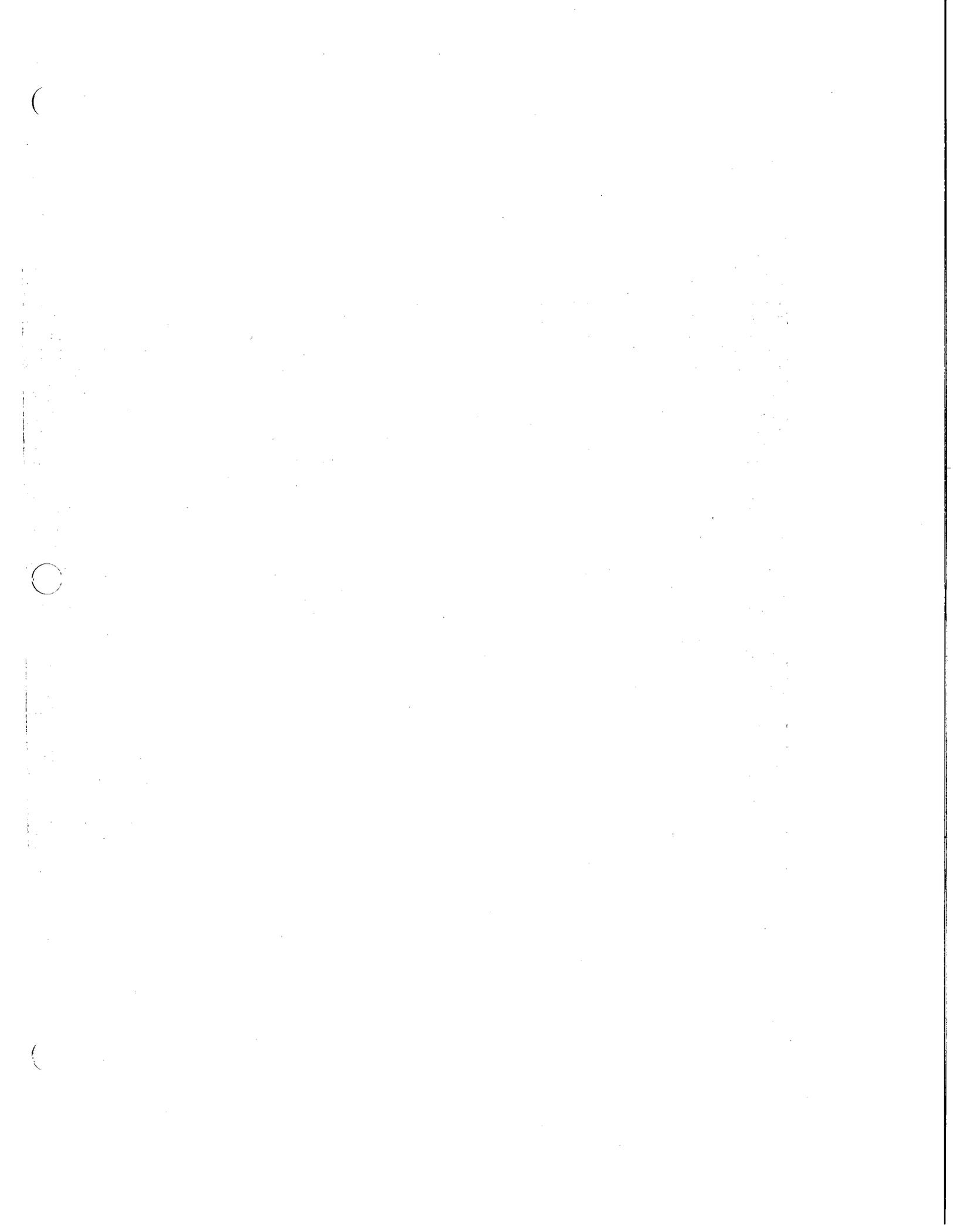
"What do you think, Jim?" Darla asked.

"I think it makes sense," Jim replied. "Jocko and Leif have been hammering us to be aggressive and maneuver to get the best advantage over the enemy; to be decisive amid uncertainty. I think now is the perfect time to do just that," Jim replied. "Execute."

Darla was excused from the off-site meetings for an hour to come up with a plan. She called her lead developer and discussed her intent. He loved it and quickly offered up two candidates from each team who were ready and eager to step up. The two candidates had worked together in the past and already had a good professional relationship. The lead developer pulled each of the two individuals aside and met with them to check their willingness. He quickly reported back to Darla that they each were ready and excited to make the step up, adding that they both had a deep knowledge of the most critical ongoing projects.

Darla debriefed Jim on the plan specifics. Then Darla decisively executed the plan. She had the company's Human Resources

(HR) department draft a letter to both Eduardo and Nigel. HR served them each their respective letter of termination, and security escorted them from the building. The Information Technology department turned off their e-mail, their phone service, and their access to the internal intranet. For Nigel and Eduardo, it was game over. For Darla and her new leaders, it was game on.





Bruiser SEALs patrol into enemy territory. Ramadi's urban combat environment presented immense challenges: every piece of trash a potential IED, every window, door, balcony, and rooftop a potential enemy firing position.

(Photo courtesy of Todd Pitman)

CHAPTER 12

Discipline Equals Freedom—The Dichotomy of Leadership

Jocko Willink

BAGHDAD, IRAQ: THE DISCIPLINE TRANSFORMATION

“Target secure,” came the call over our SEAL platoon’s intersquad radio. We had just blown in the front door of the target building with a large explosive charge, and our SEAL assaulters systematically cleared through every room, eliminating threats and making sure we were in total control of the entire structure. Now it was time to determine who we had killed or captured and gather intelligence.

I was a SEAL platoon commander on my first deployment to Iraq. The bulk of our operations consisted of what we called direct-action “capture/kill” missions or targeted raids. For these operations, we operated almost exclusively at night.

The missions usually unfolded in a similar, somewhat predictable manner. Based on intelligence either from our higher headquarters or garnered from previous operations, we determined the location of a terrorist (or terrorists). Our SEAL platoon would then plan and execute an assault on the target building—a home, place of work, or safe house—in order to capture the terrorists and

gather intelligence. Entering a target building, our SEALs quickly secured all the rooms and controlled the people found inside. We would then conduct quick battlefield questioning on military-age males, identify suspected terrorists or insurgents and detain them, then turn them over to a detention facility for further questioning or confinement. Before leaving the target, we searched the building for intelligence and evidence that might help convict in the Iraqi court system the captured persons. Such evidence might be bomb-making material, weapons, or anything else that could either lead us to other insurgents or help build a case against the suspects we detained.

