

FIRST, FAST, FEARLESS: How to Lead Like a Navy SEAL

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Overview

First, Fast, Fearless describes effective and learnable leadership traits that improve team efficiency and cohesion. Studies of veterans show that faith in leadership is positively correlated with good mental health and performance. Civilian leadership can avoid damaging their teams by developing an offensive, instead of defensive, mindset and by learning the three vital leadership tactics used by Navy SEALs: Brand, Brotherhood, and Battle Rhythm. Fear negatively affects imagination and creative problem solving. However, our brains can't differentiate between fear of a toxic leader, and a lion stalking us on the Sahara.

"A leader... is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the nimblest go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they were being directed from behind."

Part 1. Do Your Part First

The unique thing about SEALs, is that they recruit exclusively from the civilian population. SEAL recruiters evaluate fears, endurance, and commitment level. They also look for the perfect balance of humility, emotional fortitude, experience with team sports, fluency with the game of chess, problem solving skills, and a willingness to bend the rules. Recruits are then trained to develop physical and moral courage, and teamability. Teamability is a term SEALs use to describe the ability to make the team your priority.

Even in the most stressful times, SEALs act (*First*), move with a purpose (*Fast*), and commit themselves to become fully engaged (*Fearless*).

If you choose to be a leader, your virtue and values need to be shown consistently in your daily behavior. Eventually this will become your leadership style. When applied consistently, your style builds trust the way a well-known product signals consistent quality. That style becomes your leadership brand. U.S. Navy Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, one of the most decorated officers, developed 5 pillars of leadership:

1. **Leader as a Moralist:** Moral leadership is doing the right thing, not just "doing things right." Leaders should stay on the moral high ground to nurture trust. *"Trust is like the air we breathe. When it's present, nobody really notices. When it's absent, everybody notices"*.
2. **Leader as a Jurist:** A leader must make the best decision they can with the information available.
3. **Leader as a Teacher:** A good leader doesn't let the organization become vulnerable by relying on one key link in the chain of command. Leaders invest precious time and effort to define goals for their subordinates and remove roadblocks to help them reach those goals.
4. **Leader as a Steward:** A leader is a servant to his or her beloved team. They protect what they are responsible for with humility and generosity. Officers eat last because the team comes first.
5. **Leader as a Philosopher:** Studying things in detail to find meaning is a mental muscle that helps leaders understand abstract and complicated ideas. Leaders need to understand that if they cannot control themselves in times of difficulty, they cannot expect their subordinates to either.

Psychologists and career professionals agree that control over your circumstances is central to mental health. Dwelling on dangers that might come feeds a loss of morale and creativity. However, there are two main ways to turn fear into courage, and courage into action. The first way is to create a positive look-forward environment called *front sight focus*; and the second, is adopting a *first strike mindset*. Uncertainty is a fact of life but honing a *first strike mindset* makes every situation an opportunity to solve a problem.

Adopting a *first strike mindset* means leading your team toward action. In every situation act first, decisively, and assertively to make the most of your priceless time. The fundamental advantage of the *first strike mindset* is that it puts you in control of every moment.

The next thing to do to keep troops (subordinates) moving forward is to let them know you're alongside them. Servant leadership means that the team is not