

PART

1

# *From the Battlefield to the Boardroom*



A NAVY SEAL'S GUIDE TO  
**Business Leadership Success**

A collection of articles by Brent Gleeson

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# About

**Brent Gleeson** is a Navy SEAL combat veteran with multiple tours to Iraq and Africa where his team's primary objective was running capture or kill missions working in conjunction with the CIA. Upon leaving SEAL Team 5, Brent turned his discipline and battlefield lessons to the world of business and has become an accomplished entrepreneur, writer, and acclaimed speaker on topics ranging from leadership to entrepreneurship and marketing.

Brent is the Co-founder and CMO of Internet Marketing Inc., a full service digital marketing agency recognized by the prestigious Inc. 500 and the San Diego Business Journal as one of the fastest growing private companies in the country the last three years in a row.

Brent has also starred in several reality shows including NBC's 'Stars Earn Stripes' where he and Chris Kyle of 'American Sniper' along with other former special operations professionals were paired with celebrities like Nick Lachey, Dean Cain, Todd Palin and Terry Crews to compete and raise money for charities like Wounded Warrior Project.

In his leadership presentations Brent shares lessons from the battlefield which he applies daily to growing and leading high performance teams in the business world. Brent was recently honored with the leadership award at the Brand Diego Awards in San Diego for his outstanding leadership achievements in the community. You can learn more about his leadership philosophies in his weekly columns on Inc.com and Forbes.com.

Gleeson earned his undergraduate degree in Finance and Economics from Southern Methodist University, studied at Oxford University in England, and earned master degree in real estate finance and development from the University of San Diego.

Brent is on the Board of the Naval Special Warfare Family Foundation and the San Diego Ad Club. His family is an Ambassador Family for March of Dimes.



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# Preface

This eBook contains a collection of articles from my regular contributions to my columns on Forbes.com and Inc.com. This is in no way a memoir of my times in combat as a Navy SEAL although there are a few references to those experience to provide context for key points.

The core focus of these articles is to draw similarities between my experiences as a Navy SEAL to those of my experiences as an entrepreneur and business leader. Using the guiding principles learned in SEAL training and applied in combat, I had achieved relative success in growing and leading great organizations.

That said, these articles do not contain a long list of successes but rather critical lessons learned from both success and failure. Wisdom comes from learning from our mistakes, of which I have made many. But applying what we learn from those mistakes can lead to a constant state of improvement.

The reader can choose to read this eBook straight through or simply choose the articles they find interesting and relevant. I hope you enjoy the articles and of course, feel free to share with your team!



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# What Great Leaders Have That Good Leaders Don't.

*“My loyalty to Country and Team is beyond reproach.”*

— Navy SEAL Creed

When you think of strong leaders, you probably think of people who are decisive, bold, confident, and fearless. You're not wrong. Good leaders have all of these qualities. But how many good leaders are also loyal? I don't know, but I know that every great leader is.

Loyalty is one of the core values taught in the Navy SEAL training program. Instructors teach you from the first day that your team is everything to you. You succeed with them, and you fail without them. And you never leave anyone behind.

During the chaos of SEAL training, which includes the most grueling physical and mental punishment imaginable, the officers in charge of each boat crew are expected to keep an accurate headcount while their world is literally exploding around them. If they fail to report an accurate

number to the instructors, the entire team is punished brutally. It teaches you quickly what it means to live or die as a team. You succeed together or not at all.

My SEAL training is part of me for life. It resides deep within me. Obviously, the business world is different from the world of combat, but there are similarities, too. I try to apply my SEAL training every day to my role as a business leader, and team loyalty is at the top of that list.

“A commitment to loyalty is becoming uncommon in business leaders.”

A commitment to loyalty is becoming uncommon in business leaders. I think that's a shame. As leaders, we have the duty to hire responsibly and then support the people we hire.

