

# Team Secrets of the NAVY SEALS

**The Elite**

**Military Force's**

**Leadership Principles**

**for Business**

**A n o n y m o u s**

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**Team Secrets**  
of the Navy SEALs

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# **Team Secrets of the Navy SEALs:**

*The Elite Military Force's Leadership Principles for Business*

**Anonymous**

**Andrews McMeel  
Publishing**  
Kansas City

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[www.andrewsmcmeel.com](http://www.andrewsmcmeel.com)

APPR

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Team secrets of the Navy SEALs : the elite military force's leadership principles for business / Anonymous.  
p. cm.

E-ISBN: 978-0-7407-8651-8

1. Teams in the workplace. 2. Leadership. 3. United States. Navy. SEALs. I. Title: Elite military force's leadership principles for business. II. Title.

HD66.N44 2003

658.4'02—dc21

20020440

Book design and composition by Just Your Type.

Jacket design by Van Crosby

Cover photo by Hans Halberstadt

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The author of *Team Secrets of the Navy SEALs* is a seasoned professional in the U.S. military's elite fighting force. All names will be kept secret to protect him, his fellow members of the Naval Special Warfare community, their families, their superiors, and their missions.





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# *Background of the Teams*

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Since the establishment of our force, Frogmen have willingly put themselves at risk so that others may live free and fruitful lives. The men of Naval Special Warfare are willing to go where and do what others cannot or will not.

Naval Special Warfare has always been and always will be a strictly volunteer organization. If at any time a Frogman wishes to leave, he may do so. When a Team member is unwilling to complete an assigned task, there is no sense in bringing him along; others are already waiting for the opportunity to prove their mettle. This important parallel to the business world is the basis of the lessons in this book.

In World War II, U.S. forces took heavy losses because of their inexperience with amphibious operations and at acquiring intelligence. Procuring information about the composition of beachheads, the firmness of the sand, and the location of sandbars, coral reefs, and man-made obstacles became absolutely imperative. The technology behind today's satellites, which provide immediate and up-to-date imagery, was still decades away. The question was how to get such detailed and current information. The answer was Naval Combat Demolition Units (NCDUs), amphibious reconnaissance forces that operated in the advance of conventional troops, at great personal risk.

These Frogmen were men so dedicated to their country that they were willing to do whatever was asked of them. They often went into combat wearing only swim trunks, a knife, a mask, fins, and a satchel of explosives. This earned them several names, the two most noted and cherished being "naked warriors" and "Frogmen." In a time before wet suits, these men of iron resolve would cover their bodies with axle grease to fight off the bone-chilling waters of the Atlantic.

Over time, the forces became known as UDTs (Underwater Demolition Teams). During the Korean War the UDTs began a transition to hinterland operations, conducting small demolition raids. After the Korean War the need for antiguerrilla warriors was recognized. In 1961 President Kennedy commissioned the first two SEAL Teams (Sea, Air, Land Teams) to conduct "unconventional warfare." (SEAL Team One was based on the West Coast, SEAL Team Two on the East Coast.) UDTs were still in existence; however, they were slowly phased out over the next few decades as more SEAL Teams were commissioned.

SEALs saw their first combat during the Vietnam War, earning them a reputation as the most ruthless operators, accepting and completing missions that others would not even consider. Although SEALs were killed, not one was ever left behind or captured. This is a fact that all SEALs value and live by, and it is the basis of the Team concept.

From the very first days of the Frogman lineage up to the time this book was published, only 240 classes and a handful more than 6,500 men have made the grade.

To date, not one man involved in a SEAL operation has ever been left behind.



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# *Leading the Best*

## **Navy SEALs Concepts for Leading Professionals and Team Building**

Every moment of a SEAL's life is geared toward the Team! The word *Team* encompasses everything from the platoon to our entire country. In the Teams, men work relentlessly with their Teammates and face incredible odds to accomplish their missions.

What would you think if your boss told you that you were going to push a boat out of an airplane at night and then jump out after it, deploying your own parachute and chasing the boat to the water with seven other people and without the help of any lights? Next, you need to maneuver out of your parachute and get the boat operational in ten minutes, because you have to pick up eight more men who are about to jump into the water. Then you'll have to paddle for several hours and rendezvous at a predesignated meeting point—all under the cloak of one night's darkness. A sixteen-man Team—two officers and fourteen enlisted men—complete all the planning, preparation, coordination, supervision, and execution of such a mission.

