

# Why Great Leaders Demand Excellence

## (And Why It Matters More Than You Think)

Most people misunderstand what great leadership looks like.

They think it is about being liked.

Being approachable.

Keeping things easy.

It is not.

In a recent conversation on *The Enduring Mindset Podcast*, I sat down with former company commander Rachel Breslin to talk about leadership, standards, and what it actually takes to lead people in high-stakes environments.

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## The Standard Was Excellence

Before deploying to Iraq, there was a clear shift in expectations.

The standard became excellence.

That showed up in preparation.

Every mission required:

- Detailed planning
- Full understanding of the objective
- Clear communication of intent
- Rehearsals before execution

No shortcuts.

No guessing.

Every soldier understood not just their role, but the entire mission.

At the time, it felt excessive.

Looking back, it was the reason people came home.

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## Why Preparation Saves Lives

One of the most dangerous mindsets in leadership is this:

We will figure it out as we go.

That mindset gets people hurt.

Strong leadership does not rely on improvisation when preparation is possible.

It demands:

- Clarity
- Repetition
- Accountability

Because when pressure hits, people do not rise to the occasion.

They fall back on their training.

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## **Tough Love Is Real Leadership**

There is a misconception that being hard on people is negative.

It is not.

Rachel described leadership in simple terms:

Love is an action.

Sometimes that means pushing people harder than they want to be pushed.

Not to break them.

But to prepare them.

She made a decision early as a commander:

Be hard. Be fair. Be clear.

And trust that people will rise to the standard.

They did.

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## **People Rise to the Standard You Set**

Most teams do not fail because of lack of talent.

They fail because of unclear or low standards.

When expectations are vague:

- Performance drops
- Accountability disappears
- People do just enough

When expectations are clear and high:

- People adapt
- People grow
- People perform

As Rachel explained, when leaders are consistent and clear, people respond. They understand what is required and they meet it.

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# The Mission Has to Matter

There is another piece most leaders miss.

Standards alone are not enough.

People need to know why the work matters.

In long deployments or demanding environments, it is easy to fall into routine:

- Go out
- Complete the task
- Come back

Repeat.

Without purpose, that becomes empty.

Great leaders connect the work to something real.

A mission. A contribution. A reason.

That is what keeps people engaged.

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## Discipline Over Motivation

Motivation is unreliable.

It comes and goes.

Discipline is what carries people forward.

That applies to:

- Leadership
- Fitness
- Personal growth
- Career

Waiting to feel motivated is a losing strategy.

Doing the work anyway is what creates results.

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## What This Means for Leaders

If you are leading people in any capacity, here is the takeaway:

### 1. Set clear, high standards

Do not leave room for interpretation.

### 2. Prepare more than you think you need to

Repetition builds confidence and competence.

### **3. Be hard and fair**

People respect clarity and consistency.

### **4. Connect the work to purpose**

People need to know why it matters.

### **5. Prioritize discipline over motivation**

That is what sustains performance.

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## **Final Thought**

Leadership is not about making people comfortable.

It is about preparing them.

Sometimes that requires pressure.

Sometimes that requires discomfort.

But when it is done right, it creates something far more valuable.

Confidence. Trust. Results.

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## **Listen to the full episode:**

👉 <https://open.spotify.com/show/7fQ5oHIOZe94Jcjj6ytL2h?si=0c4c82fc29c6465f>

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**If you're a veteran or leader trying to figure out your next move, I share conversations and insights like this every week through The Enduring Mindset Podcast.**

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### **Related conversations:**

- *What Great Leaders Actually Do: Lessons from a Command Sergeant Major*
- *Character Doesn't Show Up in Crisis... It's Revealed*
- *You Don't Have to Do This Alone*