

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

Jocko Willink | Leif Babin | St. Martin's Press

Winning the War Within

The book starts with a focus on the necessary mindset for leaders to have if they are to lead their team successfully. Here, leaders are challenged to take ownership of all aspects of the team (Ch 1), realize that team success rises and falls on them (Ch 2), believe in the mission (Ch 3), and stay humble (Ch 4).

Laws of Combat

Willink and Babin believe these laws—when properly executed—help any team thrive. “Cover and Move” focuses on large-scale teamwork (Ch 5), “Simple” means everything must be easily understood in order to execute (Ch 6), “Prioritize and Execute” (Ch 7) spurs leaders on to know what is most important, and “Decentralized Command” (Ch 8) gets leaders to think about how they share authority.

Sustaining Victory

Four more principles help leaders sustain victory. First, leaders should have sustainable plans (Ch 9). Second, they should properly communicate “up and down the chain of command” (Ch 10). Third, they should be decisive (Ch 11). Finally, they should hold in tension concepts such as discipline and freedom, leading and following, etc. (Ch 12).



Leadership is the Key

Jocko Willink and Leif Babin fought together in SEAL Task Unit Bruiser during the war in Iraq. The stories come from the Battle of Ramadi, but Willink and Babin did not write this story about the specific issues within the battle. Rather, they wrote this book “for leaders of teams large and small, for men and women, for any person who aspires to better themselves” (7). Their focus is on how any team should be able to learn these essential principles and lead their teams to perform better (13).

The book breaks down into three sections: (1) Winning the War Within, (2) Laws of Combat, and (3) Sustaining Victory. Each section’s chapters use the same format—a story from battle that illustrates the principle, the explanation of the principle, and the application of the principle in the business world. Taken together, Willink and Babin hope leaders use these principles to “embrace the burden of command and go forward onto your battlefield . . . with the disciplined resolve to take Extreme Ownership, lead, and win” (287).



Value for the Church

Extreme Ownership has zero spiritual content, yet it is very helpful for church leaders.

Several reasons why:

- **Ministry is a battle:** The constant references to battle remind the Christian that they are indeed in a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12) with significant implications.
- **Leaders are essential:** This book focuses decisively on leadership, and the belief that much of the success rises and falls on the ability of the leader to effectively lead the team.
- **Blame-shifting isn't allowed:** Christian workplaces, with their goal of being gracious, can tend toward lax leadership climates. Willink and Babin challenge this view and remind us that leaders must take absolute responsibility of everything that happens.
- **Failure happens:** Some of Willink and Babin's strongest stories come through their failures (like the friendly-fire battle). They paint a picture of leadership that is not always glamorous.

Areas to Challenge

One cannot go through this book and not be challenged. With the high-stakes battles that were faced, the simplicity of the principles, and the strong focus on leadership, it's no wonder that this book made the New York Times Bestseller List. It is hard to argue with what they say, but several points are worth addressing.

First, this book has a very Western tone to it. It focuses on teams, but it largely highlights the strong and competent leader who leads those teams. The marketplace illustrations come out of companies that seem structured in the West and have the same values. Thus, the principles are not easily transferrable to other cultures and might make it hard for leaders who lead multicultural teams (or pastors who pastor in diverse churches). In fact, if one took these principles and tried to live them out in a non-Western context, he would likely not find much success.

Second, for the Christian, the book can appeal to the flesh if left unchecked. When one throws words around like "victory" and "win" with regularity (as this book does), it appeals to a side of us that really wants to get it done and do so without the power of the Holy Spirit. The concepts can lead us to believe that we can do anything, but leading the church is not any ordinary task and the battle that we face has eternal consequences. It uses a different type of power and seeks a different type of victory.

Conclusion

Extreme Ownership is a helpful book when looking at the principles. The first section is, in my opinion, the strongest. It reminds us that the best leaders are completely committed to their team and to their mission and pursue it with excellence.