**These are some of the lessons in loyalty that I learned as a SEAL and apply daily to my job as a business owner:**

**Never throw anyone under the bus.** As a leader, redirect praise to your team members and protect them from criticism. If you need to talk to a team member about a misstep, do it behind closed doors.

**Never leave anyone behind.** Instill in your team the belief that every person on the team is as important as the next. Include everyone in the celebration of success. And don't blame any one person for a failure. The next time you have a business success, publicly thank people in lower-

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level support roles for their contributions to the team.

## “Loyalty is built on trust.”

### **Try to be as candid as possible with your employees, and never lie to them.**

Loyalty is built on trust. If your people don't believe you're being forthcoming with them, they won't trust you to have their backs. Schedule a meeting to discuss the big picture of the business. Let any member of your team ask any question, and answer honestly.

### **Give employees your unconditional support.**

Don't turn your back on them if they mess up. Help them figure it out, and be as loyal during the bad times as during the good. Pull aside

someone who has had a bad day and give that person ten minutes of your time. Make it clear that he or she still fits into the future of your company.

I would never be disloyal to a SEAL brother. And I know my brothers will always have my back. It's a feeling of trust and security that you get only in special places. I try to make my organization one of them. Leadership is a privilege we must earn every day.



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# Lead, Prioritize, and Win: Overcoming Traditional Leadership Challenges.

*“We expect to lead and be led. In the absence of orders I will take charge, lead my teammates, and accomplish the mission.”*

— Navy SEAL Creed

Business leaders sometimes make the assumption that if they have succeeded as a leader in one field of battle that they can simply replicate that strategy across all types of teams. That isn't necessarily true.

Leadership is contextual and a skill that must be constantly developed and adapted. I have

succeeded and failed in leadership positions throughout my life and therefore learned much throughout the journey.

If we can apply just some of the lessons learned then we can usually find ourselves in a constant state of improvement. Most people have the opportunity to be a leader many times during their life. Whether that is as an entrepreneur, business executive, board member of a charity, coach of their kid's sports team, or as a leader of the family. The list goes on and on.

Each opportunity comes with its own set of challenges.

As a Navy SEAL combat veteran, I have experienced many challenges in leadership in highly stressful environments. And while the leadership approach and tools used in combat may not translate perfectly to the business environment, one can derive many correlations. Here are some tips to lead, prioritize and win as a leader in any environment.

## **Make sure the team understands the mission.**

And their role in executing it. This is critical in combat as well as business. Or any setting for that matter when a team has goals to accomplish. Ensuring that you have the right people on the bus and that they all know where it is headed is sometimes harder than it seems.

Communicating mission of the organization or team is something that needs to be a constant focus. Every decision made should be in line with accomplishing the specific goals of the company. But of course things change and when they do, the team needs to know how the new plan affects their role in execution. Communication is key.

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**Prioritize the most important initiatives.**

There will always be a long list of number one priorities. Improving systems and processes. Reworking sales initiatives. Restructuring the business. Closing new accounts. Whatever the priorities are, select the top one or two, make sure someone owns the outcome, and remained focused on these until they are done.

Spreading the organization too thin will ensure none of the priorities get done well or in a timely manner.



“ Being a leader in any setting isn't easy. As they say, it can get lonely at the top.”

**Project strength when times get tough.**

Being a leader in any setting isn't easy. As they say, it can get lonely at the top. The ultimate success or failure of the team falls on your shoulders.

All businesses experience ups and downs throughout their life cycle. It is inevitable. The highs are high and the lows can be pretty low.

A leader's character is defined by how they act during the tough times much more so than the bad. Stay calm and work the issues. Panicking or appearing stressed out in front of the team will serve no positive purpose.

**Prepare for change and drive towards**

**the win.** Another thing that is inevitable is change. Leaders need to embrace adaptive change and be prepared for when it starts happening.

Usually, by the time we realize radical change is needed in our businesses, it's been needed for a long time. And people have probably been telling us that it's needed.