That mission is just the one you'll be doing this week. Every day of this week and the next and the next after that, you will be responsible for the lives of your Team members, either in training or in combat. The only way you can survive is to trust your Team and be trusted by them. You can't think only of yourself. Everyone's life depends on each member thinking as a Team. This is my life, and this is how I survive. The principles of SEAL Team leadership and cohesiveness apply to all Teams; and strong Teams, in business and in life, are ruthlessly effective in achieving their common goals.

I am an active-duty Navy SEAL and will not use my real name or that of any of my brothers. Many of my closest friends are also still on active duty, and it would be inappropriate to proffer their identities as well. I have built this book, however, with stories from my own experience. Lead by example, build a stronger Team, and over time you will create a successful business and career.

## **Basic Philosophy of the Teams: Volunteer Program**

To get a shot at SEAL training, you must exhibit initiative and determination. It isn't easy to get into BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL), which is the initial training prospective SEALs must go through. Determination is the key. Out of about every three hundred men who say they want to be SEALs, probably one hundred mean it and only about twenty actually make the necessary effort. The day I tested, only five of seventeen sailors passed the initial screening for BUD/S. And even then inclusion was not guaranteed. It took me over eight months to convince my command to let me go and secure orders to BUD/S.

Over a year after my initial screening I arrived in sunny Coronado, California, to attend BUD/S at the Naval Special Warfare Center. My class started with 129 men who swore they wouldn't quit. After seven months, 114 couldn't keep their word.

The daily BUD/S schedule was part of the reason. In First Phase, the initial aspects of Team building weed out those who do not belong. The days and nights are filled with a series of physical challenges, called evolutions, performed in a continuous rotation. During the right of passage called Hell Week, a man might get an hour and a half of sleep from Sunday morning to Friday evening, all the while working nonstop.

In Second Phase, the physical standards get tougher and an intense diving curriculum begins. The underwater aspect of SEAL operations is extremely serious, and those who don't have the physical stamina or can't keep their wits about them underwater in the pitch dark tend to volunteer to leave the program here.

Third Phase demands that sailors reach the highest physical and mental standards. Not many men are lost during this time, however, because those who would prefer another profession and those who could not meet the strength requirements have already quit.

Throughout this training, SEAL instructors never let you forget that you are seeking membership in a volunteer organization. They realize that they may someday work with you and that their lives will depend on your competence. They have a vested interest in the quality of their students. In the meantime, they continually monitor those who are wavering and offer to help these men find a niche in the Navy if it turns out that being a SEAL is not their priority.

## **Team Concepts for the Individual: *Never Quit!***

If you have been assigned a task, you had better seriously evaluate your ability to complete it. There is no honor in accepting a remarkably daunting task if you can't get it done *correctly*. Lives depend on you. You should not shelter yourself in menial tasks but should carefully assess all situations and take on any challenge you feel able to accomplish. Moreover, remember that once you have committed, you are in. If you suddenly find that you're in over your head, you had better sprout gills and come up with a way to finish the job.

The point to the intensity of any training program is, and should be, to identify those who are going to work when it counts. Job titles may sound glamorous, but you need to know who is going to be there when the Team needs them the most.

## **You Are Only as Strong as Your Weakest Team Member**

"Weakest" may simply refer to the Team member carrying the heaviest load. In a SEAL platoon, the communications man usually carries the most weight, because of his radios and extra batteries. He is not weak, but he will most likely be the slowest and most encumbered member. If the point man (usually the person with the lightest load) leading the Team maintains a rapid pace, he will likely exhaust and unnecessarily wear out this important "Comm Guy."

A Team leader will have a reason for picking each member of the Team. Recognize the attributes on which you based your choices. Make sure that all Team members know that others depend on them and that they are expected to act accordingly. You must surround yourself with “operators”—those who perform—always being mindful of the difference between the man you’d like to have around and the one you and your Team need. Job assignment is not a popularity contest; you should always choose the best person for each job.

One important thing to remember: Just because someone is new doesn’t mean he will not be able to improve upon the way business is conducted. I have noticed that at times “old guys” will ignore the “new guys” simply because they are new. *Never* underestimate the value of a fresh, innovative, and perhaps even abstract point of view. Diversity is good and can strengthen the Team.