We had trained extensively to patrol through cities, breach doors, clear buildings, and capture or kill bad guys. But we weren't police. We had very little training on how to search buildings for intelligence and properly collect evidence. But how hard could it be? On our platoon's first few operations we did what any rowdy group of highly trained, armed young men would do: we ransacked the place. While the terrorists proved highly adept at hiding weapons and evidence, SEALs showed particular skill at breaking things to find what had been hidden. We flipped over furniture, emptied desks and dresser drawers onto the floor, ripped down curtains and pictures from the walls. We smashed anything that looked like it might have some kind of hiding space in it, including televisions, cabinets, or radios. Often, we found evidence where you might least expect it. But we created such a mess in the process that we had to go through everything again to double-check what had actually been searched. This meant moving everything that had been dumped onto the floor to check under carpets for trapdoors, where contraband might be hidden. While we often found the evidence or intelligence we were looking for, on several occasions critical intelligence and evidence was missed or left behind because no specific person had been designated as responsible for its collection. The whole search process

took substantial time, generally around forty-five minutes to complete. Remaining in a target building for that long, after the noise of an explosive breach and the assault team clearing the building alerted everyone in the neighborhood to our presence, made us vulnerable to counterattack from insurgents in the area.

After we had conducted a number of missions like this, a new Iraqi court system (composed of Iraqi judges and American advisors) imposed stricter requirements for collected evidence, including a documented chain of custody and the required paperwork for each item and a written explanation of where *exactly* the evidence had come from—right down to which room in which building. That way, in the new court system, the evidence could be used with a higher degree of confidence.

Suddenly, our SEAL platoon's rudimentary and highly undisciplined method of searching—the ransack—became even more problematic. So I tasked my assistant platoon commander (known as the assistant officer in charge or AOIC) with creating a more efficient search procedure for evidence to ensure our compliance with the new Iraqi court requirements. A young, enthusiastic, and aggressive SEAL, my AOIC was fired up to operate and lead. He took the assignment seriously and dove in.

A couple of days later he presented me with his plan. At first look it appeared complex, a possible violation of the Simple principle. But as he broke it down for me, it became clear that each person was assigned a simple task to execute while other members of the assault force conducted other tasks concurrently. It was a simple plan and a systematic method to enhance our effectiveness at searching for evidence. The plan designated a search team with specific individuals responsible for specific tasks: one would draw a sketch of the house and room layout, another would label each room with a number, another would video and photograph evidence where it was found. Each room would have a single SEAL operator who was designated the "room owner,"

responsible for everything in the room. Searches would happen systematically in an organized manner, starting from the floor up, so that we no longer had to search beneath what had been dumped on the floor.

The room owner would collect any contraband or possible evidence found and place it into a plastic bag that he carried. He would label that bag so that everyone would know who had found the evidence and in what room. For each room, when the search was completed, the room owner put an "X" through the labeled room number so that everyone knew the room had been searched. Finally, the room owner would maintain possession of the bags he collected on target until we were back on base and he could personally hand them over to the intelligence exploitation team in an organized manner, following the chain of custody procedures. Once back at camp, the sketcher and the labeler would lay out tape on the floor with the room numbers on them. The assault force would then file through and put their bag of evidence in the appropriate spot. When the exploitation team started to analyze the information, they would already know what building and what room it was found in. They also knew who had collected the intelligence, in case there were any questions.

While the plan at first sounded complex, when broken down into individual roles, it was actually fairly simple. In addition, I figured if each one of these jobs took perhaps ten minutes to accomplish, and they were all being executed simultaneously, this disciplined procedure would enable us to complete the task with far greater efficiency and speed than our undisciplined ransack method.

My AOIC had developed an excellent plan that promised to greatly enhance our evidence collection. Now we had to brief that plan to our SEAL platoon. I had the AOIC put together some PowerPoint slides that laid out the new process. It was a relatively

simple brief explaining the roles, responsibilities, and sequence of the method. We called in the platoon and ran through the plan.

Since human beings tend to resist change, we met instant dissent. "This will take too long," one SEAL complained.

"Why are we changing the way we do this? If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" another added.

"I'm not going to sit on target waiting to get shot while we do all this!" a senior SEAL exclaimed. "This is going to get somebody killed." According to him, implementing this plan would spell our imminent doom.

Virtually our entire SEAL platoon was vehemently against the new plan.

So I had to explain *why*. "Listen," I started: "Who here has searched a room that had already been searched?" The platoon admitted just about everyone had. "Who here has looked into a messy bedroom on a target and wondered whether or not it has been searched?" Again, most everyone had done so. I continued, "Who searched the upstairs bathroom on our last target?" They looked at me with blank stares. I knew the answer and told them: "No one." Upon our return, we had determined that the bathroom hadn't been searched at all; we had missed it. "The fact is we are not doing the best job. Evidentiary standards are increasing. We have to do a better. This method gives us a good standard operating procedure to utilize. With discipline and training, we will be much more effective in our search procedures than we have been. So we are going to try this method. Let's give it some test runs and see how it works."

There was grumbling, but the SEAL platoon reluctantly complied. We jocked up in our op gear and headed out to some abandoned buildings on base that we used for walk-through rehearsals prior to missions. Once there, we talked through the plan one more time and then we ran through it—a full-scale dress rehearsal. The

first run took us half an hour, a substantial amount of time, but still less than the forty-five minutes it had taken before. We shifted to another building and ran through it again. Now people knew their jobs and better understood the flow. The second run took about twenty minutes. We moved to another building. This time, it took ten minutes. The guys were now believers. Implementing a disciplined search method drastically improved our effectiveness and efficiency. It meant we were less likely to miss key evidence and intelligence. It also improved our speed, which meant we could spend less time on target, which decreased the risk of enemy counterattack.

That night we put the new method into practice for the first time on an actual combat mission in downtown Baghdad. Like clockwork, we cleared, secured, and searched the target building—all in less than twenty minutes. When we returned to our compound, all of the evidence we gathered was placed into neat piles organized by room. Going forward, we made minor adjustments to our new procedures for even greater efficiency, like creating ziplock bags that were hung around prisoners' necks to hold the personal belongings and evidence found on their person. With a baseline of solid, disciplined search procedures, it was easy to make minor adjustments to enhance our team's efficiency and effectiveness.

