

**2020 NEI Report of Project Management Lessons Learned and Best Practices
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**Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win
9 pages**

Messrs. Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, Retired Navy Seals Officers
ReadinGraphics Book Summary

Extreme Ownership: How US Navy Seals Lead and Win by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin is a self-help and motivational book by two former Navy Seals about their experience with leadership and the rules they learned in combat that have helped them live successful lives as leaders both inside and outside the service. The book is meant to act as how-to guide for those looking to improve their leadership skills and find success in any field or part of their lives.

Extreme Ownership is built on a number of principles taught in the Navy Seals that help leaders establish an attitude and a mindset to guide others to succeed with them so that teamwork and success are possible to achieve. The first, and perhaps most important philosophy to establish as a leader is one of humility. Willink and Babin make it clear that none of the other principles in the book are possible – or useful – without a mindset of humility that removes all ego or personal motivation. The best leader, they say, is one who doesn't take things personally or use the group for his own gain, but instead thinks about the benefit of the act and the importance of the work. The key components of humility, in their eyes, are the ability to own up to and admit mistakes, and willingness to take responsibility for personal failures. Without these skills, it is impossible to gain the respect of subordinates. At the same time, a humble leader gives the credit for any wins to his subordinates as well. It is entirely up to the leader to both take responsibility for any mistakes, and to humbly allow others to celebrate and take responsibility for team victories.

The second principle is the idea of extreme ownership. For Willink and Babin, this means that a leader is responsible for every element of their team's behavior. This ties in with their second ideal that there are no bad teams, only bad leaders. Essentially, Willink and Babin argue that a leader has to take responsibility even for those that are underperforming and bringing down the efforts of the team. It is the leader's responsibility to bring any underperformers up to par or remove them from the team if that is not possible. Similarly, it is the leader's responsibility to embed the idea of extreme ownership in every member of the team, so that every person feels obligated to do his part even when others aren't pulling their own weight.

Another important element of team leadership is the idea of inspiring others and believing in your cause. Without a strong sense of belief in an idea, it will be nearly impossible to rally one's team to act and to inspire them to take extreme ownership. This is particularly true in challenging situations. The best missions are accomplished when everyone understands the mission and believes that it is the best course of action. It is the leader's responsibility to make this mission clear.

Other important elements of this leadership philosophy include the idea of decentralized command, which essentially means that the best teams are those where all members of the team are empowered to make decisions within the scope of their own work or their own project. This requires clear and constant communication on behalf of the leader and faith in team members to make good choices. It is the leader's job to prioritize those decisions and those tasks for their subordinates, so those chaotic or high-pressure environments can be made more feasible for all members of the team.

Finally, Willink and Babin make it clear that decisive action and uncertainty are both important parts of completing any mission, be it military or otherwise. Though research is important, there is no guarantee for anything in life – it is impossible for a leader to come up with a plan that is 100 percent foolproof. With this in mind, it is important to make educated and well-researched

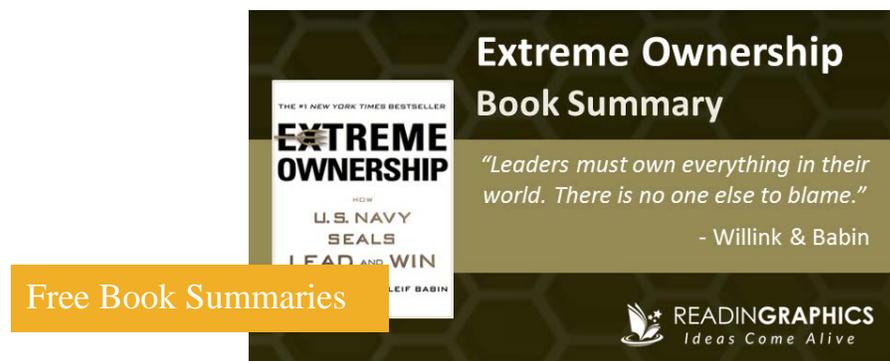
decisions that take into account both the ideal and realistic alternatives and to go forward with the plan despite doubt or fear. Being indecisive makes for poor leaders, and doesn't allow for growth within the team or within the mission.