## SEAL Training and Common Goals

SEAL instructors stress the Team concept from the beginning. Everything is done as a class. Men eat as a class, train as a class, work out as a class, learn as a class, and “pay the man” as a class. If one man screws up (the weak link for that evolution), everyone joins him in performing the assigned penalty, thereby motivating the entire Team to mend the weak member’s ways. You fail as a Team and succeed as a Team.

A BUD/S class is broken down into Boat Crews of six or seven men, fewer when several people quit. As the name suggests, each Team has the charge of a boat. An IBS (inflatable boat, small) resembles a white-water raft. Two of the most memorable Team-building exercises are Log P.T. (physical training) and surf passage. Log P.T. is done as a Boat Crew with a fifteen-foot section of a telephone pole. The instructors run the men through a series of exercises with the log, each requiring the efforts of the entire Boat Crew. If one person slacks off from his job, the others will feel how they are required to labor under the added weight.

For example, in such exercises as sit-ups, each man cradles his section of log in his arms, holding the log over his head until the instructor gets tired of watching them. My personal “favorite” was the foot races in soft sand with the log on the men’s shoulders. In order for the entire crew to “get on the log,” they’d have to turn their bodies forty-five degrees to one side, which made it even harder to run. The crew was jammed on the log and it took maximum Team coordination to prevent feet from entangling and bringing the crew to the ground in a pile of limbs followed closely by the three-hundred-pound log. Oftentimes the entire Boat Crew had to hold the log overhead, arms extended, for one minute. Arms and shoulders would be depleted of strength and many crews would fail this test repeatedly. Crews could not leave until they completed this task. I can remember occasions when it took my crew a dozen attempts before success—we would wonder how we got it the twelfth time because we couldn’t do it the first time. That is what BUD/S and Team building is all about—persevering until success!

In surf passage, the Boat Crew is required to paddle its boat through the pounding surf zone

to the relative calm of the waters beyond. One man calls the cadence while the rest paddle in unison to attain this common goal. This is a difficult evolution during the winter months because the waves are huge and can easily mangle the boats. If one man stops paddling while tackling a wave, the entire crew will pay as the powerful wave tosses them about like rag dolls.

## **It Pays to Be a Winner!**

Certain evolutions in BUD/S pit the Boat Crews against one another in healthy competition, commonly in the form of races, where the men run while carrying either the boat or the load as a crew or paddle to designated points. The winning Boat Crew is usually rewarded by an early release from the exercise or the chance to sit out the next race.

In Naval Special Warfare, officers and enlisted men endure the exact same training. Team members can't help but form ties when they work closely together. All members of the Team have the same training, and though some men hold positions of leadership, they are, first and foremost, members of the Team.

## **Natural Selection**

Through these activities, the Teams inevitably shed some weight. As members of the Boat Crews drop out, new Teams form. It is imperative that the new crew members adapt and learn one another's strengths and weaknesses, and prepare to face the instructor's never-ending labyrinth of trials. It's all business—the individual does not have the luxury of mourning his buddy who decided to quit. At every turn, each man is reminded that he is there because he wants to be. A man can stop the pain and stress whenever he wants to, simply by telling the instructors that he has had enough and wishes to quit.

## **Results**

As a professional, you have a job to do. The previous examples of Team building may seem like excessively harsh training that results in staggering attrition, but such culling is necessary if you want to select only those who will not quit when it counts. The purpose of weeding out the unfit is strikingly evident when you proudly sit among those who've decided to stay and work for the Team.

If you make it through all the trials, you join a Team made up of life-long friends, with a "sea bag" full of confidence, an enhanced appreciation for the human spirit, and an unrivaled sense of what a true Team is.

## **Personal Accountability**

Personal accountability is the next important lesson. If you have built a good Team, you are expected, as are the rest of the members, to be of the highest caliber. Hold yourself

these standards as you would anyone else ... no excuses.

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## Real Work

A member of an operational SEAL platoon can figure that about 60 percent of the men on his Team and those around him are experienced SEALs. The rest are new members affectionately known as “meats.” Each platoon’s objective is to complete a yearlong workout to prepare for a six-month deployment. And, just like a Team of professionals building through development in their particular specialty, a platoon will participate in several phases of training, learning and honing their skills and tactics in several areas. Each block, or phase will follow the same basic pattern: Learn, apply, review, evaluate, reapply, reevaluate, and then set SOPs (standard operating procedures).