Not only were we faster with the new method, the quality of our evidence collection vastly improved. Using the previous ransack method, time constraints and the inability to keep track of sloppily stored evidence limited us from hitting multiple targets per night. But with our new, disciplined method, we could execute raids and complete our searches so quickly that we could now hit two and sometimes even three targets in a single night, all while keeping evidence separate and organized. Our freedom to operate and maneuver had increased substantially through disciplined procedures. Discipline equals freedom.

• • •

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.

I learned in SEAL training that if I wanted any extra time to study the academic material we were given, prepare our room and my uniforms for an inspection, or just stretch out aching muscles, I had to *make* that time because it did not exist on the written schedule. When I checked into my first SEAL Team, that practice continued. If I wanted extra time to work on my gear, clean my weapons, study tactics or new technology, I needed to *make* that time. The only way you could *make* time, was to get up early. That took discipline.

Waking up early was the first example I noticed in the SEAL Teams in which discipline was really the difference between being good and being exceptional. I saw it with some of the older, experienced SEALs. Those who were at work before everyone else were the ones who were considered the best "operators." That meant they had the best field craft, the most squared away gear, they were the best shots, and they were the most respected. It all tied into discipline. 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.

When SEALs launch combat operations, discipline is paramount. SEAL operators might have to carry loads of fifty to a hundred pounds of gear. Temperatures can be either extremely hot or freezing cold. When on a patrol and it comes time to rest, SEAL operators can't just flop down and take a load off. They must move tactically—slowly and quietly. When they want to eat or drink, they can't just drop everything and dig into their gear. Instead, SEAL operators have to wait until they are in a secure position. Though they might be exhausted from lack of sleep, when they get a chance to rest, SEAL operators must remain vigilant and aware so that the enemy does not surprise them. Nothing is easy. 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.

Although discipline demands control and asceticism, it actually results in freedom. When you have the discipline to get up early, you are rewarded with more free time. When you have the discipline to keep your helmet and body armor on in the field, you become accustomed to it and can move freely in it. The more discipline you have to work out, train your body physically and become stronger, the lighter your gear feels and the easier you can move around in it.

As I advanced into leadership positions, I strived to constantly improve my personal discipline. I realized very quickly that discipline was not only the most important quality for an individual but also for a team. The more disciplined standard operating procedures (SOPs) a team employs, the more freedom they have to

practice Decentralized Command (chapter 8) and thus they can execute faster, sharper, and more efficiently. Just as an individual excels when he or she exercises self-discipline, a unit that has tighter and more-disciplined procedures and processes will excel and win.

I carried the idea of disciplined standard operating procedures into Task Unit Bruiser. While there were all kinds of preexisting SOPs that SEAL platoons and task units followed—how we react to enemy contact in predetermined maneuvers called “immediate action drills,” the way we patrol as a standard method that varies little from platoon to platoon—in Bruiser, we took them even further. We standardized the way we loaded vehicles. We standardized the way we mustered in a building on a target. We standardized the way we “broke out” (or exited) from buildings. We standardized the way we got head counts to ensure we had all of our troops. We even standardized our radio voice procedures so that the most important information could be communicated quickly and clearly to the whole troop without confusion. There was a disciplined methodology to just about everything we did.

But there was, and is, a dichotomy in the strict discipline we followed. Instead of making us more rigid and unable to improvise, this discipline actually made us more flexible, more adaptable, and more efficient. It allowed us to be creative. When we wanted to change plans midstream on an operation, we didn't have to recreate an entire plan. We had the freedom to work within the framework of our disciplined procedures. All we had to do was link them together and explain whatever small portion of the plan had changed. When we wanted to mix and match fire teams, squads, and even platoons, we could do so with ease since each element operated with the same fundamental procedures. Last, and perhaps most important, when things went wrong and the fog of war set in, we fell back on our disciplined procedures to carry us through the toughest challenges on the battlefield.

While increased discipline most often results in more freedom, there are some teams that become so restricted by imposed discipline that they inhibit their leaders' and teams' ability to make decisions and think freely. If frontline leaders and troops executing the mission lack the ability to adapt, this becomes detrimental to the team's performance. So the balance between discipline and freedom must be found and carefully maintained. In that, lies the dichotomy: discipline—strict order, regimen, and control—might appear to be the opposite of total freedom—the power to act, speak, or think without any restrictions. But, in fact, discipline is the *pathway* to freedom.

PRINCIPLE

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 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.

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 hyperaggression. 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, discussed new options, and came to a conclusion with them, often adapting 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 were 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.

A leader must be calm but not robotic. It is normal—and necessary—to show emotion. The team must understand that their leader cares about them and their well-being. But, a leader must control his or her emotions. If not, how can they expect to control anything else? Leaders who lose their temper also lose respect. But, at the same time, to never show any sense of anger, sadness, or frustration would make that leader appear void of any emotion at all—a robot. People do not follow robots.

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.

A leader must be brave but not foolhardy. He or she must be willing to accept risk and act courageously, but must never be

reckless. It is a leader's job to always mitigate as much as possible those risks that can be controlled to accomplish the mission without sacrificing the team or excessively expending critical resources.

Leaders must have a competitive spirit but also be gracious losers. They must drive competition and push themselves and their teams to perform at the highest level. But they must never put their own drive for personal success ahead of overall mission success for the greater team. Leaders must act with professionalism and recognize others for their contributions.

A leader must be attentive to details but not obsessed by them. A good leader does not get bogged down in the minutia of a tactical problem at the expense of strategic success. He or she must monitor and check the team's progress in the most critical tasks. But that leader cannot get sucked into the details and lose track of the bigger picture.

A leader must be strong but likewise have endurance, not only physically but mentally. He or she must maintain the ability to perform at the highest level and sustain that level for the long term. Leaders must recognize limitations and know to pace themselves and their teams so that they can maintain a solid performance indefinitely.

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.

A leader must be close with subordinates but not too close. The best leaders understand the motivations of their team members and know their people—their lives and their families. But a leader must never grow so close to subordinates that one member

of the team becomes more important than another, or more important than the mission itself. Leaders must never get so close that the team forgets who is in charge.

A leader must exercise Extreme Ownership. Simultaneously, that leader must employ Decentralized Command by giving control to subordinate leaders.

Finally, a leader has nothing to prove but everything to prove. By virtue of rank and position, the team understands that the leader is in charge. A good leader does not gloat or revel in his or her position. To take charge of minute details just to demonstrate and reinforce to the team a leader's authority is the mark of poor, inexperienced leadership lacking in confidence. Since the team understands that the leader is de facto in charge, in that respect, a leader has nothing to prove. But in another respect, a leader has everything to prove: every member of the team must develop the trust and confidence that their leader will exercise good judgment, remain calm, and make the right decisions when it matters most. Leaders must earn that respect and prove themselves worthy, demonstrating through action that they will take care of the team and look out for their long-term interests and well-being. In that respect, a leader has everything to prove every day.

