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We Choose Success, or We Choose Failure.

by AJ Powell 0 Comments 6 min read



Written by [AJ Powell](#)

“Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years,
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”

Invictus – William Ernest Henley (1875)



It is very true that team dynamics do play a major role in how an individual chooses to act, and can even be responsible for changing that person altogether over a period of time. As a leader and instructor in the military for over a decade, I saw this happen on a regular basis. Team dynamics have a profound effect on individuals of all calibers, but there is no predictability as to whether or not that influence will be a positive one or a negative one. It just isn't possible to determine because the only person who can decide whether or not success will occur is the individual themselves.



An average individual introduced into a team filled with highly self-motivated rock stars will either rise up to rock star status himself, or be broken by his inability to keep up. In reality, he must make the choice and decide for himself whether or not he wants to be a part of that team, and just how hard he is willing to work for it. This is the hallmark of the assessment and selection processes found throughout the United States Special Operations Forces. In the world of Special Operations, you want the Right Guy for the Right Job, and that job requires that individuals are a highly self-motivated, highly dedicated professionals, who are capable of acting individually as well as part of a team, and who will never give up reaching for success, no matter how hard it is. Not the greatest shooter? That's ok, that can be taught later. Not the best P.T. stud? Not a problem, so long as you want it bad enough, and never give up, you will improve. But that alone does not guarantee you are going to make it. That alone does not mean you will make the cut. All teams want the guy who wants to be there, and besides being able to make decisions on their own, is capable of team work in a dynamic, ever changing and challenging atmosphere.



Special Operations selection courses stand as proof that individuals are the only ones responsible for their success, and the primary reason why a leader could never claim that they had any part in making individuals better. If you held an average individual up to the highest of standards, and then placed him into a stellar group, and he eventually became stellar himself, it was not you who made him that way, it was him. He himself chose to rise up and overcome. Likewise is the same should he fail, and this works for all things in life. Sports teams accepting a rookie already have a team dynamic in place. Does the rookie show up and wash out? Or, does he take the time to find out how best to fit in, work as hard as he can to improve himself, and make it off the bench and onto the field? We are the measure of our own success. We are the makers of our achievement, no one else could ever make such a claim. Being a winner is not the decisions of a leader, it is the choice of the individuals. For military personnel, it is a way of life, and the way to life.



Just because we may not be able to handle certain challenges at one point in our lives, does not mean we should give up. It only means that, if it is important to us, we need to try that much harder. Real success is never easy to come by. In fact, real achievement often has a long history of failure and hardship. However, remember, the world is filled with underachievement. We live in a society of self-centered mediocrity and indifference, where being average is often celebrated while real achievement is often overlooked. Sometimes in our lives we may be asked to do things we think are seemingly impossible. But motivated individuals will find that with a little hard work, careful planning, and determination, that impossibility becomes very probable, and the mountain top that much closer.



You see, real achievement requires individuals to will strive for greatness, no matter how difficult it feels, or how far out of reach it may seem. It is in our darkest moments, when we have pushed ourselves to our limits, when we are in the most pain, when we have given it all we have and have nothing left to give... THAT is when the real challenge begins, that is when we find out who we really are, what we are truly capable of, and what we are really made of. Being a leader does not mean that we have all the answers either. It does not mean that we know everything, because we don't. No one does. But it does mean that we must hit the ground running every single day. Being a real leader is hard work. Leaders must always be willing to change, to adapt, to think of new ideas, new ways to accomplish things, to listen to others and make the best decisions possible given knowledge, experience, and the information they have at the time. Real leaders must be willing to give it all, to show that they deserve to lead others, to reflect on the past, and learn for the future. They must be the first to step foot on the battlefield, and the last to step off. They must lead from the front, because only cowards make demands from the rear.



Being successful is demanding enough, being a leader requires that you earn your title every day. It does not matter what others do or say, because only you can make yourself who you are. No one else could ever make such a claim. It will never be easy. Nothing worth anything in life ever is. This is the primary reason why the world is so filled with that underachieving self-centered indifference. But remember that no matter what life throws at you, no matter how hard life gets... You are the only one who can make yourself successful. You are the only one who can decide if you will ever reach your stars...

...You are the master of your fate. You are the captain of your soul.



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About the author



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AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker.

He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.