Jocko Willink is a podcaster, avid MMA fighter, author, and retired US Navy SEAL. He co-authored *Extreme Ownership* with his colleague Leif Babin, who is also a retired Navy SEAL and currently an instructor for all officers graduating from the SEAL pipeline. Babin and Willink co-founded the Echelon Front, a consulting company that provides access to leadership training services and materials, advocating for high performing, healthy, and well-balanced teams. Babin's editorials have been published in *The Wall Street Journal* and other magazines, and Willink is the founder of a weekly podcast, the Jocko Podcast, that covers topics such as leadership, war, exercise, and lessons he learned while serving as a Navy SEAL.

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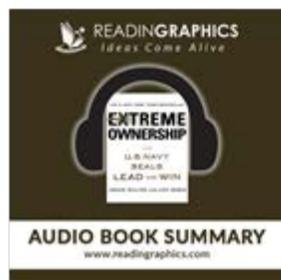
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U.S. Navy SEALs are probably one of the highest-performing military teams in the world. In “Extreme Ownership”, retired SEAL officers Willink and Babin share the vital leadership principles that have enabled SEAL leaders and teams to achieve extraordinary results, and explain how these insights can be applied to achieve success in all aspects of business and life. In this Extreme Ownership summary, we’ll outline the 12 leadership principles that bring leadership and team success on 3 levels: Victory from Within, Victory in Combat, and Sustaining Victory.

For the full details and tips, do [get a copy of the book](#) or our [complete book summary bundle](#).

Book Summary Bundle



In high-pressure, high-stake situations, leaders' decisions and actions have an immediate impact, and often decide the outcome of a mission. On the battlefield, this could mean the life or death of team members, with implications for the mission and war. In business, this could determine if the company sinks or prospers.

Willink and Babin fought in Ramadi (Iraq) after the terrorist attack on the U.S. on 11 September 2001. They later became leadership instructors for the Navy SEALs, before starting their own consulting firm, Echelon Front, to work with companies from a wide range of industries. The success of SEAL operations is built on individual excellence and teamwork, made possible by great leadership at all levels. This foundation also applies to business and life.

Victory from Within

The first leadership principles cultivate internal victory:

1. EXTREME OWNERSHIP (E.O.)

A true leader takes 100% ownership of everything in his domain, including the outcome and everything that affects it. *This is the most fundamental building block of leadership that cuts across all other principles.* It applies to leadership at any level, in any organization.

- When something goes wrong, a true leader doesn't find excuses or blame others.

He puts aside his ego, takes full responsibility for the outcome, and reviews what he must do differently as a leader to create success. If an under-performer is dragging the team down, it's the leader's role to train and mentor the person. If people aren't doing what they should, it's the leader's responsibility to clarify the mission and action plan, get people's commitment and equip them to perform their roles.

- Taking E.O. requires that you put aside your own ego and *review what you must do differently as a leader* to create success. This involves accepting criticisms, securing resources, winning hearts and minds, building clarity and processes, etc.
- *Leadership attitude is contagious*. When you demand E.O. of yourself and others, people start to emulate you and the mindset spreads throughout the organization.

SEAL example

During an operation, SEALs were about to storm a building that was supposedly under attack by enemy troops. At the last minute, Willink realized that it had been a "blue-on-blue" (i.e. friendly fire) and stopped the attack. However, there'd already been casualties, with an Iraqi soldier dead and a SEAL injured. Blue-on-blues are one of the worst blunders in combat; the senior leaders were furious and Willink knew his career was at stake. During investigations, they uncovered many mistakes made by people handling the planning and operations. Still, Willink took the full blame as the commander of the operation, and focused his efforts on reviewing the standard operating procedures (or S.O.P.s) to prevent similar incidents from happening again. In so doing, he not only earned the trust of his superiors, but also set an example for other team leaders.

Digest these powerful tips in minutes with our summary and infographic!

Business example

An executive was frustrated that his brilliant plan had fallen apart during execution, due to the lack of support from the Board and his staff, as well as poor market conditions. After speaking with Willink, he realized that he had been blaming others instead of doing what was needed to ensure his plan's success. He found new ways to engage and rally his staff behind the plan, secured the essential support/resources from the Board and tackled the challenges to turn things around.

We'll now outline the remaining 3 principles for to achieve Victory from Within. For similar details and examples, do get [the book](#) or our [complete 14-page book summary](#).