Beyond this, there are countless other leadership dichotomies that must be carefully balanced. Generally, when a leader struggles, the root cause behind the problem is that the leader has leaned too far in one direction and steered off course. Awareness of the dichotomies in leadership allows this discovery, and thereby enables the correction.

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 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.

A good leader has nothing to prove, but everything to prove.

APPLICATION TO BUSINESS

The chief financial officer (CFO) finally caught me alone, in between meetings, and made the point clear: the whole electrical division was losing money. The CFO could not believe that Andy, the company's CEO, kept the division running. Perhaps at some future point, the division might turn things around and become profitable. But that future was likely more than five years away—five very long years in the construction industry, where market conditions, weather, competition, contracts, and costs of labor could radically change forecasts.

“The only way we can make the electrical division profitable is if we pay them thirty to forty percent above the market rate for electrical work. And if we do that, sure, they might make money, but we will lose big.”

“Why do you think Andy is keeping it open and running?”

I asked with curiosity. "He is a smart guy. He must see what's happening."

The CFO looked down to the ground and then over each shoulder. "It's Mike," he said solemnly.

"Mike, the CEO of the electrical division?" I asked.

"Yeah. He's an old friend of Andy's," answered the CFO, "and a very good friend that has stuck with him through thick and thin."

"OK," I replied, understanding what was being implied. Andy was taking care of his friend.

"What are the consequences of keeping the electrical division open?" I asked.

"If we keep it open, we will continue to bleed capital. That by itself won't kill us," answered the CFO. "But if we are that tight on cash and we encounter any unexpected cost, we would be extremely vulnerable. I don't mind risk, but this simply does not make sense."

The next day I sat down with Andy. While I had worked with this company for about a year, it was mostly with the middle managers. My latest two-day workshop had been with the C-level executives. Andy had brought me in to help with the other leaders but it turned out he too could use some guidance.

Waiting for an opportunity to open the discussion, I sat with Andy to review the strengths and weaknesses of his leadership team across divisions. Eventually, we got to Mike.

"He's a great guy," said Andy. "Known him for years. He really knows the business, inside and out."

"That's great," I replied. "His division must be making a lot of money for you."

"Well you know, I saw some good opportunity on the electrical side, and wanted to get into it," Andy said, with obvious unease.

"With Mike's experience, I knew he could run a good show."

"So the division is profitable?" I asked.

"Not yet," Andy answered, "but it will be."

"How many months until it is?" I asked.

Andy paused. "Honestly," he said, "it could be three to five years."

"Ouch," I said. "That sounds like a long time in this business."

"And it could be too long. It is costing us money every month to keep him operating," Andy admitted. "But they just aren't getting any contracts outside of our company right now."

"Have you thought about shutting it down?" I asked directly.

"I have . . . but . . . you know, it will be profitable in a few years," he replied slowly.

"Let me ask you this," I said. "What if some other unforeseen event comes up? Costs you didn't expect? A major incident or accident? A large contract that falls through? Could you afford this kind of drain on the company if things went sideways?"

"Probably not," Andy replied.

"Is that the best strategy for the company?" I asked.

"You know, it's not that simple. I've known Mike for a long time. Long time," Andy said. "He has always done me right. I can't just shut him down."

There it was. Andy knew this loyalty was misguided. I just needed to get him to come to terms with it and see it for what it was.

Since Andy had just sat through my brief on the Dichotomy of Leadership, I stole one of my own lines right from it: "So one of your men is more important than the mission?" I asked bluntly.

"I didn't say that," Andy insisted.

"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 mis-

sion or the good of the team. Frankly, it sounds to me like Mike is more important than the financial stability and success of your company."

It was evident that Andy knew he was leaning too far in one direction. As with many of the dichotomies of leadership, a person's biggest strength can be his greatest weakness when he doesn't know how to balance it. A leader's best quality might be her aggressiveness, but if she goes too far she becomes reckless. A leader's best quality might be his confidence, but when he becomes overconfident he doesn't listen to others. In this case, Andy was a very loyal leader. He knew his people well and took care of his leaders and employees. But here, his loyalty to Mike was jeopardizing the financial stability of the entire company. His loyalty was out of equilibrium. But beyond the company's balance sheet, Andy's other leaders throughout the company saw what was happening, and it slowly undermined Andy's leadership as their CEO.

Finally, Andy relented, "I know, I know. I should shut it down, cut my losses. But it's hard in a situation like this."

"Of course it is. Being a leader is never easy," I said. "Imagine the U.S. Navy Sailors in World War II whose ships had been severely damaged. With their ship taking on water and in danger of sinking, those sailors sometimes had to secure the hatch to a flooded compartment when men who were their friends were still in those compartments, in order to save the ship. That's an unbelievably hard decision. But they knew if they did not make that call, they risked everyone else. They needed discipline to make the toughest decision in order to save the ship and save all the other men aboard. There is a lesson in that for your situation here with Mike. You require discipline to shut this hatch, to shut down the electrical division, in order to ensure the safety of your company—and all the other employees here."

Andy got the message. Two days later, he called me and told

me he had made a decision to cut the company's losses and commenced the shutdown of Mike's division. He knew it was the right move and was now confident in the decision. To Andy's surprise, Mike had told him he fully understood and had expected this would come. It did not impact their friendship. Andy found another place in the company to incorporate Mike's substantial experience and expertise, which allowed him to add value. The cost savings from the cut allowed them some freedom to invest in other, more-profitable divisions in the company.

(

(

(



Jocko and "Gunfighter" company commander, from the legendary U.S. Army 1/506th 101st Airborne, coordinate and deconflict the movement of SEALs, Iraqi soldiers, and U.S. Army troops during a large clearance operation in enemy territory.

(Photo courtesy of Todd Pitman)

AFTERWORD

There is an answer to the age-old question of whether leaders are born or made. Obviously, some are born with natural leadership qualities, such as charisma, eloquence, sharp wit, a decisive mind, the willingness to accept risk when others might falter, or the ability to remain calm in chaotic, high-pressure situations. Others may not possess these qualities innately. But with a willingness to learn, with a humble attitude that seeks valid constructive criticism in order to improve, with disciplined practice and training, even those with less natural ability can develop into highly effective leaders. Others who were blessed with all the natural talent in the world will fail as leaders if they are not humble enough to own their mistakes, admit that they don't have it all figured out, seek guidance, learn, and continuously grow. With a mind-set of Extreme Ownership, any person can develop into a highly effective leader. The qualities described throughout this book can and must be enhanced through training in order to build better leaders and teams that perform at the highest levels. Training is a critical aspect that must be utilized to develop

the foundations of leadership and build confidence in leaders' abilities to communicate and lead.

