

A SEAL's Perspective: 5 Ways to Be a Better Leader

BY JEFF BOSS | February 13, 2014|

Entrepreneurs aren't average people. The average person doesn't hedge their bets against the odds and zig while the rest of the flock chooses to zag. But having the courage and audacity to enter into an unknown market, create a brand new product or meet with new partners is exactly what leads to entrepreneurial success for the simple fact that an entrepreneur's purpose defines them.

The desire to improve, learn and grow is intrinsic for the entrepreneur because they have found a purpose that suits their life's mission. But remaining competitive is a daily sport, and if you fail to live up to your purpose as a leader then you run the risk of failing to lead.

After spending 13 years in the SEAL Teams, there are five lessons I want to share that can make you a better business leader (after all, sharing knowledge is power, right?).

Test yourself -- daily. Leaders need challenges. They need to defy the unknown and achieve the unexpected. If this means waking up an hour earlier to work out, read the paper or just have personal time, do it. The sense of accomplishment yielded from your efforts will have a snowball effect on your self-efficacy. And remember, every day counts.

The BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training) motto of "The only easy day was yesterday" always held true because every day became harder than the last. I remember thinking to myself after enduring a conditioning run, "That was the hardest run I ever did!" That is, until the next conditioning run, and then that run became the hardest one I ever did. The point is that every day affords an opportunity to become better than what and who you were yesterday. If you don't take advantage of the opportunity, your competitor will.

Workout (i.e. sweat!). Having the mental fortitude to push yourself does two things: it shapes your body and sharpens your mind. It's easy to brush off the mental component of exercise if you're not pushing yourself, especially if you just go to the gym to talk. But if you exert yourself, breathe heavily and sweat profusely (no grunts, please), then your mind feels the same effects and raises its pain threshold, which in turn allows the body to push itself further.

In his book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, Harvard clinical professor Dr. John Ratey cites multiple studies of students' high school fitness scores relative to their test scores, with results indicating that consistent activity positively impacts brain performance. Bottom line: The daily grind that entrepreneurs must face necessitates both a strong mind and a strong body. What the mind believes, the body achieves.

Strive to become better, not the best. In BUD/S, we did a two-mile ocean swim every week with a swim buddy in the "toasty warm" Pacific waters (the Pacific is anything but warm). In the rare chance that a swim pair were to encounter a shark, the plan was to stab your swim buddy and then swim like hell (no, really). The point is that a swimmer didn't have to be the fastest in the water -- just faster than the guy next to him. Apply this to your competition.

Demonstrate your C². Character is who you are; competence is what you can do. The confluence of these, which I call C², is the secret sauce that turns good leaders into unforgettable people that others aspire to be.

Be humble. Nobody likes hearing the same voice over and over again. In fact, incessant talkers are what I like to call social hand grenades -- throw them in a room full of people and watch the crowd disperse. Don't be that guy (or gal) who likes to talk just to show everyone how much you know. Remember this: Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Entrepreneurship is not for the faint of heart. It takes focus, determination, and discipline to push through the daily grind if you want to win. Separate yourself from the pack by practicing the fundamental leadership skills that cultivate better performance -- and better business.

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