Getting a job done fast is fruitless if it isn’t done right. Individuals and Teams must constantly evaluate their progress. If an individual or Team starts to lose focus, they must take a step back and review.

As a Team member, you can’t be afraid to admit that you don’t grasp a concept. If the Team is only as fast as its slowest man, you cannot hang in thinking, “I can catch up.” You must honestly evaluate your own ability and communicate forthrightly about it—for your own good and for that of the Team. When Team members are unaware of a weak link, they cannot repair it. Unnoticed, the weak link will break, costing time, money, and perhaps even lives.

One block of training for a SEAL platoon is land warfare, which consists of combat tactics and, often, live-fire drills and exercises using live explosives. Particularly dangerous are IADs (immediate action drills), designed to teach a platoon tactics and methods of breaking contact with an enemy force. These involve shooting and moving through different kinds of terrain to evade enemy fire.

In this loud and chaotic environment, the trainers keep the pressure on by setting off explosives to let the Teams know that the enemy is still out there. As the platoon sustains fire, the platoon OIC (officer in charge) looks for a way out. He must, in a matter of seconds identify and utilize a safe escape route, or the training cadre will start “killing” his men.

The platoon also has the burden of carrying their “dead and wounded” out with them. In addition, each man needs to be aware of the condition of his firearm at all times. When a man gets his turn to jump up and run, he must flick on his safety and be careful not to sweep his buddies with his rifle muzzle, as a hot gun can “cook off” a round at any time. (A cook-off is when the chamber of the gun is hot enough to cause the round sitting in it to combust inadvertently firing the weapon.) Since everyone is deafened by the noise of gunfire and explosions, each man screams to pass the “word” (instructions) to the next man. This is not the time to play catch-up. When a man doesn’t know what’s going on or where his people are, he can end up shooting someone or getting shot himself. What’s worse is when a man asks someone to explain a concept again, or has to make excuses for why he didn’t know where Jim was and why he shot him in the back. When SEALs train with live ordnance, they play for keeps.

In short, what's important to the SEAL Team is important to any Team of professionals business: Stay informed, stay alert, and stay alive.

## **Team Secrets for Innovative Thinking**

The unwillingness or inability to think creatively will not only hinder you but will stifle the young and creative untapped innovators in your organization.

Make an anonymous suggestion box available. Let people get rankling details and complaints off their chests. As a Team leader, invite Team members to identify themselves when they drop off suggestions, pointing out that if they do, you can get in touch with them for further discussion.

You may find that most messages are nothing but empty complaints. Stress that no issue will be addressed unless the submitter also includes a viable solution. This will foster an atmosphere of ownership among the Team and innovative and fresh thinking among Team members.

If someone comes to you with a new idea, you must consider it. Barking, "We've done this way for years and it works fine!" will do nothing but stifle those around you.

From time to time, go to others for their ideas. People like to be challenged. Give them the responsibility and some latitude to be creative for you.

## **Be Serious, but Don't Take Yourself So Seriously**

Finding the bright side of a bad situation is better than losing your motivation. I can recall several instances when I huddled in a tiny hideout in the woods in miserable conditions. Shaking from the cold and soaking wet, I would turn to my platoon mate and whisper, "Damn, this sucks." He'd reply, "Yeah, but it will make a great story later." If you can find humor in a bad situation and joke about it, you will have a better chance of salvaging your attitude and coming out on top.



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## Chapter 1 Lessons

- You succeed as a team or fail as a team.
- To develop Team skills and to operate accordingly takes time and concerted effort.
- Improve the quality of your Team by truly screening your prospective Teammates. This sets the standard from day one.
- Accountability is paramount and necessary.



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# *Know Who You've Got*

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**Y**ou must know your Team and what motivates them. If you merely direct day-to-day routine and think of those under you as nameless workers, you are simply “managing.” This was well and good forty years ago, when companies demanded marginally educated employees willing to perform the same tasks for eight to ten hours a day. But it is terribly wasteful in an era when higher education, varied skills, and creative abilities are absolutely necessary for success—both for the individual and for the business. This applies to civilian as well as military ranks. The modern workplace does not need mere managers; it needs leaders who will continually develop those entrusted to their care. It is important to practice sound management tactics to ensure the stability of your business, but it is also crucial that you expand your leadership skills to ensure that your Team members succeed as well.

