



Jocko Wilink and **Leif Babin** are former U. S. Navy SEALs who work in leadership consulting through eschelonfront.com. Their book, ***Extreme Ownership: How U. S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win***, explores leadership “proven in combat.” In this riff, I will explore their thirteen principles and offer some considerations for church leadership.

Intro

I am committed to Jesus-centered non-violence. So why did I read this book? I read this book because my daughter’s soccer coach ask her to read it to prep for her role as a team captain. So I read it to be informed. I came away with one big question: *Is this the way that Jesus led his disciples and leads the church today?*

Be Aware

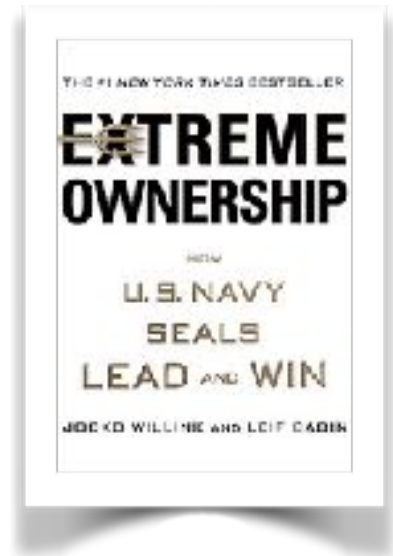
If you decide to read this book, know that Jocko and Leif tell stories of combat operations in Ramadi, Iraq. Sometimes it is shocking to know their mission is killing people. Yet, I wonder what would happen if people who are committed to Jesus-centered non-violence were as committed and organized in their pursuit of that mission?

Big Ideas

The book outlines 13 principles. Each chapter contains a combat story, a leadership principle and a business/organizational application.

The **13 principles** are:

- **Principle #1:** “On any team, in any organization, all responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader. There is no one else to blame.” pg. 30
- **Principle #2:** “...leaders...must recognize that when it comes to standards, as a leader, it’s *not what you preach, it’s what you tolerate.*” pg. 54
- **Principle #3:** “In order to convince and inspire others to follow and accomplish a mission, a leader must be a true believer in the mission. ...the leader must believe in the greater cause.” pg. 76
- **Principle #4:** Ego clouds and disrupts everything: the planning process, the ability to take good advice, and the ability to accept constructive criticism. ...Often the most difficult ego to deal with is *your own.*” pg. 100
- **Principle #5:** “All elements within the greater team are crucial and must work together to accomplish the mission, mutually supporting one another for that singular purpose.” pg. 122
- **Principle #6:** “Simplifying as much as possible is crucial to success.” pg. 140
- **Principle #7:** “...a leader must remain calm and make the best decision possible.” pg. 161
- **Principle #8:** “Teams must be broken down into manageable elements...with clearly designated leaders. Those leaders must understand the overall mission and the overall goal of that mission.” pg. 183
- **Principle #9:** “The leader must explain the overall purpose and desired result, or end state, of the operation.” pg. 204
- **Principle #10:** “Any good leader is immersed in the planning and execution of tasks, projects, and operations to move the team towards strategic goals.” pg. 229



- **Principle #11:** "Leading up the chain requires tactful engagement with the immediate boss (team leader) to obtain the decisions and support necessary to enable your team to accomplish its mission..." pg. 237
- **Principle #12:** "There is no 100 percent right solution. The picture is never complete. Leaders must be comfortable with this and be able to make decisions promptly." pg. 254
- **Principle #13:** "A leader must lead but also be ready to follow. Sometimes, another member of the team might be in a better position to develop a plan, make a decision, or lead through a specific situation." pg. 274

Take aways

- The role of leaders is crucial for the overall success of any group who is trying to accomplish anything.
- No organization is helped by fuzzy understandings of who is in charge of what, when, why and how.
- **Leaders have to be all in!** Leaders can't expect others to be more committed than they are.
- Leaders must **communicate clearly** and **simply** with everyone in the group.
- People need to know how their unique gifts/role/tasks contribute to the whole.
 - Leaders need to help others see that.
 - If you are part of the group and don't know, it is up to you to ask.
- **By the way** - and this is KEY- everyone in the group is a leader.
 - Extreme ownership is required of **all** people in the group.
 - That means that each person takes responsibility for their part in the mission and owns it 100%.

Extreme Ownership Goes to Church!

It is hard for me to think of Jesus and his church in the same category as a U.S. Navy SEAL team. I confess that I am biased. In reality, however, the New Testament (NT) is pretty clear that Jesus is the one and only head of the body, the church. The NT is clear that Jesus accomplished the mission in his own body, through his life, death and resurrection. The NT is clear that Jesus gave the church a clear mission. The NT is clear that each person in the church is equipped by the Spirit to participate in the mission. The NT is clear that Jesus instructed his disciples in how they should live and engage in that mission.

At the same time, Jesus empowers his people to make on-the-ground decisions (See Matthew 18) in the moment. Jesus recognizes that we will not have a 100% clear picture. The picture is never complete. Living in human community is complex. Sometimes leaders and teams have to make the best decision possible in the moment. We rely on grace in the midst of failure.

One area where the SEALS have a leg up on many (but not all) churches is their commitment to one another and their commitment to accomplishing their mission. I believe that if the church engaged in the mission of Jesus by following the model of Jesus (denying self, taking up our cross, and following him) the world would be a different place. Too often church members point fingers, place blame, or expect others to accomplish the mission while they watch from the safety of the sideline. There is no room for spectators when it comes to pursuing Jesus' mission in the world. **All disciples. All in.**

Is this the way that Jesus led his disciples and leads the church? More so than I thought when I started this book. **What do you think?**

How would you apply the leadership principles of Extreme Ownership to your church? Non-profit? Family? Life?