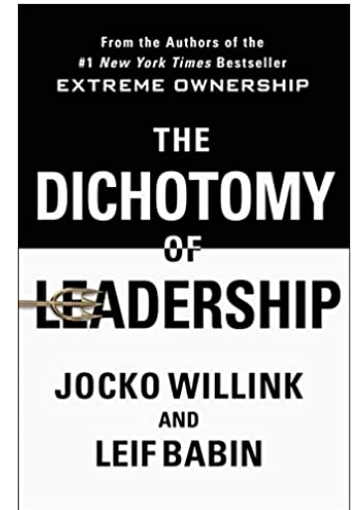




# The Dichotomy of Leadership: Balancing the Challenges of Extreme Ownership to Lead and Win

By: Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

For every positive behavior a leader should have, it's possible to take that behavior to the extreme, where it becomes a negative. Leaders need to find a balance. Leadership is "simple, but not easy." Principles presented in the book:



## Part I: Balancing People

- **The Ultimate Dichotomy:** Leaders need to care for each member of their team, while accepting some risks to accomplish the mission. Drive the team to accomplish the mission, without driving them off a cliff.
- **Own It All, but Empower Others:** Micromanagement inhibits the growth of individuals, but a lack of vision can impede strategic goals.
- **Resolute, But Not Overbearing:** Set high standards, but don't be too inflexible. Leaders have a finite amount of "leadership capital" that is acquired over time, through trust. Use it wisely. Explaining your reasoning can gain buy-in for decisions.
- **When to Mentor, When to Fire:** Most underperformers don't need to be fired, they need to be led. Leaders should push individuals to reach their potential, but some people may not be suited to a particular job. Be loyal to the individual, but be loyal to the team overall.

## Part II: Balancing the Mission

- **Train Hard, But Train Smart:** Training must be challenging to simulate realistic challenges, apply pressure to decision-makers, and encourage growth, but it shouldn't demoralize the team.
- **Aggressive, Not Reckless:** Be aggressive in solving problems and implementing solutions, but balance this with careful thought and analysis to make sure risks are assessed and mitigated.
- **Disciplined, Not Rigid:** "Discipline equals freedom," but excessive discipline can stifle free thinking in leaders and team members. Standard Operating Procedures and repeatable processes are helpful, but teams should be free to consider alternate solutions and new ideas.
- **Hold People Accountable, but Don't Hold Their Hands:** Ensure team members understand the reasons behind their task/mission and empower them to do the right thing.

## Part III: Balancing Yourself

- **A Leader and a Follower:** A leader must be willing and able to lead, but should support their boss, and be willing to rely on the expertise of others.
- **Plan, but Don't Overplan:** Careful planning is essential to the success of any mission. Focus on a few most-likely contingencies and the worst-case scenario.
- **Humble, Not Passive:** Humility is the most important quality for a leader. Leaders must accept constructive criticism and build strong relationships up and down the chain of command.
- **Focused, But Detached:** Leaders must be attentive to details, but not so immersed that they lose track of the larger strategic situation.

## From "Own It All, But Empower Others" (chapter two)

Signs of too much micromanagement:

- Lack of team initiative. Members don't take action unless directed.
- Members don't seek solutions, but wait to be presented with one.
- The team doesn't act without direction, even in emergencies.
- Bold and aggressive action becomes rare.
- Creativity grinds to a halt.
- Teams don't coordinate with other departments or divisions for fear of overstepping bounds.
- An overall sense of passivity and failure to react.

Signs a leader is too hands-off:

- Lack of team vision in what to do and how to do it.
- Lack of coordination between individuals and efforts often compete or interfere with each other.
- Initiative oversteps bounds. Both teams and individuals act beyond their authorization.
- Failure to coordinate. Teams may interfere with others' efforts.
- Team is focused on the wrong priorities, or solutions not aligned with strategic direction.
- There are too many people trying to lead and not enough trying to execute.

## From "A Leader and a Follower" (chapter 9)

The ideal relationship to have with your boss:

- They trust you
- They value and seek your opinion and guidance
- They give you what you need to accomplish your mission and then let you go carry it out

Thanks to Stephen Lepper (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephen-lepper>) for contributing his notes. Help other military leaders and contribute on [DODReads](#).