

Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



Extreme Ownership by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

Why Read *Extreme Ownership*?

“Leadership is simple, not easy. Likewise, leadership is both an art and a science. There are no exact answers or specific formulas to follow in every case.”

“No book can tell a leader exactly how to lead in every situation. But this book provides a sounding board for difficult decisions, a frame of reference to use for guidance when faced with tough leadership dilemmas. While the specifics of any particular situation may vary and the characters slightly differ, the principles remain the same and can be applied, either directly or indirectly, to overcome any leadership challenge that might arise.”

Extreme Ownership is a book about a set of leadership principles learned, honed, and perfected in a time of war by a small group of Navy SEALs. These leadership principles, while martial in their development, are easily transferred outside of the military setting to the wildland fire environment. If you read only one book on leadership this year, this is the one to choose. Using parallel examples of how each concept or principle was applied in combat and in a business setting, the authors demonstrate and model their leadership principles for the reader.

There are several videos on the book available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Author Overview (8 minutes):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4ZiNCM0A0Q>
- **Philosopher’s Notes (14 minutes):**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkYf4DOuFcY>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

Blog: <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

Professional Reading Program: <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

Main WFLDP page: <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

Extreme Ownership Discussion Questions

Chapter One: Extreme Ownership

What does the phrase “Extreme Ownership” mean to you? What obstacles are there to taking ownership of failures and mistakes in your organization and situation? How do you go about looking for the real, unbiased truth in your leadership situation? What are some tools we use in the fire service to learn from our failures, mistakes, and close calls?

Chapter Two: No Bad Teams, Only Bad Leaders

Do you agree or disagree with the conclusions the authors reach about teams? Have you seen good teams with bad leaders? How about bad teams with good leaders? Do you think “bad” teams exist? Why or why not? What do you think about the idea of “it’s not what you preach, but what you tolerate?”

Chapter Three: Believe

If you’re a follower, how can you prompt a leader to help you figure out the “why” of a task or assignment? If you’re a leader, how can you check to ensure you’ve successfully explained the “why” to your followers? How is it courageous to ask why? What are the benefits of asking why? What are the drawback of not asking?

Chapter Four: Check the Ego

What are some ways you’ve seen ego become a problem in you experience? What are some ways you can “check the ego” in your organization? How does controlling ego fit into the concept of Extreme Ownership?

Chapter Five: Cover and Move

What are some situations where you’ve had to choose the “least bad” option? What are some drawbacks of not coordinating with those around you in the fireline setting? Have you seen situations where teams didn’t “cover and move” in your organization? How would try to improve those situations after reading this chapter?

Chapter Six: Simple

What are some tools fireline leaders can use to keep things simple? How can keeping things simple allow us to more effectively deal with complexity? How do you keep things simple as technology, interagency operations, the wildland-urban interface, and policies/regulations seem to continuously make things more complex?

Chapter Seven: Prioritize and Execute

How do you personally set priorities in the field? How can you ensure that you’re tracking the “right” priorities in a high-stress, time-critical situation? What are some examples of setting priorities and executing in a wildland fire setting?

Chapter Eight: Decentralized Command

What are some ways we can push decision-making down to frontline leaders? What about frontline followers? How can decentralized command work on your crew or in your organization? Why is trust important in this setting, for leaders and followers both? How does simplicity in Leader's Intent apply to decentralized command?

Chapter Nine: Plan

How do the planning principles in the book apply in wildland fire? Why is it important to incorporate Leader's (or Commander's) Intent in planning, even if it's a rapid plan? What do you think of the leader's checklist? Do you see similarities to the planning process in your organization?

Chapter Ten: Leading Up and Down the Chain of Command

How can you make sure you are communicating the bigger picture to your folks in a clear, concise, and simple way? Why is leading up the chain just as important as leading down the chain? What do you think about the three major factors to be aware of when leading up and down the chain?

Chapter Eleven: Decisiveness and Uncertainty

How do you make decisions in uncertain, dynamic situations? What are some traps of being indecisive? Can you train to be better at rapid decision making.

Chapter Twelve: Discipline Equals Freedom – The Dichotomy of Leadership

What did you think after reading this chapter? How can discipline equal freedom in your life, personally and professionally? What do you think about the dichotomy of leadership?