Of the men who graduated BUD/S with me, most were enlisted. Sixty percent of them had bachelor's or associate's degrees, and at least two had master's. One of my classmates had been an electrical engineer for Westinghouse for several years before joining the service. The more you learn about your Team members, the more you will be amazed by the vast pool of knowledge you have to draw from. Review résumés, ask questions, and get to know those you work with. The time you spend learning about your people will yield information that could prove valuable in the future.

Aside from the fact that individual Team members will know that you are interested in their success and welfare, you will gain a greater understanding of how to best utilize each individual in your Team—which will benefit not only the Team as a whole but also each individual. Each SEAL platoon has “departments” to manage the gear required for the many aspects of SEAL missions. The ordnance department handles all issues dealing with bullets, bombs, and weapons. The communications department handles all radios, computers, and ancillary communications equipment. The air department manages parachutes and rigging and preparation of equipment involved in air operations. Diving maintains and repairs open- and closed-circuit diving gear and logistics concerning submerged operations. Intelligence handles information, maps, and cameras. The engineering department handles the Zodiac boat motors, and other assorted hardware. The two corpsmen make up the platoon's medical department.

With so many jobs requiring time and specific expertise, it is in the Team's best interest to assign to each department those best able to handle the tasks involved. I have a passion for parachuting and aviation, so I was sent to rigger school, jumpmaster school, and other aviation-oriented schools. I headed up the air operations department. Invariably, every platoon is going to have a “motorhead,” to whom you'll want to entrust your engines. The last thing you need ten miles offshore are piles of useless metal that were formerly engines. Every SEAL carries and is responsible for a weapon. But when it comes to collateral duties such as those a specific department handles for the good of the Team, platoon commanders do what they can to accommodate the interests of each individual SEAL. Platoon riggers and

highly trained and are the only men allowed to pack reserve parachutes. To my way of thinking, it would be awfully nice if the rigger actually enjoyed his job.

People will look up to you simply because of your position and the aura of responsibility associated with your title. Removing yourself from your Team and planning your next career step will only serve to alienate and blind you. While absorbed in seeking your own selfish goals, you will not be in tune with your Team.

Get involved and experience the wide-eyed enthusiasm that will greet you when your Team members realize you are involved in and concerned about their well-being and future. I am not suggesting that you invite them to your house every weekend to play with your dog and eat hamburgers. But you must make it evident that one of your duties—which you sincerely and willfully undertake—is Team custodian. This entails the general maintenance and care of the Team—as well as the “cleaning out” of unsuitable members, if need be!

You will be a revered and effective leader if you take the time to find out what drives each member to succeed. With this knowledge, you can assign your people to tasks and missions more efficiently and with the greatest good of the Team in mind. No matter how you hold the torch to the light, personnel are the Team’s greatest assets—and yours individually. Identify those members with a propensity or knack for future assignments or projects. You may have two people who don’t like what they are doing and would be thrilled to switch. This simple knowledge can allow you to make the change and produce a stronger, more effective Team.

Before SEALs go into the field for an operation, the Team is evaluated to ensure the optimum placement of personnel. The officer in charge knows exactly who is going on the mission, what their specialties are, and what roles they will fill. Take a good look at your Team. You need to scrutinize each person and identify his or her strengths and weaknesses—always with the good of the Team, and the individual, in mind.

As a leadership tool, maintain a small file on each member of the Team. Be open about what you are doing and make clear to your Team that you will be using the information in the file to perform periodic evaluations. You must set standardized evaluation parameters and continually refine your evaluation system to make it bias free. Use evaluation sheets to track positive and negative performances.

In the SEALs, the evaluation file is a great tool for leaders, as they rate individual performance against a Navy standard. This helps selection boards make better decisions about individual advancement. Within the platoon, the chief maintains a “training jacket” on all the members of the Team. This file usually contains, but is not limited to, information about the individual’s advancement and performance in specific training and professional development schools. It also contains periodic evaluations and lists the sailor’s special qualifications. Further evaluations track outstanding performance and document trends in substandard performance. The latter is crucial if a member proves to be a safety hazard or is just not suited for the job and must be removed. In order to sustain the high quality and integrity of your Team, you must maintain a set schedule for reviews and ensure that the evaluation process is executed without bias. You can use an unbiased periodic and active evaluation system to terminate those who poison the Team or who don’t have Team goals in mind.