When that time comes, gather the team, develop a plan, assign roles, and get it done. Waiting or letting issues fester will only damage morale, and most likely the bottom line.

Business leaders face all kinds of challenges. Some are easy to overcome, and many aren't. But remember, you are not alone.

Rely on the team to solve problems. Then everyone will feel the satisfaction when challenges are overcome.



# The Anatomy of Entrepreneurial Leadership: A Navy SEAL's Perspective.

*“Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons. And they will follow you into the deepest valley.”*

— Sun Tzu

As a Navy SEAL turned serial entrepreneur, I have experienced many failures and a few successes in leadership. Most of the successes, however, haven't come without getting feedback and learning from past mistakes. When writing or speaking about how high-performance teams ultimately achieve success, I like to focus on the notion of leadership at all levels. Not just at the middle or most senior levels. Not designed just for those who have direct reports. But all members of any elite team.

Leadership at all levels is about every individual's innate ability to rise to the occasion and step outside the confines of their job description in

order to take on the responsibilities necessary to accomplish the mission. Here are the behaviors and competencies required for high performance teams to be successful.



**These attributes apply to leaders and emergent leaders.**

**Courageousness.** But not in the macho sense of the word. Being a courageous leader is about remaining calm under pressure, communicating effectively in chaotic environments, providing resources, removing obstacles, and protecting the team at all costs.

**Trustworthiness.** Studies show that productivity, income and profits are directly negatively or positively impacted dependent upon the levels of trust within the team. And that has to start at the top. Building an environment of trust is about transparency, consistency, tackling challenges head on, and leading by example in every sense of the word.

**Emotional intelligence.** This could possibly be one of the most important attributes. Emotional intelligence for leadership at any level involves being self-aware, disciplined, communicative, empathetic, humble, motivated, and passionate.

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**Motive and inspire.** Different types of people are motivated in different ways. It could be generational, experience related, or where they fall within the chain of command. The list is long. It is imperative for leaders to understand the differences and act accordingly.

**Embrace change.** Otherwise known as adaptability. Change is inevitable. In combat it is the norm. All organizations, especially growing ones, experience change. If they don't they will most likely fail. Great leaders can often predict when change may be needed and take action. They understand the need for that change. And more importantly they are clear and consistent in communicating to the team what the change is all about, why it is necessary, and what the positive outcomes of that change will be. They also help every team member understand what their role is in affecting that change.

**Align the team.** Team alignment is critical for success. When the team is not aligned there can be many reasons, but ultimately it is the result of a leadership failure. Misalignment is usually the result of a breakdown in communication, lack of consistent direction, lower levels of accountability, and lack of a clear vision. The opposite of all this will result in one team with one fight.

## **These attributes apply to all team members.**

**Believe in the mission, vision and values.** Although some leaders may find these softer-side elements unimportant and that they don't not translate to the bottom line, it is quite the opposite. A team member's understanding and belief in the mission, vision, and core values carries more weight than one might imagine. When an employee understands the mission

and shares the values, they feel more connected which leads to greater self-discipline, collaboration, insight, and collective action towards common goals.

### **Understand the expectations.**

Clear expectations are a result of good internal communication and accountability. Each team member needs to understand what is expected of themselves, their peers, and their leaders.

**Strive for excellence.** Excellence is about being in a constant and diligent pursuit of perfection. It is about attention to detail, perseverance, learning from failure, and getting back up every time you get knocked down, no matter what. This type of mindset is infectious and those around you will begin to exhibit these behaviors as well.

**Have a shared sense of purpose.** This goes back to a team's collective belief in their mission. In the SEAL teams the mission is clear: purge the world of evil while saving as many lives as we can. Plain and simple. The more simple the mission, the easier it is to believe in and see where one fits within its execution.

**Unwavering trust and loyalty.** This applies to all. In combat, when bullets start flying, politics and other externalities go out the window. The time for individual achievement is over and it becomes one team, one fight. You are fighting simply to protect the brother on your left and right. Trustworthy organizations operate on a dividend; a performance multiplier if you will, which increases speed and decreases costs.

