In one of the early episodes of the StartUp Podcast—which features Alex Blumberg, formerly of This American Life and NPR’s Planet Money—he meets Chris Sacca, a renowned former venture capitalist and entrepreneur.

Blumberg painfully bumbles through an attempt at pitching his business idea to Sacca. Believe me, it was bad. I found myself embarrassed for Blumberg just listening to it in my car. Then, Sacca follows by showing Blumberg how he should have pitched it.

And within Sacca’s formula for pitching a startup, he reveals what I’ve come to think of as a highly useful concept for not just startups, but for leaders, teams and organizations of any size.

That useful concept?

It’s the idea of the “unfair advantage.”

For Sacca and startups, the unfair advantage has to do with the specific reasons why the person or team will win at whatever it’s trying to do. This could be prior success and personal connections, it could be patents or other coveted intellectual property, it could be some other magical combination of timing and resources.

Thinking about your unfair advantage as a startup company is useful because it forces you to think about and clearly identify your strengths and how they fit into the strategic environment or market into which you’re trying to enter. Knowing that, you can capitalize upon your strengths as you wade through the extreme ambiguity and uncertainty of starting a new venture. From Sacca’s perspective as someone who would fund startups, clearly articulating one’s unfair advantage is helpful because it generates confidence in those around you. It’s a powerful sales tactic.

Originally posted at https://www.benbaran.com/home/2017/5/30/whats-your-unfair-advantage
But the idea of the unfair advantage is highly valuable beyond the world of startups and pitching ideas to potential investors.

Knowing and using your unfair advantage, in fact, has a lot to do with one of the U.S. Navy’s Leadership Principles. Specifically, number 10 in that list of 11 principles is “Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities.”

That’s one way of saying it. Another way is “Know your unfair advantage and use it.”

Nearly every person, every team and every organization has at least one area of excellence. It could be a special skill, a way of operating, an area of knowledge—the point is that this “unfair advantage” comprises that entity’s unique capabilities. It’s the genius that makes you or your group special.

If you know and use your unfair advantage—or “employ your command in accordance with its capabilities—you’ll be laser-focused on those activities that you or your team does well. You’ll seek opportunities that align with those strengths, using them add unique value.

So for leaders, this idea has a few implications.

First, it’s important to know what you do well as a leader. Knowing your weaknesses is important, but at some point in our lives, we’ve also got to know and focus upon our strengths. Capitalize upon them. Find opportunities to let your strengths shine.

Second, it’s important to know your team—what can your department do that’s different from the rest of the organization? How specifically do you create or add value? Knowing this can help you when you’re working with other leaders inside your organization to assign roles and responsibilities.

Third, at the strategic level, all organizations should continually refine their sense of how they’re unique. What can your organization do better than any other organization in the region? In the world? Take those unfair advantages and run with them. Bake them into your strategy and infuse them into what your organization actually does on a daily basis.

If you do, you’ll be employing “your command in accordance with its capabilities,” setting it and those whom you serve up for success.
This post is one in a series that I’m doing on all 11 of the U.S. Navy’s Leadership Principles. Here are all 11 of those principles:

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement (read more)
2. Be technically and tactically proficient (read more)
3. Know your people and look out for their welfare (read more)
4. Keep your people informed (read more)
5. Set the example (read more)
6. Make sure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished (read more)
7. Train your unit as a team (read more)
8. Make sound and timely decisions (read more)
9. Develop a sense of responsibility among your people (read more)
10. **Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities**
11. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions

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