

ERIC KAPITULIK | JAKE MACDONALD

THE

PROGRAM



LESSONS FROM
ELITE MILITARY UNITS
FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING
HIGH PERFORMANCE
LEADERS AND TEAMS

WILEY

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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ISBN 9781119574309 (Hardcover)

ISBN 9781119574514 (ePDF)

ISBN 9781119574415 (ePub)

Cover image: © lvcandy/iStockphoto

Cover design: Wiley

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To our teammates, both those who are and those who
are no longer with us.*

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Introduction

DECEMBER 9, 1999, was almost the last day of my life, and I still get nervous when I think about it.

Ten of my Force Reconnaissance Marines and I were training for our deployment to the Persian Gulf. We were riding in the back of a helicopter, practicing maneuvers for vessel, boarding, search and seizure (VBSS) missions. Rather than coming in to a 60-foot hover over the ship we were practicing taking over, our helicopter came in too low and too fast and struck the side of the ship.

Recognizing his error, the helicopter pilot pulled on the “collective,” which would typically give lift to a helicopter, but on that day, the back left wheel was stuck in the thick metal netting that surrounds many large cargo vessels. With the wheel stuck, the helicopter inverted and plunged into the Pacific Ocean. My Marines. My teammates. We were all immediately knocked unconscious.

I’m Eric Kapitulik, the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Program. The Program is a team-building and leadership development company that annually works with more than 150 collegiate and professional athletic teams, and corporations of all sizes. We have one mission: “Develop Better Leaders and Create More Cohesive Teams.” My Program teammates and I have been doing so for more than a decade.

Achieving the Ultimate Victory

Many families, athletic teams, and corporations do well. They “win games.” But many teams, whether athletic, corporate, or family, want more. They want the big prize. The championship trophy, the cover of *Fortune* magazine, the love and respect of many generations. The question they all want answered is: How do we achieve more? More from our teammates? More from our leaders? More together?

This book will provide readers, on whatever their chosen battlefield, with a road map to compete for championships. First, we will discuss what a Championship Culture is, define the Core Values that form the culture’s foundation, and develop the goals and standards that reinforce our Core Values on a daily basis. We will then discuss how we create an environment where all members of the team are committed to achieving those goals and standards.

Next, we will highlight the standards to which teammates and team leaders are held and how we create—despite the discomfort all of us feel while doing so—a culture of accountability in order to achieve the best versions of ourselves and our team.

We then discuss what we must do every day of our life while preparing to be the best teammates and best team leaders that we can be, on all the teams of which we are privileged to be a part, including our most important team, our own family. Specifically, developing our physical, mental, and emotional toughness, not making excuses or letting others make them for us, and defining “hard work” and committing to it.

Finally, effective communication is key for both teammates and team leaders; no organization can achieve prolonged, sustained success without it. The final chapters review what effective communication means, how to develop it, and then how to ensure our teams carry it out.

The Program team has led men and women and made decisions when those decisions had life-and-death consequences. Like my own. . . .

Surviving a Catastrophic Crash

We awoke in a sinking helicopter, wearing 50–75 pounds of gear, weapons, equipment, and ammunition—with no oxygen and no idea

how to get out of our dire situation. I fought my way through the helicopter as it sank, looking for a way to exit. Then I started to swim, and only then did I feel true fear.

When the helicopter inverted, its blades sheared off, but the engines were still turning, causing bubbles to surround us deep beneath the ocean's surface. By the time we fought our way out of the sinking helicopter, we were deep in the dark Pacific Ocean, still wearing all that very heavy gear. I don't care how mentally and physically tough we may be, none of us can hold our breath indefinitely. Eventually, your body gasps and air rushes into your lungs. But if you're deep in the ocean, salt water rushes in. My teammates and I were underwater for so long, looking for a way to exit that sinking helicopter, that by the time we started to swim, we were all drowning.

Our bodies were shutting down. Our worlds were going black. I still get scared thinking about that moment when I first started to swim, because I can still remember thinking to myself, "I *hope* I'm swimming in the right direction."

Making things even more challenging was the fact that the helicopter had hit the water with such violence that it caused a compound fracture in my leg. So when I swam in a direction that I *hoped* was the surface, while drowning, I did so using only my arms. The bones in my right leg were completely severed.

A few meters below the ocean's surface, I could see sunlight filtering through the water, and a few moments after that I was picked up by a safety boat. I had survived. Unfortunately, six of my Marines—six of my teammates—lost their lives that day.