These behaviors and competencies are not typically innate talents, but rather learned capabilities that have to be worked on and developed over time to achieve higher levels of performance and take collective action towards common goals.

# 8 Ways a Leader's Behavior Impacts the Bottom Line.

*“I serve with honor on and off the battlefield. Uncompromising integrity is my standard. My character and honor are steadfast. My word is my bond.”*

— Navy SEAL Creed

I am by no means perfect and have learned many hard leadership lessons over the years. I have learned many of those lessons as a Navy SEAL in combat and even more over the past ten years helping run our digital marketing agency. One of the most impactful things I have learned is that a leader's behavior has a direct economic impact on the organizations they run.

As a leader, continually developing our emotional intelligence is critical to moving people in a desired direction and taking collective action towards

achieving common goals. A few months ago I wrote an article about five aspects of emotional intelligence required for effective leadership. Now I would like to expand on this subject and talk more specifically about how our behavior as leaders impacts the ultimate success of our organizations.

**Here are eight ways that a leader's behavior impacts the bottom line.**

**Calm is contagious.** As is panic. Staying calm under pressure is an absolute requirement for effective leadership. The team responds to the behavior of its leadership. If managers and leaders fold under pressure so will everyone else. If you can't stay calm, you won't think or communicate clearly. Panic leads to misinformation, reactive behavior and poor decision-making which has a direct impact on efficiency and profitability. When we stay calm, we can project confidence and make the necessary adjustments with the best information at hand.

**Integrity as a guiding principle.** It's quite common to see integrity as a core value or guiding principle for an organization. Living it every day is a different story and requires constant self-reflection. Integrity won't exist in any organization or team unless it is blatantly and consistently practiced at the top. Every transaction, decision, strategy and communication must be laced with integrity in order for it to become a cultural foundation. When a leader does not act with integrity, neither will the team, which puts the company at financial risk.

**Consistency is key.** This may be one of the toughest aspects of leadership. Everything we do is under the close watchful eye of our teams. Communication must be consistent. We have to follow the policies we put in place more closely

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“ If we run around acting like we have multiple personality disorder, the entire structure of the organization becomes fragile which inhibits forward progress.”

than anyone. If we run around acting like we have multiple personality disorder, the entire structure of the organization becomes fragile which inhibits forward progress.

**Trust is a must.** Studies show that productivity, income and profits are directly negatively or positively impacted dependent on the levels of trust within a company. Studies also show that only 49% of employees feel that senior management have their best interests in mind and only 28% believe that CEOs are a credible source of information. When trust is low, it places a hidden tax on every transaction, communication and decision bringing speed down and costs up. By contrast, high-trust organization operate on a dividend. A performance multiplier that increases speed and decreases cost.

**Empathy shows compassion.** As leaders, we have to learn to control our emotions but also have a balance of compassion for people at all levels. This goes back to having good emotional intelligence and showing our human side every now and then. It's a delicate balance. Emotional competencies are not innate talents but rather learned capabilities that must be

developed and practiced to achieve higher levels of performance. When the team feels protected, they will be more connected which leads to greater self-discipline, collaboration, insight and collective action toward common goals.

**Be the example.** Don't just lead by example, be the example. Inside and outside of the office. Great leaders live the vision and values of the company on a daily basis.

**Protect the team.** A great general once said, "You cannot manage people into combat, they must be led." Sometimes our teams need more leadership than management. It's our responsibility to make the team feel safe and supported, stay calm under pressure, provide resources and remove obstacles. When the team feels protected, they will stay calm and focused on the mission.

**Communication is like oxygen.** Like Navy SEALs, any high performance team must have exemplary communication to be successful. Good communication is the cornerstone for any relationship to flourish, overcome adversity and ultimately to survive long-term. Don't be afraid to over-communicate. Redundancy is imperative. When an organization's internal communications are poor, it erodes trust which impacts performance.