Often people hesitate to document poor performance because the subject of the evaluation

is “a nice person” or has convinced the reviewer that their future performance will be better. But what should have been the final straw cannot be the first time you document performance issues. That hurts the individual, who did not have the proper impetus to improve their performance or competence, and the organization and the people in it, who must suffer through this potentially dangerous fumbling, followed by the pain of termination or even a lawsuit.

It’s also crucial that your evaluation process be objective and detailed enough to be fair to the individuals concerned, in the event that someone other than you needs to utilize the information. Fair and objective evaluation and documentation will also allow the next leader to do what is best for their Team and the individuals in it.

Moreover, if your Team knows what you are doing and why, as you undertake a constant evaluation and documentation regimen, there will be no surprises. Each member will know that you are serious, and that you are willing to take action in the best interest of the whole Team.

You must be able to distinguish the difference between a good person and a good operator. In the SEAL community, some men must be let go in the best interest of the Team. The sailor who is not working in the Team may be a nice person, tops. But he may not be appropriate for the job.

If a member of the Team just doesn’t grasp the finer points of the job, it can cost your organization a lot of money. It can cause extra work and irritation for other Team members, particularly if the person in question suffers from chronic incompetence, for whatever reason. In the SEAL Teams this person could eventually cost himself or another his life in a training exercise or on a real-world mission. Constant evaluation can tell you whether you can afford to work with a “leadership challenge” or whether it makes more sense to find a replacement. The Team has to come first!

To put this another way, you must consider the possible moral issue of keeping a nonperformer. You should track chronic poor performance and take action—even if that means termination—if the situation does not improve over a reasonable period of time. Action, as painful as it can be, will prove to your Team that you are dedicated to the quality of its members and its product or service, and that you will act to preserve the integrity and safety of the Team. Consider the ramifications of allowing a substandard performer to remain a part of your Team. The dedicated members will eventually become fed up and lose faith in your ability to protect the Team. What would be your perception of a leader who you knew had prior knowledge of a personnel issue but was unwilling to rectify the situation? If the weak Team member is truly a good person, try to find another job for them. Do not keep them on for fear of hurting their feelings. It will hurt both them and your Team. Sloth and apathy breed rapidly, and if other Team members see that a low level of performance is accepted by the Team leadership, they will have difficulty producing a high-quality product or service and may soon adopt easier, if inferior, standards.

There was a sailor in my sister platoon who had a problem with situational awareness in the “kill house,” a building in which SEALs practice in-house shooting with live ammunition. This is an extremely dangerous exercise, since you are shooting real bullets in close quarters. The sailor in question repeatedly shot his rifle inches from the faces of his Teammates. Other

than this, he was a great person and an extremely hard worker, always one of the last to leave work, always willing to lend a hand to anyone in need. But in the special-warfare business, you cannot afford to be bad at anything. This sailor was given several opportunities to enhance his awareness. After he proved that he was unable to maintain the proper awareness in the kill house, he lost his SEAL qualification and was transferred from the Team. Although it was hard to see a good man taken down a notch, it did not make sense to wait until someone's parents had to be informed that their son was dead because we didn't want to hurt another sailor's feelings.

The Navy has long selected its finest enlisted personnel to become officers. Choosing officer candidates from the ranks offers several advantages over outside recruitment. First and foremost, the organization has its choice from a pool of personnel who have already made a commitment to the service. They know the organization and have chosen to stay. They are not coming to the Navy green, unsure of what to expect. This is not to say that there are not many advantages to getting a fresh outlook and new ideas from outsiders. However, those already part of the Team know what they are getting into. These people know, for the most part, how the organization works. Perhaps the greatest advantage to choosing from existing personnel is access to documentation of their performance according to Navy standards; the Navy's great leadership tool, the periodic, standardized evaluation, provides selection Teams with a method to evaluate the potential and worth of advancement candidates.