Within one month, we had six new teammates from 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, our parent unit, volunteer to join our team and we successfully deployed to the Persian Gulf. While my teammates and I were deployed, I decided that I would raise money for a college scholarship fund for the children of my deceased teammates. To do so, I decided to compete in the world's toughest endurance events and climb the world's tallest mountains—things that I already enjoyed doing, but now I could do them for more altruistic purposes.

Since then, I have completed eight Ironman Triathlons. I have adventure-raced across the Kalahari Desert in South Africa, throughout the state of Alaska, and from the Pacific Ocean across Costa Rica to the Caribbean. I have completed the American Birkebeiner Ski Marathon and the Canadian Death Race ultramarathon, an 80-mile

trail run through the Canadian Rockies. I was one of thirty finishers of the Leadville Silverman, a 50-mile mountain bike up and over six mountain passes all higher than 14,000 feet elevation, followed by a 50-mile ultramarathon up and over those same six mountain peaks the next day. I have summited five of the fabled Seven Summits, the tallest peaks on each of the seven continents. A few years ago, I stood on the summit of Mount Everest.

I am often congratulated on these “individual” accomplishments. Yet anybody who has ever accomplished similar achievements knows just how false that classification is. Nothing that we do in our life is done as an individual. Everything we accomplish is done as a member of a team, and we all fill one of two roles on those teams: teammate or team leader. Further, I am a husband to my wife and a father to my children. None of these “individual” accomplishments would have been possible without the love and support of my family and numerous other great teammates.

Privileged to Be Part of the Team

The Program Leadership Instructors are collegiate athletes, high-altitude mountaineers, Ironman Triathletes, business owners, and combat veterans. We are husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. We all share very similar personal experiences, and exactly the same professional ones working with more than 150 collegiate and professional athletic teams and corporations annually.

Program Leadership Instructors have led men and women in the world’s harshest and most deadly environments, including the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan. They have made life-and-death decisions and have had to live with them.

Throughout this book, Program Teammate and Lead Instructor Jake “Mac” MacDonald and I will highlight some of our Program teammates’ experiences, as well as those that Mac and I have been fortunate to have in our own lives. Mac and I, and our Program instructors, have developed better teammates, better team leaders, and created more cohesive teams with thousands of teams throughout North America. We have helped to ensure that those teams don’t just do well, don’t just “win games,” but rather that they compete for championships on whatever their chosen battlefield.

This book explains how we do so, and how you can too. Each section finishes with “Action Items” and “Saved Rounds.” “Action Items” are meant to help you put our advice into action, challenge you and your teammates to advance to the next level, and become the best teammate and team leader you can be.

“Saved Rounds” is a military term used to denote any bullets that military warriors have not fired during a day of shooting, but that must still be accounted for. Even if those bullets haven’t been shot, they are still important. We use the term similarly at the end of every section. The information in “Saved Rounds” wasn’t “fired” earlier, but it is still important.

SECTION

I

Creating a Championship Culture

CORY WATCHED IN horror as two rocket-propelled grenades streaked over his head. One impacted on the road directly in front of his lead vehicle; the next was a direct hit on his own.



U.S. Army Sergeant Aaron Wittman in eastern Afghanistan. He would be dead within five hours of this picture being taken.

Note: Photo courtesy of Duane Wittman.

1

The Fundamentals of a Championship Culture

THE SUN ROSE bright and clear over the Tora Bora Mountains in eastern Afghanistan on January 10, 2013, providing a surreal moment to remind them of the beauty the world can offer in the midst of a combat zone. The president of The Program Corporate, then U.S. Marine Corps Captain Cory Ross, was acting as a military adviser, attached to an Army Special Forces A-team. For months, Captain Ross had been operating with this team of Green Berets. He went everywhere they did and participated in all their operations, from meeting with village elders and providing medical services, to fighting alongside his Army teammates against Taliban forces.

That morning, they accompanied some of the Afghan local police, men they had recruited and trained to protect their own villages, on a tour of their area. They bonded and built rapport with the Afghans throughout the morning. For lunch, the Afghans slaughtered a sheep, a sign of great respect, for the American forces. While they ate, though, Cory and his teammates began receiving radio reports of multiple military-age males moving toward the village. Cory and the Special Forces soldiers tightened security, but didn't leave the village until lunch was finished, lest they insult their hosts.

Typically, military units do not like to be predictable and will not use the same roads and paths, both to and from areas, that they are

operating. However, the mountainous terrain offered no other options for Cory and his teammates. They had only one possible route back to their forward operating base. Although Cory was uncomfortable taking the same roads, the mood of the unit was still optimistic. The day was peaceful, and they were proud of the progress that they, and their Afghan counterparts, had made. That peace was completely shattered as they reached a hairpin turn in the road a short distance outside the village.