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. Some of the boldest, most successful plans in history have not come from the senior ranks but from frontline leaders. Senior leaders simply had the courage to accept and run with them.

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. Soon, a leader no longer needs to be involved in the minor details of decisions but can look up and out to focus on the strategic mission as the team handles the tactical battles. 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.

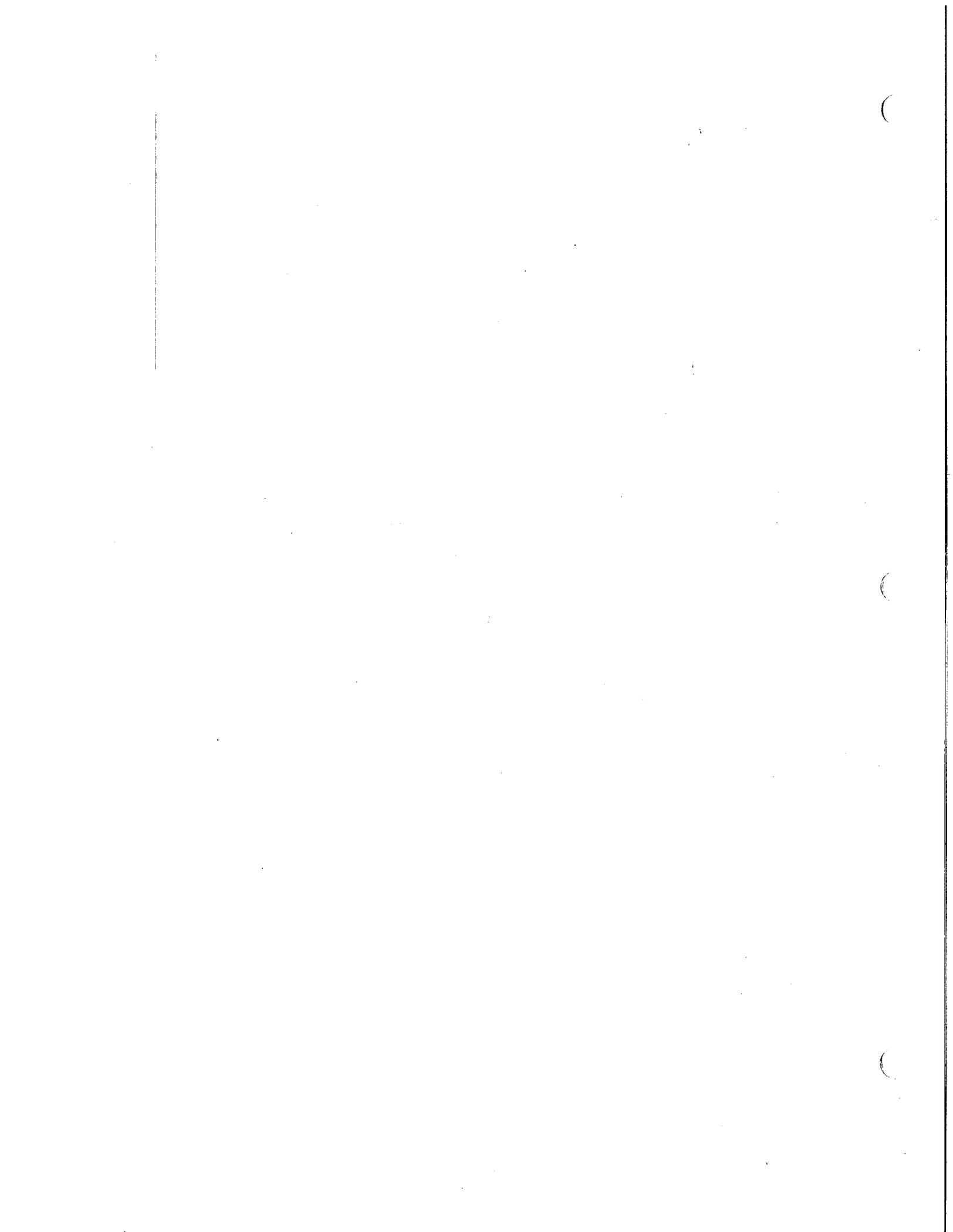
Much of what has been covered in this book has been covered in the past. We do not consider ourselves to be creators of a new paradigm of leadership principles. Much of what we learned or relearned has existed for hundreds and in some cases thousands of years. But, although these principles are often simple to understand in theory, it can be difficult to apply them in life. Leadership is *simple, but not easy*.

Likewise, leadership is both art and science. There are no exact answers or specific formulas to follow in every case. In any situation, there exists a great deal of gray area, neither black nor white. There may be an infinite number of options for potential solutions to any one leadership challenge. Some will be wrong and

only lead to further problems, while others will solve the problem and get the team back on track. Leadership decisions are inherently challenging and take practice. Not every decision will be a good one: all leaders make mistakes. No leader, no matter how competent and experienced, is immune from this. For any leader, handling those mistakes with humility is the key. Subordinates or direct reports don't expect their bosses to be perfect. When the boss makes a mistake but then owns up to that mistake, it doesn't decrease respect. Instead, it increases respect for that leader, proving he or she possesses the humility to admit and own mistakes and, most important, to learn from them.

No book can tell a leader exactly how to lead in every situation. But this book provides a sounding board for difficult decisions, a frame of reference to use for guidance when faced with tough leadership dilemmas. While the specifics of any particular situation may vary and the characters slightly differ, the principles remain the same and can be applied, either directly or indirectly, to overcome any leadership challenge that might arise.

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.