As leaders, we make a conscious decision to lead well or not. To pursue perfection or not. To always be improving or not. Our behavior does impact our companies' bottom line. It's up to us whether that impact is positive or negative.

# 7 Ways Leaders Can Improve Trust Within Their Organizations.

*“Leadership without mutual trust is a contradiction in terms.”*

— Warren Bennis

Trust is imperative for any relationship or team to be successful. Studies show that the levels of trust within an organization have a direct positive or negative impact on retention, productivity and profitability. This means that there is a direct economic impact on an organization when trust is low and applies to any company large or small.

When trust is low in a relationship or company, it places a hidden tax on every interaction, activity, communication, strategy and decision. The result is that speed goes down and costs go up. The reverse is true as well. When an organization is operating within an environment of high trust there is a dividend. A performance multiplier. Decisions, communications,

interactions, and strategies happen with greater speed and at lower costs to the company.

Trust within a company can deteriorate in many ways such as lack of communication, dishonesty, promises not being kept, or lack of follow-through. The list goes on and on. The good news is that rebuilding and maintaining trust is something that can be learned, managed and measured to achieve maximum performance and improve morale, productivity and profitability.

Let's first take a look at the four critical elements of trust that leaders need to be aware of before we dive into methods for improving trust. This applies to both leaders and team members alike.

**Able.** You may believe that a colleague is sincere and honest but not fully trust them because they don't produce results. Conversely, you may work with or for someone who has the skill and talent to make things happen, but they don't exhibit honesty at all times. So you wouldn't trust that person either. This element of trust is about honesty and follow through.

“ Leaders have to be honest in their dealings and create and follow fair processes for all people. ”

**Believable.** Believability is about acting in a consistent values-driven manner that reassures employees that they can rely on their leaders and each other. Leaders have to be honest in their

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dealings and create and follow fair processes for all people.

**Connected.** Connectivity is about demonstrating good communication skills and having a high level of emotional intelligence. Good leaders need to be connected to their teams by understanding their needs, sharing information about the company, and being accessible. Especially in times of turmoil.

**Dependable.** Saying what you will do, and doing what you say. Reliability and taking action is



imperative for any team to be productive. Leaders must be organized and predictable so that the company knows they have their act together.

When people believe they are working for a trustworthy organization, they will invest more of their time and talents in meeting or exceeding the company's goals. They will feel more connected which leads to greater self-discipline, collaboration, insight and more collective action towards achieving common goals.

## Here are 7 ways that any organization can start improving trust.

**1. Demonstrate trust.** Building an environment of trust starts with placing the right people in the right roles, giving them the resources to be successful, and then trusting them to get the job done. Building trust in an organization starts with demonstrating trust.

**2. Be transparent.** The levels of transparency will vary by company for many reasons. But many studies show that people prefer to work with or for someone that tells it straight. Be it positive or negative. This includes taking ownership of mistakes made at the top. When leaders are consistent in the manner in which they deliver communication, the levels of trust with the team increases.

**3. Pass the word.** As a former Navy SEAL, I vividly remember the saying, "pass the word." This means "tell us what the hell is going on!" Information is power. When leaders consistently share information about the organization, its position, the industry, customers, or competitors it empowers the team and collaboration improves.

**4. Provide resources for success.** Nothing is worse than when an organizational system causes people to have to compete against one another. When people feel like its every man for himself, collaboration dwindles and communication ceases to exist. Set the team up for success and they will give you everything they've got.

**5. Provide feedback.** Any good team member wants goals and feedback. They want to know that they are doing a great job and to be given

feedback on areas for improvement. Regular check-in meetings are critical for continually getting the most out of each team member.

**6. Tackle challenges head on.** All companies face challenges on a regular basis. Teamwork and communication are key elements to successfully navigating inevitable obstacles. But when a company or its leadership don't tackle challenges head on, and more importantly don't involve the team in the process, trust deteriorates. Put challenges on the table and allow the team to influence the processes for providing solutions.