To achieve success on any battlefield, at some point we must overcome adversity. Maybe not the same amount as that about to be experienced by Cory and his teammates at this hairpin turn in the road, but company cutbacks, bad calls by the referee, sick or injured players, a poor economy, or a host of other factors will challenge all of us. In those moments, despite that adversity, an organization's culture will manifest itself in that team's ability to still successfully accomplish its mission—or not.

To achieve success on any battlefield, at some point we must overcome adversity.

To ensure the former, a culture must first be defined by the leader's Core Values and embodied by talented team members. Second, the organization's best people must determine the goals and standards that daily reinforce those Core Values. It isn't enough to say that we have a culture based on family, for example, unless we can prove it every day. Our goals—and more importantly, our standards—ensure we do so. Without them, like too many organizations, we don't have a culture based on family. Instead, we have an organization that merely makes t-shirts for their company or posts "Family" signs in the lobby.

To consistently accomplish the mission on whatever our chosen battlefield, organizations must have (1) the best people, (2) goals and standards, and finally, (3) a daily commitment to holding one another accountable for achieving them (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Three Components of a Championship Culture

2

Determining “Best”

THE PROGRAM HAS one mission: develop better leaders and create more cohesive teams. We help construct world-class organizations. World-class organizations have world-class cultures, and those cultures’ foundations are its “best” people.

World-class organizations have world-class cultures, and those cultures’ foundations are its “best” people.

“Best”, for any organization, occurs at the overlap in the Venn diagram shown in Figure 2.1. One circle represents the organization’s Core Values (more on this in Chapter 3) and the other represents talent. The “best” person for any organization is one who embodies that team’s Core Values, and who is also incredibly talented. In the short term, talent helps a team accomplish its mission. Its culture, as defined by its Core Values, combined with talent, ensures that team’s long-term ability to do so.

In order to lay the foundation of a Championship Culture, the question we must first answer is not what we want our organizations to *stop* doing, but rather how we want them to *start* behaving. As the leader, we do this by first determining our Core Values.

One of the first lessons all Marine Corps officers are taught (although not all learn it) is never to ask our Marines to do something

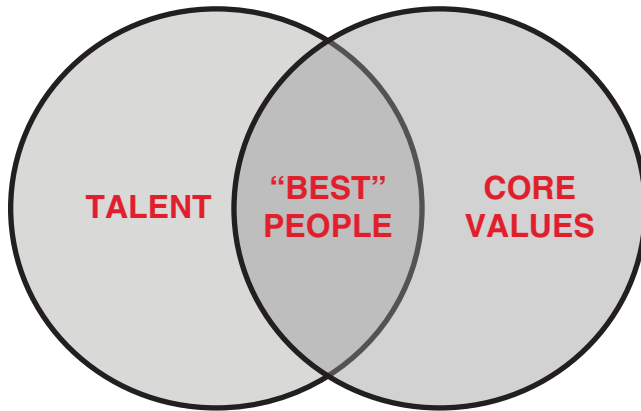


Figure 2.1 The best people for your organization have talent and share your organization’s core values.

that we aren’t willing to do ourselves. More importantly, don’t ask them to be someone that we aren’t willing to be also. It is a mistake, however, that almost all of us make. A coach tells players to clean up their messy locker room but the coach’s office is even dirtier. Business leaders demand that their employees follow the organization’s credit card policy, but then turn around and use their own for all sorts of questionable purchases.

Closer to home, how many parents have told their children that they need to “get outside their comfort zone,” but haven’t done so themselves in the past month—or the past five years?

As leaders of athletic teams, schools, businesses, and our own families, let’s be better than this. We should never ask our people to do something—or more importantly, to be someone—we aren’t willing to be ourselves. If we expect our team to behave in a disciplined manner (and hence one of our team’s Core Values is Discipline), then as the leaders, we must behave in a disciplined manner, as well. When determining our team’s Core Values, we must determine what the non-negotiable traits are that we, as the leaders, embody and expect our team to embody, as well.

Unfortunately, too many leaders make the mistake of enforcing, and then reinforcing, the behaviors they don’t want, rather than asking themselves what the behaviors are that they do.

Let's not make this same mistake.

When determining desired behaviors, start by thinking about what do we, as leaders, stand for? What do we represent? What does it mean (or what do we want it to mean) to be a member of our team? The answers to these questions are our Core Values.

Parents, the head coach, or the CEO set the Core Values for the family, team, or business, respectively. We appreciate that leaders, at times, will join companies that may already have Core Values. However, if those Core Values are not already those of the new CEOs, division managers, or employees, then it will not be a good fit for the new hire, regardless of position within the organization.

