

Extreme Ownership Summary (5 Minutes): 20 Lessons Learned & PDF file

Extreme Ownership: How U.S Navy SEALs Lead and Win, published in 2015, details the principles needed to successfully lead a team, that can very well lead to victory. Based on their personal experience, when they served as Navy SEALs, Jocko Willink and Lief Babin crafted a novel with lessons that everyone who looks to be a leader should implement. Despite taking from their experiences as Navy SEALs, they provide principles and advice that anyone can apply to lead a prosperous life or business.

Extreme Ownership Summary

Here are the twenty lessons to take from the novel on how to become a successful leader and win:

#1 Leaders Take Extreme Ownership

In any team or organization, all responsibility for success, as well as failure, rests with the leader. The leader must take extreme ownership of everything in their world. If a failure occurs, there is no one else to blame but the leader. With extreme ownership, the leader reflects on themselves rather than blaming anyone lower-ranking on the team.

#2 To Grow You Must Admit Failure

It is common when we experience failure that we attribute it to the winner, or our enemy, to having really good luck or having bad luck ourselves. The authors note that we will tend to blame anything and everything but ourselves. It is important, that a leader acknowledge when they do something wrong. Admittance leads to learning, growing, and improving as a team.

#3 Not A Bad Team but a Bad Leader

It is the leader's duty to enforce and encourage the standards needed to ensure a good team. They must follow suit with what enables the team to utilize "extreme ownership." If a team fails to follow or uphold a standard, the fault falls on the leader. The purpose of a leader is to create the environment and resources for their team to be successful.

#4 Leaders Should Never Be Satisfied

As tough as it might sound, leaders should never be satisfied. This is not meant to diminish anyone's work or improvement but it is rather mean to acknowledge that there is always room for improvement. If a leader is never satisfied, then they will be able to objectively point out areas in which the team can improve to ensure that the team will always be high-functioning and successful.

#5 A Leader Should Always Believe in the Mission

If someone is a leader, they are in that position for a reason: to inspire and aid their team perform. To put it simply, if the leader does not believe in their mission or goal, they are not capable of being a suitable leader. The authors claim that believing in the mission allows the leader to fully lead and inspire the rest of the team to do as well.

#6 Why They Should Believe is Just as Important

To say that you believe in a mission is easy to say, but what leads to believing in that mission is the reason why you should care. It is the duty of the leader to understand *why* they and their team should care. And it is even more important to express it clearly to the whole team so that everyone can be in agreement on the motivations behind the mission.

#7 Check Your Ego

It is true that the most successful people are driven by their ego, and yet it is still important to check your ego. If you fail to check your ego, you can cloud your judgment and it can affect your ability to accept criticism from peers. Constructive criticism is essential when trying to improve and secure success. Failure to check your ego can be destructive to yourself and the rest of your team.

#8 Never Think You Are Too Good

As one would expect, this lesson is also tied to the ego. It is important that you avoid believing that you are too good to fail, or that you are better than your opponent or enemy. The moment you begin to adopt this mentality is the moment you begin to become a detriment to your team. This can cause you to fail to fully assess the weaknesses of your team which can impact future missions.

#9 Cover and Move

Cover and move is a fundamental tactic to leadership and it is centered around teamwork. To cover and move means to help one another, even if a larger team is working in smaller teams. Working together and supporting one another, in order to win, is essential. The authors note this principle as crucial for leaders.

#10 Keep it Clear and Simple

Both authors note that as a leader, it is in your best interest to make any plans and orders clear and simple for your team. This is to avoid any issues. It is imperative that your team understands what you're trying to convey, what the goal or target is--that way you can ensure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and what must be done, and be fully capable of leading the rest of the team.

#11 Leaders Have Fluid Positions

The authors make it clear to point out a misconception: that as a leader they must stay in a particular role. The truth, however, according to Willink and Babin, is that a true leader must be free to move onto different roles where they are needed most. A leader should be preoccupied with helping whichever part of their team needs it. Having this flexibility is essential, it will determine if they will be successful or not.

#12 To Plan Means to Assess the Mission

Vagueness with a task or mission is likely to fail simply due to the lack of unity and execution that is expected to follow. It is just as important that everyone is clear on the purpose and the end goal, to avoid any mistakes and confusion. This is why the more specific and clear that the task is explained to the team, the better the outcome may be.

#13 Clear Intent

As mentioned earlier in this Extreme Ownership summary, as long as the commander's intent is clear to the rest of the team, then each decision and action should follow smoothly, according to the authors.

#14 A Debrief is Important

A debrief after a mission, no matter how exhausted you and your team might be after a mission, is essential for missions in the future. What can be discussed in such debriefs is as follows: what went right, what went wrong, what can be done so that the result is even more effective, or how can we increase our team's advantage? Addressing these questions ensures that the next mission is just as successful if not more.

#15 Lessons Learned

If the mission was unsuccessful, it is even more important to address what to avoid and what to improve so that the outcome is not repeated.

#16 Take Responsibility

The authors note that as a leader you must take responsibility for everyone, subordinates, and superiors. If someone isn't doing what they are meant to be doing, it is time to reflect on yourself first and determine where you failed and what needs to be done. One way to take responsibility is that instead of asking your leader what you should do, let them know what you are doing and they will lead you in the right direction.

#17 Do the Best You Can

Leaders must make the best decisions based on the immediate information known to them. There can come a time where you will need to make a rash decision without much time to strategize or consult with your team. This is where you attempt to do the best you can.

#18 Assess Before You Act

Take comfort in that the outcome of any decision is not always certain, and success is not always guaranteed. As a leader, you must assess what you are given and act even when uncertain.

#19 Leading is a Dichotomy

To be a successful leader, you must also follow. There can come a time when someone on your team, whether they are subordinate or not, is better versed in a task or mission, and you must acknowledge how they might be a better fit than you. Understanding when to allow others to take the lead, and when you follow, is just as important.

#20 Don't Get Too Personal

Although it is very important for leaders to possess humility, in that they can understand their teammates and what motivates them. It is just as important that a leader not get too close to their peers. A couple of issues can arise from this. One issue that can come about is that the team might forget who really is in charge when the lines between teammates and friends are blurred. Another issue that can arise is favoritism, which can create even greater conflict within the team. A leader should always remember their position.

Top 10 Quotes from Extreme Ownership

1. "Discipline equals freedom."
2. "It's not what you preach, it's what you tolerate."
3. "Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame."
4. "Relax. Look around. Make a call."
5. "After all, there can be no leadership where there is no team."
6. "Leaders must always operate with the understanding that they are part of something greater than themselves and their own personal interests."
7. "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."
8. "There are no bad units, only bad officers."
9. "All animals, including humans, need to see the connection between action and consequence in order to learn or react appropriately."
10. "Instead of letting the situation dictate our decisions, we must dictate the situation."