**7. Lead by example.** This is a given, but sometimes easier said than done because it requires absolute consistency. Actions speak

louder than words. Good leaders live the vision and values of the organization. It has to start at the top.

Building and maintaining trust is imperative for any personal or professional relationship to thrive. But trust is a delicate commodity and must be nurtured, practiced and measured to ensure that it doesn't vanish due to a series of poor decisions or miscommunications. Like anything else, trust building behavior can be learned and developed to achieve high levels of performance and drive a team towards the execution of a common goal.



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# 5 Aspects of Emotional Intelligence Required for Effective Leadership

*“The ability to control my emotions and actions sets me apart from other men.”*

— Navy SEAL Creed

Emotional intelligence is widely known to be a key component of effective leadership. The ability to be perceptively in tune with yourself and your emotions, as well as having sound situational awareness can be a powerful tool for leading a team. The act of knowing, understanding, and responding to emotions, overcoming stress in the moment, and being aware of how your words and actions affect others, is described as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence for leadership can consist of these five attributes: self-awareness, self-management, empathy, relationship management, and effective communication.

As a Navy SEAL veteran, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, and leader of one of the fastest growing digital marketing agencies in the country, I have experienced many emotions and become very aware of how those emotions can have a positive or negative effect on my ability to inspire and lead a team. Many individuals try to shut off their feelings, but as much as we distort, deny, and bury our emotions and memories, we can't ever eliminate them.

You can learn to be emotionally independent and gain the attributes that allow you to have emotional intelligence by connecting to core emotions, accepting them, and being aware of how they affect your decisions and actions.

Being able to relate behaviors and challenges of emotional intelligence on workplace performance is an immense advantage in building an exceptional team. One of the most common factors that leads to retention issues is communication deficiencies that create disengagement and doubt.

A leader lacking in emotional intelligence is not able to effectively gauge the needs, wants and expectations of those they lead. Leaders who react from their emotions without filtering them can create mistrust amongst their staff and can seriously jeopardize their working relationships. Reacting with erratic emotions can be detrimental to overall culture, attitudes and positive feelings toward the company and the mission. Good leaders must be self-aware and understand how their verbal and non-verbal communication can affect the team.

To help understand the emotional intelligence competencies required for effective leadership, I would recommend determining where you stand on the following elements.

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**Self-Assessment:** This can be defined as having the ability to recognize one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, values and drivers and understanding their impact on others.

Without reflection we cannot truly understand who we are, why we make certain decisions, what we are good at, and where we fall short. In order to reach your maximum potential, you must be confident in who you are, understanding the good with the bad. Those that have a strong understanding of who they are and what they want to work on, can improve themselves on a regular basis.

“ Leaders can't afford to lose their cool. Being calm is contagious, as is panic. ”

**Self-regulation:** Also known as discipline. This involves controlling or redirecting our disruptive emotions and adapting to change circumstances in order to keep the team moving in a positive direction.

Leaders can't afford to lose their cool. Being calm is contagious, as is panic. When you take on a leadership role you can no longer afford to panic when things get stressful. When you stay calm and positive you can think and communicate more clearly with your team.

**Empathy and Compassion:** Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand how they may feel or react to a certain situation. When one has empathy, the capacity to feel compassion is open. The emotion that we feel in response to suffering that motivates a desire to help.

The more we can relate to others, the better we will become at understanding what motivates or upsets them.

**Relationship Management:** You can't make deep connections with others if you're distracted. Many of us have families, other obligations, and a crazy to-do list, but building and maintaining healthy and productive relationships is essential to one's ability to gain higher emotional intelligence.

You must have the ability to communicate effectively and properly manage relationships in order to move a team of people in a desired direction.

**Effective Communication:** In the SEAL teams you have to do three things flawlessly to be an effective operator and team member: Move, shoot, and communicate. Communication being of the utmost importance. Studies show that effective communication is 7% the words we say and 93% tone and body language.