INDEX

- About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior* (Hackworth), 54
- adaptation, 145–46, 272–73
- aggression, 258–62, 275
- Ambrose, Stephen, 94
- American Sniper* (Kyle), xii
- Anbar Awakening, 9
- approvals, 71–73, 234–37, 239
- attacks, 89–90, 172. *See also*
- Prioritize and Execute attack on Camp Corregidor, 87–88
 - on COP Falcon, 129–30
 - during return home reflections, 221–22
- attitude, 45, 57–58, 96–97, 286
- bad leader business
- BUD/S and, 57–59
 - debrief on, 61
 - Extreme Ownership in, 62
 - overview on, 56
 - responsibility in, 60
 - tolerance in, 61–62
- bad leader principle
- improvement in, 55
 - junior leaders in, 55
 - standards in, 54
 - teamwork in, 54–55
- bad leaders, 37–41. *See also* Hell Week
- Band of Brothers* (Ambrose), 94
- Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training (BUD/S), 41–44, 57–59. *See also* Hell Week
- Battle of Ramadi, xv, 9–11.
See also specific missions
- belief, 12
- belief business
- blame about, 84–85
 - ego related to, 79–80
 - Extreme Ownership in, 84–85
 - misconceptions in, 78–79, 81–82

- belief business (*continued*)
 - power and, 80–81
 - reasons for, 79–80, 82–85
 - retention in, 78
 - strategy behind, 83
- belief mission
 - approvals in, 71–73
 - camaraderie in, 75–76
 - capability in, 71
 - gear for, 68
 - mistakes in, 74–75
 - OJT for, 70–71
 - orders in, 65–69
 - quality in, 66–67
 - reasons for, 69–70, 72–73
 - success of, 76
 - training in, 68
 - trust and, 67, 69
 - usefulness in, 75
 - winning in, 70
- belief principle
 - goals in, 77–78
 - junior leaders in, 77–79
 - leader's belief in, 76–78
 - for mission, 76–79
- bigger picture, 103–4
- blame, 57, 60, 101–5
 - about belief business, 84–85
 - for fog of war mission, 26–27
 - in fog of war principle, 30–31
- blue-on-blue. *See* friendly fire
- bonus structure, 32–33
- Bradley Fighting Vehicles
 - (Bradleys), 116–17, 168, 168, 179
- breaching, 2, 200
- briefs, 61, 206, 216
 - on discipline equals freedom, 268–69
 - for plan business, 217
 - for plan mission, 198–199
 - on plan principle, 205
 - on Simple mission, 134–35
- BUD/S. *See* Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training
- business
 - combat and, 12–14
 - leadership in, xiii–xiv, xvi–xvii
- camaraderie, 75–76
- Camp Corregidor. *See also* ego
 - check mission
 - attack on, 87–88
 - discipline at, 95
 - 1/506th at, 94–100
 - insurgents killed and, 93–94
 - Iraqi soldiers at, 92–96
 - positioning in, 92–93
 - risks for, 92
 - for teamwork, 92
- Camp Ramadi, 9, 40, 152
- capability, 71
- casualties, 53, 64, 157, 160, 174
 - deaths, 10, 20, 24, 51–52, 194, 194, 222–24
- Charlie Platoon, xii, 9, 52, 86, 111, 130
- checklist, 207–8
- clarification, 179–82, 189–90, 252
- clearance, 108, 108–10, 115, 284
 - for COP Falcon, 130
 - in decisiveness amid
 - uncertainty, 248, 250–52
- CO. *See* commanding officer
- combat, 5–6, 28–29, 264, 264
 - business and, 11–14
 - experiences in, xii, xiv–xvi, 254
 - fog of war business compared to, 34–37
 - Hell Week compared to, 50–53

- command and control, 185–86, 220, 220
- command master chief, 236–37
- Commander's Intent, 172, 183–84, 189, 204, 214
- commanding officer (CO), 24–27, 212–13, 231–37
- communication, 102–5, 140
 - in Cover and Move mission, 114, 117–18
 - in fog of war mission, 18–19, 25
 - from Simple mission, 136–37
- competition, 256–57, 276
- complexity, 142–44
- confidence, 98, 100–1, 274–75
- confidentiality, xvi
- connection, 144–45
- contact, 136
- contingencies, 161–62, 205–6
- control, 190, 228
 - command and, 185–86, 220, 220
 - in Decentralized Command mission, 172–73
 - of emotions, 275
- COP Falcon. *See also* Simple mission
 - attack on, 129–30
 - clearance for, 130
 - defense for, 131
 - MiTTs from, 132–35, 139–40
 - as presence patrol, 131–32
 - route from, 132–33
- cover, 135
- Cover and Move business
 - downtime in, 123
 - mission for, 124–25
 - relationships for, 125–26
 - as team, 124–26
- Cover and Move mission
 - clearance in, 115
 - communication in, 114, 117–18
 - dilemma in, 116–17
 - engagement in, 115
 - patrol in for, 111–112
 - patrol out for, 118–19
 - positioning in, 113–16
- Cover and Move principle, 121–22
- Cover and Move tactics, 5–7, 119–22
- credit, 31
- criticism, 224–25
- deaths, 10, 20, 24, 51–52, 224
 - commemoration of, 194, 194
 - return home reflections on, 222–23
- debrief, 61, 206, 216
- Decentralized Command business
 - clarification in, 189–90
 - junior leaders in, 190–91
 - organizational chart of, 186–87
 - team sizes in, 187–90
 - trust in, 190–91
- Decentralized Command mission, 78, 183
 - casualties and, 174
 - clarification in, 179–82
 - control in, 172–73
 - enemy snipers in, 169, 178–82
 - friendly fire and, 180–82
 - need for, 170–71
 - positioning in, 174–77
 - sniper teams in, 173–74
 - tensions in, 177–78
 - training for, 170–73
 - trust for, 170–71, 173, 176
- Decentralized Command principle
 - command and control in, 185–86
 - junior leaders in, 183–84
 - senior leaders in, 184–85