2. NO BAD TEAMS, ONLY BAD LEADERS

Leaders fundamentally decide their teams' level of performance. Under the right leadership, *any* team can thrive.

3. CLARITY AND BELIEF

As a leader, you must fully understand and believe in a mission, before you can convince others to embrace it and lead them to do what's needed to succeed.

4. MANAGE YOUR EGO

Great leaders prioritize the wider mission over their personal ego. They're willing to learn, accept good ideas from others, and own up to their mistakes. They also of manage their team members' egos to keep everyone focused on the team mission.

In [the book](#) and our [full summary](#), we elaborate on each of the principles above with more examples and tips.

Victory in Combat

The next 4 leadership principles cultivate a winning team that delivers results built on extreme ownership:



5. COVER AND MOVE (TEAMWORK)

Cover and Move is a common military tactic, where one team covers while another moves, so they can jointly gain ground. This is all about having different teams working together and supporting one another.

6. KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

Keep your plans simple, so they can be easily communicated, understood, and adjusted in response to real-time changes.

7. PRIORITIZE AND EXECUTE

It can be overwhelming to be faced with many time-sensitive, high-stake problems, all of which may snowball into bigger issues. In such situations, good leaders stay calm, take stock to identify the top priorities, then tackle them one at a time.

8. DECENTRALIZED COMMAND

Break down your teams into groups of 4-5, with a clearly assigned leader for each group. Ensure that leaders at all levels understand the overall mission and immediate goals, including what the team must do and why.

In [the book](#) and our [full 14-page summary](#), we dive deeper into what each of these principles look like in practice.

Sustaining Victory

Finally, sustain victory with these leadership principles:



9. SOUND PLANNING

Great leaders ensure there's a sound planning process that includes mission clarity, evaluation of options and risks, engagement of all levels, post-action debrief, and systematization of the planning process..

10. LEAD UP AND DOWN THE LINE

Great leaders concurrently lead lead upward (by offering information and updates to help *their* leaders understand their work and support them) and lead downward (to help junior leaders and frontline staff to see the bigger picture).

11. BE DECISIVE AMIDST UNCERTAINTY

As a leader, you must be prepared to make the best possible decisions based on available information.

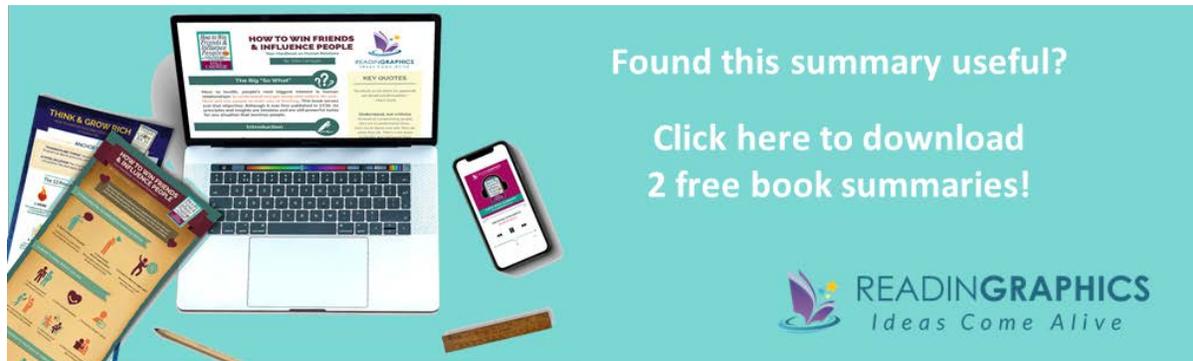
12. DISCIPLINE BRINGS FREEDOM

Discipline doesn't mean rigidity and is in fact essential for freedom and results. In [the book](#) / [full summary](#), we also look at the other dichotomies of leadership and what it means to balance them.

Other Details in "Extreme Ownership"

The authors illustrate the 12 key leadership concepts using detailed and vivid

stories, reinforcing their messages and tips with a mix of real-life combat and business examples. Do [get a copy of the book](#) for the full details, get our [Extreme Ownership summary bundle](#) for an overview of the various ideas and tips, or learn more about the authors' consulting firm at www.echelonfront.com.



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