At a certain point early in my career, I was building an application package. The Team was about to have a change of command, and I had spoken at length with the outgoing commanding officer about the prospects of a commission. But my package was not going to be complete before he left. The commander assured me that he would brief the incoming C.O. about my record and my desire for a commission. He did not endorse my selection, but the new C.O. would be making the decision, but he did recommend me for the commission. Two other men from the Team also applied for the same program.

Although we would compete against applicants drawn from the entire Navy, the C.O. ranked our packages against one another. Two of us were to deploy on a mission in two weeks, and the commission packages were due in Pensacola in three. Preparations for deployment are quite extensive and time-consuming, and there are family matters to tend to because of the upcoming six-month absence. The new C.O. interviewed the three of us for about fifteen minutes each. Then we left our application packages with the administrative department, to be completed and sent to us later, since the new C.O. had not yet made a decision regarding endorsement of any of the candidates.

Once we were overseas, I called my Team to make sure my package had been sent. To my dismay, the new C.O. had not endorsed any of the officer-candidate packages. The next day the C.O. called to explain that he felt I was a great SEAL but did not yet have enough experience to be a successful officer candidate. With all the diplomacy I could muster, I stated that I was very qualified, in fact, an excellent candidate, and that I was competing against fleet sailors without half the qualifications. He agreed and then gave me his take. I remember gripping the phone with white knuckles as he spoke.

“I know you are an outstanding sailor,” he told me, “and will make a great officer, but you are a *SEAL under my command*. If I am going to put you in for a commission, you are not going to be the best compared to the rest of the Navy, you are going to be the best compared to you! If you want to be a naval officer, I want more! I want you to show me that you are ready while you are on this deployment. When you get back to the States, I want you to become a static line jumpmaster and a range safety officer. I want you to take on more responsibility.”

I was furious. I did, however, have one of the best workouts in a long time after that phone call! Later, one of the officers in my platoon helped me understand the C.O.’s viewpoint and the responsibility inherent in recommending someone for a commission. This was a lesson in personnel management and responsibility I shall never forget.

On returning home, I requested both static line jumpmaster and range safety officer (RSO) school and completed the training as soon as I came back from postdeployment leave. Afterward, I moved into the Team’s “training cell,” which was responsible for preparing SEAL platoons for deployment. A month after RSO school, I was in the desert preparing a training scenario for a night exercise. The C.O. would be coming to observe, but I was still bitter and not particularly excited to see him. The C.O. arrived and watched us complete the setup. As we walked away to await the platoon’s arrival, he caught up to me.

He started off by saying, “I recently signed two qualifications letters with your name on them. The word is that you kicked ass in that last platoon. You did everything I asked of you and I was wondering if you are still interested in a commission.”

After I explained that I had already started putting another package together, he said he would do everything he could to ensure its success.

At that point everything was clear. This man was a true leader and a man of integrity. He hadn’t just looked at my qualifications to judge me; he’d tested me to “know” me. What made me tick? Did I have that extra ounce of resolve necessary to be a naval officer?

Another insight I gleaned from the experience was that we must be the custodians of our Team. Being a Team member means being aggressively proactive. Take ownership and pride in the Team. Encourage each and every member of the Team to evaluate every situation. You cannot rely on “someone else” to screen and evaluate your Team for you.

This does not mean that you should head-hunt or nitpick. Rather, stay alert for potential problems and stop them as soon as they appear. Know your people. Promote by experience and not by paper. Test, evaluate, and judge.

Promotion should not be simply a function of time or checked boxes. Looking back, I wish more C.O.s had the morals, standards, and resolve mine did when it came to deciding whether to endorse my officer-candidate package. If you are involved in the promotion process, you will be judged by the quality of those you promote.

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## Chapter 2 Lessons

- Stay involved. How can you learn about your Team if you are aloof and distant?
- Assets. Learn to identify and utilize the talents of those on your Team. Satisfied people are happy people.
- When considering the fate of one, consider the well-being of all.
- Document issues. If it is worth your time to deal with, document it. A thorough and appropriate paper trail can save your butt.
- Identify potential problems before they become critical.
- When you take charge, you become entrusted with and responsible for the welfare and morale of the Team.
- Being a nice person is not a job qualification. Know who your Team members are, what they are interested in, and what they do best.
- Challenge your Team. Break up day-to-day monotony by pushing individual Team members to develop themselves.
- Be the custodian of your Team and encourage others to accept the same responsibility.
- Know and develop; know and remove.



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