However, for teams without Core Values, or for teams who realize that theirs must change, there are numerous ways to determine what their Core Values should be, and as much time as possible should be spent doing so. The following diagram and exercise illustrates one way The Program does so with our own clients.

Determining Core Values

Rick Van Arnam, former U.S. Army Colonel and principal consultant at the Table Group, first provided this exercise to us. He also offered a wealth of information surrounding Core Values, based on his work with Patrick Lencioni, who had recently published *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (Jossey-Bass, 2012). It should be mandatory reading for any leader.

Balance

Fitness/Physical

Passion

Structure

Fun

Toughness

Commitment

Achievement

Quality

Courage

Knowledge

Volunteerism/Service

Growth

Efficiency

Authority

Discipline

Recognition/Status

Perfection

Independence
Legacy
Competence
Wisdom
Effectiveness
Accountability
Selflessness

Integrity/Trust
Fairness
Simplicity
Urgency
Loyalty
Creativity/Innovation
Money/Wealth

1. Take three minutes and select the ten most important values to you from the list—the ten words that you feel best describe you. If a word not on the list is incredibly important to you, feel free to add it. (For example, we don’t include Faith or Family for a host of reasons, but if you are compelled, please add them.)
2. Next, take one minute to narrow that list of ten down to five values.
3. Finally, take fifteen seconds to eliminate two values, leaving the top three most important or most descriptive values.

A second method of determining Core Values is simply to think about the adjectives that best describe you. Ask the people who know you best (spouse, partner, parent, best friend) to do the same for you. Ultimately, as the leader, what are the values that you embody and that you want your team to embody as well? What are the values that are most important to you?

3

Defining “Best”

ONCE WE HAVE determined our Core Values, we must then define them. The leader determines the Core Values, but at the very least, the leader, the executive team or coaching staff, and possibly a few team members whom we consider “best”, should help define those Core Values.

Ray Lipsky is a friend and U.S. Naval Academy classmate of Program founder Eric Kapitulik. Ray was a member of the Navy football team and then served honorably as a Marine Corps Infantry Officer. His battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Lefebvre, would often remind Ray, and the rest of his battalion, “Man [Woman] is a sum of his [her] experiences.”

Humans are the sum of their experiences. Why is this important for our discussion on defining Core Values? Because we can’t simply state that one of our Core Values is, for example, “Toughness,” or that we expect our team to behave in a *tough* manner without defining what “tough” means to our organization.

The Program had the privilege to work with Coach Tom Izzo and the Michigan State men’s basketball team many years ago. Michigan State is annually one of the best college basketball teams in the country and, although they do have an incredible number of very talented student athletes, they are not usually thought of as the most talented team in the country. They are known, however, for consistently being one of the toughest. Coach Izzo is tough and his team exemplifies it.

During one of our conversations with Coach Izzo, he reminded us of the importance of trying to recruit kids who are already tough and then demanding that they be tough every single day in practice. The challenge for Coach Izzo, as it is for all leaders, is that we are all a sum of our experiences.

Eric was born to Louis and Louise Kapitulik and grew up on a Christmas tree farm. His father was a Connecticut state policeman and his mother was a high school teacher. He played sports well enough that he had an opportunity to play one of them in college and was fortunate enough for that college to be the U.S. Naval Academy. He then served as a Marine Corps Infantry Officer and a Platoon Commander with 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. In his free time, he competes in the world’s longest endurance events and climbs the world’s tallest mountains.

He had the great fortune to have parents, and then friends and mentors, who were tough people. He did tough things and saw others doing tough things in the military and outside of it. Based on the sum of his experiences, Eric has a certain mental picture of who tough people are and what tough people do. Our teammates at The Program share very similar personal experiences. Based on all those experiences, we have our definition of tough.

This is true for everyone and their own Core Values. Based on our own life experiences, we all have a certain mental picture and a definition of those values. The members of our team may not have grown up with a dad who is a policeman and a mom who is a school teacher (or a grandfather who grew up during the Great Depression and worked in a mill his entire life). Our team members may not have grown up on a Christmas tree farm in Connecticut. As Coach Izzo highlights, our team members may have grown up with no parents, in a car, never even having a Christmas tree. By the same token, our team members may have grown up in a country club lifestyle, vacationing in Switzerland. In any case, team members have their own mental picture of tough and of what tough people do.

The Program’s concept of tough may or may not be the same as that of the Michigan State men’s basketball team, but if both share that Core Value, then the “best” people in both organizations must

embody it. A world-class culture is founded on the “best” people. Those “best” people have talent and embody the team’s Core Values. We must first select those Core Values and then define them for our team.

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