Misunderstandings and lack of communication are usually the basis of problems between most people. Failing to communicate effectively in a workplace leads to frustration, bitterness, and confusion among employees. Effective communication can eliminate obstacles and encourage stronger workplace relationships. When employees know their role within a company and understand how they benefit the overall direction and vision, there is a sense of value and accomplishment. Good communication results in alignment and a shared sense of purpose.

Emotional intelligence is a powerful tool critical for exceeding goals, improving critical work relationships, and creating a healthy, productive workplace and organizational culture.

# 5 Common Fears of Leadership — And How to Conquer Them.

*“In the absence of orders I will lead my team and accomplish the mission. I lead by example in all situations.”*

— Navy SEAL Creed

Mastering any skill usually requires some element of fear-conquering. Leadership is no different.

The first step in overcoming fear is being prepared. When my SEAL Team was operating in Baghdad in 2003, none of us knew how well trained we were until that training was tested in battle. During our first gunfight, not one man hesitated. Our team members were doing their best to get into the fight, not out of it.

Many fears can come into play when leading

a team. Entrepreneurs face this head on as their companies grow. You go from being an eager person with a great idea to a leader, manager, and someone who is looked upon for inspiration. Sometimes this happens more quickly than you can anticipate so you must be prepared to handle these inevitable challenges.



**These are the five main fears I have faced as a leader and what I did to overcome them.**

**Criticism.** As a leader, your shortcomings will be highlighted more than your strengths. The team you lead looks to you to make the right decisions but most people understand that no one is perfect. In the SEAL teams, you grow thick skin quickly. Public criticism is the norm. There is no HR department. But this process has a purpose because mistakes can cost lives. As a leader criticism is something you should expect so my best advice would be to get used to it. To take it a step further, get out in front of it. Being self-aware is a highly useful quality when carrying the load of leadership.

Face the fear head on by regularly requesting anonymous feedback from your team. This can be done by using 360 degree reviews or surveys

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with specific questions about how effective you are in your role. Another way to do this is simply by asking, "How am I doing? What else could I do to be a more impactful leader for this team?" Humility will go a long way.

**Failure.** Let's face it. Failing at anything sucks. Especially when all eyes are on you. Driven people hate failure more than anything in the world. But you do not become a successful leader without having experienced failure along the way. Unfortunately, this is how most of us gain wisdom. When leading a team, failure can come in many forms. Making bad financial decisions. Bringing in the wrong people. Overpromising and under delivering. Inconsistency. Not properly communicating the vision and what everyone's role is in mission success. The list goes on and on.

But failure is inevitable. When you make mistakes, own them and let the team know what you are going to do starting today to right the ship. Be as prepared as you possibly can and make adjustments along the way.

**Making Decisions.** Decision-making is critical for business leadership. Notice I didn't say "good" decision-making. Sometimes it's just about making a decision and moving forward. Analysis paralysis can cripple an organization. Poor decisions will be made. Refer back to the failure section. But the ability to learn how to make good decisions in highly chaotic environments can give you the tools necessary to take your business to the next level.

That said, business isn't combat. Sometimes you have to slow down and take your time. Even if it means missing a potentially good opportunity. Pushing forward too fast and making kneejerk decisions will always lead to major obstacles. Obstacles that cost money. So be prepared, use the information at hand, and make the best

possible decisions you can. When you miss the mark, adjust quickly.

**Speaking.** The fear of public speaking tops the charts in surveys worldwide. I attended business school after leaving the SEAL teams. Imagine a combat hardened SEAL presenting in front of a graduate school class, with his hands shaking. Are you kidding me? But again, as a leader within an organization, one of the things you should be doing the most is publically addressing your team. If you can't do this with confidence then how can you expect your team to follow you into "battle."