- decisions, 13–14, 281, 286–87
 - by junior leaders, 173, 183–84, 190–91
- decisive engagement, 164
- decisiveness amid uncertainty
 - clearance in, 248, 250–52
 - enemy snipers in, 248–49
 - Kyle in, 245–47, 249, 251–53
 - misidentification in, 252–53
 - PID in, 246, 249–50, 253
- decisiveness business, 255
 - aggression for, 258–62
 - competition in, 256–57
 - inaction in, 257–59
 - promotions in, 260–61
 - terminations in, 261–63
- decisiveness principle, 254–55
- defense, 131
- delegation, 204–5
- deployment, 212–13, 215–16, 226
- details, 276
- dilemma, 116–17
- discipline, 92, 95
- discipline business
 - background on, 277–78
 - dichotomy in, 280–82
 - losses in, 277–79
 - loyalty in, 278–82
- discipline equals freedom
 - background on, 265–67
 - brief on, 268–69
 - need for, 266–67
 - plan for, 267–68
 - in practice, 270–74
 - standardization in, 272–73
 - in Task Unit Bruiser, 273–74
- discipline principle, 274–77
- disrespect, 97–98
- disruptions, 145–46
- downtime, 123
- Echelon Front, LLC, xii, xvi
- ego, 34–35, 79–80
- ego check business
 - bigger picture in, 103–4
 - blame in, 101–4
 - communication in, 102–5
 - Extreme Ownership for, 103–5
 - stand-off in, 102–3
- ego check mission
 - attitude in, 96–97
 - discipline in, 92, 95
 - disrespect in, 97–98
 - lack of coordination in, 98–99
 - respect in, 95–97
- ego check principle, 101–2
- e-mails, 24–25
- emotions, 24–25, 275
- engagement, 115, 164
- EOD. *See* explosive ordnance disposal
- Execute, 5
- exit, 155–57, 159–60
- explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), 2–3
- Extreme Ownership, 14, 37–38, 59, 62. *See also specific topics*
 - in friendly fire, 26–29
 - for leadership, 285–86
- failure, 10, 227–28
- fall back, 5–6
- familiarity, 276–77
- field training exercises (FTXs), 212–13
- fire power, 149–50
- 1/506th, 94–100, 284
- fog of war business
 - bonus structure in, 32–33
 - combat compared to, 34–37
 - ego in, 34–35

- Extreme Ownership for, 38–39
 goals of, 31–32
 opposition in, 32–33
 SEAL teams compared to,
 36–37
 fog of war mission, 17, 29
 blame for, 26–27
 communication in, 18–19, 25
 e-mails on, 24–25
 Extreme Ownership in, 26–28
 friendly fire in, 21–22
 Marine Corps ANGLICO in,
 18–19, 22–23
 mistakes in, 25–26
 QRF in, 19–20
 shame from, 24–25
 fog of war principle, 30–31
 friendly fire (fratricide), 21, 26–29
 Decentralized Command mission
 and, 180–82
 in Vietnam, 22, 28–29
 frontline leaders, 170–71, 229–30
 frustration, 230–34, 239–40
 FTXs. *See* field training exercises

 gear, 66, 68, 91
 goals, 31–32, 49, 77–78
 ground force commander, 6, 196,
 198–199

 Hackworth, David, 54
 Hell Week
 attitude in, 45
 combat compared to, 50–53
 IBS for, 43
 instructions in, 44–48
 instructors for, 42–47
 losers in, 45–47
 quitting in, 42
 underperformers in, 50
 winners in, 44–49

 Hell Week leaders, 43–44
 attitude of, 57–58
 goals of, 49
 of losers, 46–49
 mistakes of, 50
 responsibility of, 49, 58–59
 swap of, 47–49, 57–59
 hostage rescue. *See* plan mission
 humility, 8, 91, 100, 197, 202,
 276
 Humvees, 1, 6, 17, 19–20

 IBS. *See* inflatable boat, small
 IEDs. *See* improvised explosive
 devices
 improvised explosive devices
 (IEDs), 89, 116–17, 202–3
 in Prioritize and Execute attack,
 154–56, 160
 incomplete picture principle,
 254–56
 inflatable boat, small (IBS), 43
 instructions, 44–48
 instructors, 13, 42–47
 insurgents, 3–5
 insurgents killed, 93–94
 intelligence, 1, 195–96, 199
 intention, 240–41
 Commander's Intent, 172,
 183–84, 189, 204, 214
 Iraqi soldiers, 68, 92, 96, 201–3

 Job, Ryan, 150–51
 death of, 12, 51–52, 194, 222–23
 Jones, John Paul, 206
 junior leaders, 31, 55, 77–78, 229,
 286
 decisions by, 173, 183–84,
 190–91
 Junior Officer Training Course, 12,
 42, 53

- kidnapping, 195–203
 kill house, 185
 Kyle, Chris, xii, 9, 86, 244, 244
 in decisiveness amid uncertainty,
 245–47, 249, 251–53
- Laws of Combat, 4–6, 14
- leaders, 30–31. *See also* bad leaders;
 frontline leaders; junior
 leaders; senior leaders
- leadership, xii–xiii, 7, 196, 254–55
 in Battle of Ramadi, 10–11
 death and, 51–52
 decisions in, 286–87
 Extreme Ownership for, 285–86
 teams of, 8
- leading chain of command business
 Extreme Ownership in, 241–42
 frustration in, 238–39
 intention in, 240–41
 understanding in, 241–42
- leading down the chain of
 command
 context in, 227, 229
 failure in, 227–28
 lessons about, 228–29
 principle of, 229–30
 understanding of, 226–28
- leading up the chain of command
 approvals in, 234–37, 239
 CO in, 233–37
 command master chief in,
 236–37
 Extreme Ownership for, 235–38
 frustration and, 230–34, 239–40
 principle of, 237–38
 tact in, 237–38
- Lee, Marc, 10, 51–53, 194, 222
 machine gun and, 148, 148
- lessons, 7, 29, 228–29
- Lister, Dean, 13
- loopholes, 16
- losers, 45–49
- loyalty, 278–82
- luck, 202
- M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tanks,
 16, 16–17, 19, 178
- M88 Recovery Vehicle, 40
- machine guns, *xviii*, 19, 40, 88
 Job and, 150–51
 Lee and, 148, 148
- Ma'laab District mission, 64.
 See also Camp Corregidor; fog
 of war mission
- Marine Corps ANGLICO, U.S.,
 18–19, 22–23, 130
- media, 224
- memoirs, *xiii*
- mentors, 11, 286
- military operations, urban terrain
 (MOUT), 171–73
- Military transition teams (MiTTs),
 128, 128, 132–35, 139–40
- misidentification, 252–53
- mission, 65, 190, 204. *See also*
 specific missions
 belief principle for, 76–79
 for Cover and Move business,
 124–25
- mistakes, 25–26, 50, 287
 in belief mission, 74–75
 in Cover and Move tactics,
 120–21
- MiTTs. *See* military transition
 teams
- Monsoor, Mike, 10, 51–53, 174,
 194, 223
- MOUT. *See* military operations,
 urban terrain
- mujahideen (muji)* (“those engaged
 in jihad”), 18–19

