



EXTREME OWNERSHIP: HOW U.S. NAVY SEALs LEAD & WIN

by Jocko Willink & Leif Babin



Overview

This book details the characteristics that authors Willink and Babin believe are essential to strong leadership. As retired Navy SEALs, they now use their military experiences to inform leaders in the business realm. In their view, the crucial component to success is **Extreme Ownership** – taking extraordinary responsibility for all that occurs, beyond what is normally required. This entails accountability, courage, and confidence; it means assuming liability for the outcome of your team’s missions and refusing to find excuses for failure. By taking *Extreme Ownership*, you can reach your potential as a leader.

“Leaders must have extraordinary humility & courage.”

Chapter 1: Extreme Ownership

Friendly fire is an inadvertent military clash between 2 units from the same force. After a particularly nasty “blue on blue” incident resulting in some injuries, Willink’s unit was debriefed to identify avoidable missteps and mistakes made by individual soldiers, so that they could be prevented in the future. Yet this incident made an enduring impact on Willink, altering his stance on leadership. He realized that as the leader, he was solely responsible for the situation and its outcome. Although he could not necessarily control individuals’ actions and decisions, he had not prevented the incident’s occurrence, nor had he effectively managed it in the moment. By taking *Extreme Ownership*, he gained a significant amount of trust and respect from his teammates, thus strengthening his unit. Rather than let mistakes generate doubt or discord amongst the team, everyone learned valuable lessons they applied to future operations.

Those who take *Extreme Ownership* take ultimate responsibility for all outcomes. They detach themselves emotionally from situations to make objective assessments, and try to make the best

decisions for everyone involved. If their plan is not successful, they chalk it up to ineffective leadership on their end, and never blame others or circumstances.

Chapter 2: No Bad Teams Only Bad Leaders

Navy SEAL training infamously involves Hell Week – a week that pushes candidates to physical and mental exhaustion, inducing many to quit. Candidates are placed on teams – each led by a trained SEAL – that compete against each other. At the week’s culmination, one team is named champion.

In one particular case, Group A was dominating the competitions while Group B struggled in last place. Leader B claimed he “got dealt a bad hand” with his team. The instructors then swapped team leaders to prove a point. When Hell Week ended, Group B was now neck-and-neck with Group A. This just goes to show that it was not about the team members, but about the leadership. Leader B victimized himself and used external circumstances (getting dealt a bad hand with team members) to justify his failures. Leader A, on the other hand, took *Extreme Ownership* and led his group to success no matter what hand he was dealt. He expected to see his team succeed, and prepared them to surmount any obstacle in their way, no matter how the cards were dealt.

Group B’s quick turnaround from last place to first place under Leader A demonstrates that good leaders:

- Find out ways to obtain the results they desire; they don’t find excuses.
- Direct their team’s energy and focus towards the task at hand.
- Foster a culture that expects top performance from all individuals.
- Take *Extreme Ownership* of a problem and consider all obstacles potentially surmountable.
- Do not consider themselves victims or “Tortured Geniuses” that the world underappreciates. They own both their flaws and their failures.