My recommendation is to take every opportunity you can to speak in front of audiences. This could be during meetings, in client presentations, guest lecturing at local universities, or speaking at industry conferences. Practice makes perfect. The more you do it, the more confident you will be. In fact, the more speaking I do, the more my overall confidence has developed in any situation.

**Responsibility.** As the saying goes, with much power comes much responsibility. You are not just responsible to clients and shareholders. Your first priority is to your team. If you put them first, all the rest will fall into place. Being responsible for a person's livelihood can be a stressful burden. As a leader your role is to define the mission, provide resources, and remove obstacles.

Embrace the fact that you have a team to lead. It's a good problem to have. Assuming you have the right people doing the right things, remember that they can be your best resource for important information. Keep them in the loop and ask them to do the same for you. Working together as a team will lighten that burden of responsibility. These are just a few of the fears that come with leadership. Whatever your fear is, it is always best to face it head on. You will quickly realize that you had nothing to be afraid of.

# Lead, But Don't Get in the Way.

*Great leaders provide a vision and direction, but know when to get out of the way and let the team execute without interference.*

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Leading from the front is great. But while in front, don't also be the very roadblock that impedes progress. As a Navy SEAL, the best leaders I worked with provided great command and control, were cool under pressure, but also knew when to get out of the way and let the boys get to work. They had a sensational ability for being present and having great situational awareness while not meddling with the team during execution. Because that wasn't their job. Their job was to provide the right resources, get the good missions, and let the team do what they do best.

**To do this, simply define what needs to be done, provide the tools to get it done, then step aside and empower your team**

**to innovate and execute. Here's how.**

**The What.** Have the right mission. And make sure your team understands what it is. In the Teams we all knew what the mission was and enjoyed the benefits of a clear shared sense of purpose. When growing a business however, we often become so engrossed in driving the business forward and seeking new revenue that the softer side priorities fall by the wayside. Such as, communicating to the team why they are doing what they do and what it means for the business and their career path. The answer is simple. Ensure that the team understands the mission and their role in fulfilling it. And then refer back to this frequently. If you aren't doing this, it makes it more difficult for the team to do their jobs as effectively as possible.

**The Why.** Define the right purpose. This goes well beyond revenue, profitability and even shareholder value. My company recently spent significant time reevaluating and more clearly defining our mission, vision and purpose. We have been blessed with fantastic growth but we don't want to lose sight of why we exist. Often times, business owners focus solely on sales and revenue but forget that the team wants and needs to understand what they are a part of. This also helps you build the right team that believes in what the company is doing.

That is why the Navy SEAL selection process is so rigorous. We absolutely must ensure that those who make it through believe in the mission and vision. As business owners we have to remember that a focus on this side of the company does in fact positively impact performance and the bottom line.

**The Who.** Get the right team. If you assemble team of rock stars that you trust to do their jobs,

*From the Battlefield to the Boardroom*

## “ Set a direction within certain boundaries then let them soar. ”

well then by all means get the hell out of their way. As leaders, thinking we know everything and can do someone else's job better can be the most detrimental flaw we have.

Set a direction within certain boundaries then let them soar. When we don't empower the team we are getting in their way and eventually they will lose their passion. Give them the resources to succeed and watch what happens.

**The How.** Provide the right resources. This is where I have failed often. We need to invest in our businesses in order to achieve real growth. And sometimes this means relinquishing some

bottom line margin in the short term in order to see exponential growth in the long term. Running a service-based business can be difficult in this regard. When experiencing rapid growth, your former processes and systems can become obsolete quickly. Then you become inefficient which means the answer to more growth is more people. This doesn't exactly help improve profitability. First, we had to become efficient, restructure processes and workflow, and get the right people doing the right things. Then, we were able to become more scalable in a healthy way.

It would be like me telling a team of SEALs to hit a target to capture or kill a known Taliban leader, then passing out squirt guns and saying, "Go get 'em boys!"

As the leader of a team or businesses it is easy to accidentally get in our own way, and the team's way. Take a step back and make sure you aren't impeding progress. You'll be glad you did!



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