- on the job training (OJT), 13, 70–71
- On War* (von Clausewitz), 18
- operations order (OPORD)
 - Commander's Intent in, 214
 - creation of, 210–211
 - deployment related to, 212–13, 215–16
 - purpose of, 213–14
- orders, 65–69. *See also* operations order
- ordnance table, 194, 194
- organizational chart, 186–87
- ownership, 228. *See also* Extreme Ownership
- patrols, 111–12, 118–19
 - presence, 131–32
 - Prioritize and Execute attack on, 151–52
- personal life, 271–73
- physical conditioning, 66, 272
- PID. *See* positively identify
- plan, 161–62, 267–68
- plan business, 208
 - progress of, 217–18
 - standardization for, 209, 216–18
- plan mission, 200. *See also* operations order
 - analysis for, 196–97
 - brief for, 198–99
 - for hostage rescue, 195–203
 - humility for, 197–202
 - intelligence on, 195–96, 199
 - Iraqi soldiers in, 201–2
 - kidnapping related to, 195
 - target secure in, 201–2
 - training about, 202–3
- plan principle
 - checklist on, 207–8
 - contingencies in, 205–6
 - course of action in, 204
 - debrief in, 206
 - delegation in, 204–5
 - standardization in, 207
- platoon commanders, 51–52
- platoon leader's order (PLO), 210–11
- positioning, 153, 174–77
 - in Camp Corregidor, 92–93
 - in Cover and Move mission, 113–16
- positively identify (PID), 246, 249–50, 253
- power, 80–81, 149–50
- presence patrol, 131–32
- principles, 13–14, 229–30, 237–38
- Prioritize, 5
- Prioritize and Execute
 - step one in, 158–59
 - step two in, 159
 - step three in, 159
 - training for, 158
- Prioritize and Execute attack
 - exit from, 155–57, 159–60
 - fire power in, 149–50
 - IED in, 154–56, 160
 - location in, 152–54
 - machine gun in, 150–51
 - on patrol, 151–52
 - reports in, 150
 - risks from, 153–55
- Prioritize and Execute business
 - decisive engagement in, 164
 - initiatives for, 163–64
 - step one for, 164–66
- Prioritize and Execute principle
 - contingency plan in, 161–62
 - steps in, 162–63
- prisoner, 3, 6
- procedural lessons, 7

- promotions, 260–61
proof, 277
- al Qaeda, 89
Quick Reaction Force (QRF), 19–20, 232
quitting, 42
- Ramadi, Iraq, xiv–xv, 89–92, 128.
See also Battle of Ramadi
Camp Ramadi, 9, 40, 152
life in, 114
- Ramadi night mission, 1
breaching charge in, 2
EOD check at, 2
fall back in, 5–6
firefight in, 5
ground force commander for, 6
insurgents in, 3–5
Laws of Combat, 5–6, 14
prisoner in, 3, 6
results of, 6–7
squirter in, 2–3
training for, 4–5
- readjustment, 146–47
- Ready First Brigade Combat Team, xv–xvi, 9–11, 109–10
- rehearsals, 200–15
- relationships, 125–26
- rescue, 153. *See also* plan mission
- respect, 95–98
- responsibility, 49, 58–60
- retention, 78
- return home
criticism in, 224–25
deaths and, 224
media in, 224
- return home presentation. *See also*
leading down the chain of
command
audience for, 225–26
deployment summary in, 226
realization from, 226–28
- return home reflections
attack during, 221–22
on deaths, 222–23
- review, 135
- risks, 92, 153–55
- route, 132–34
- al-Sadr, Muqtada, 67
- safety, 139–40
- SEAL teams
bad leaders of, 37
Extreme Ownership in, 37–38
fog of war business compared to, 36–37
gear for, 66–91
physical conditioning of, 66
training of, 65–66
- Seize, Clear, Hold, and Build
strategy, 9, 109–110
- senior leaders, 184–85, 205, 229
- sentries, 90
- shame, 24–25
- “Simple, not easy,” 13, 286
- Simple business
adaptation in, 145–46
complexity in, 142–44
connection in, 144–45
disruptions in, 145–46
readjustment in, 146–47
success in, 147
understanding in, 141, 147
- Simple mission, 7, 133
brief on, 134–35
communication from, 136–37
contact in, 136
cover for, 135
review for, 135
route as, 134

- safety after, 139–40
 support for, 137–39
- Simple principle, 140
- simplicity, 189
- sledgehammer, 155–56
- snipers, 173–74, 244, 244. *See also*
 Cover and Move mission;
 decisiveness amid
 uncertainty; Kyle, Chris
 enemy, 169, 178–82, 248–49
- Soldiers, 2
- squirter, 2–3
- standardization, 207, 209, 216–18,
 272–73
- standards, 54
- stand-off, 102–3
- Strategic lessons, 7
- strategy, 10, 83, 109–10
- success, 12, 14, 24, 76, 147, 218
- support, 137–39, 197
- Sustaining Victory, 14
- tact, 237–38
- Tactical Operations Center (TOC),
 6, 87, 230–31
- target secure, 201–2
- Task Force Bandit, 16, 130–31, 247
- Task Unit Bruiser, xv–xvi, 8
 discipline equals freedom in,
 273–74
 photos of, xviii, 86, 86, 108, 108,
 128, 128, 148, 148, 194, 194,
 244, 244, 264, 264, 284, 284
- Team Bulldog, 86, 110–11. *See also*
 Seize, Clear, Hold, and Build
 strategy
- teams, 8, 100, 183. *See also*
 SEAL teams
 beliefs of, 12
 Cover and Move business as,
 124–26
- Cover and Move tactics as,
 120–22
 MiTTs, 128, 128, 132–35,
 139–40
 sizes of, 187–90
 sniper, 173–74
- the Teams, xi–xii
- teamwork, 54–55, 92
- tensions, 177–78
- terminations, 261–63
- time, 123, 211, 271
- TOC. *See* Tactical Operations
 Center
- tolerance, 61–62
- TRADET (training detachment),
 171–72
- training, 4–5, 29, 68, 271–73
 close-quarters battle in,
 185
 for Decentralized Command
 mission, 170–73
 FTX, 212–13
 Junior Officer Training Course,
 12, 42, 53
 OJT, 11, 70–71
 about plan mission, 202–3
 for Prioritize and Execute,
 158
 of SEAL teams, 65–66
 TRADET, 171–72
- trust, 67, 69, 236–37
 in Decentralized Command
 business, 190–91
 for Decentralized Command
 mission, 170–71, 173, 176
- underperformers, 30
- understanding, 141, 147, 226–28,
 241–42
- urban combat, 264, 264
 friendly fire in, 28–29

vehicle-borne improvised
 explosive device (VBIED), 40,
 90
vice president, 31–39
Vietnam, 22, 28–29
von Clausewitz, Carl, 17–18

war stories, xi
winning, 44–49, 70
Winning the War Within,
 14
X-Ray Platoon, 22