

Bias for Action ... the Navy Seal's Way!

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WHY is creating organizational capability for Initiating Action so important today? Growing complexity, for one reason, which when combined with the faster than ever pace of business and getting faster every day, is creating a new round of “survival of the fittest”. Those organizations and leaders who are able to “get stuff done” will survive and thrive in this new age leadership reality. The challenge for

many leaders, however, is in adapting and learning new approaches for initiating action as their favored “command and control” style doesn’t work like it did in “the old days”. Culturally and technologically, it seems like life is on steroids as the pressures for answers and decisions outdoes the capabilities to generate answers for many, if not most knowledge workers today.

This week, the son of a dear friend and colleague in Chicago comes home after eleven years as an officer and team leader in the Navy Seals. Thankfully, Chad comes home proud of his service to country but also able to look forward to building the next chapter in his life. Many of his friends, colleagues and team members will not have that opportunity. For the past six months, we have corresponded with Chad about leadership challenges in the VUCA world he faces everyday ... volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. We are building a workshop concept that combines the leadership lessons that guide Navy Seals success together with our Agile Model®. Below are some real excerpts of Seals leadership ethos written by Chad ... I think you will see how powerful and applicable they are to leaders competing in the VUCA world everywhere!

Initiating Action
Bias for Action
Decision-Making
Collaboration

What makes the Delta Force or Navy Seals such fierce fighting forces? Many things, of course. But one of those factors is their “bias for action” ... their poise, composure and readiness to sense and respond at all times. That word “bias” is often used in a negative direction relating to

discrimination or bad attitudes towards individuals or groups. But at its root, the word means “an inclination towards” ... in this case towards action. When we have a bias for action, it means that individual leaders or teams operate with an inclination towards

getting things done and a sense of urgency for completing mission. Organizations today must fight through the complexity and uncertainty that can paralyze progress. Agile organizations focus on building capability in what The Agile Model® calls “Initiating Action” which starts with the attitude towards action combined with strong decision-making and collaboration skills throughout the organization.

Below are a couple of excerpts from Chad’s chronicles on “Leadership Lessons from the Seals” ...

The “Commander’s Intent

“The Commander's intent comes directly after our mission statement in our planning process. This gives everyone the vision of what the end state objective is and in the absence of supervision (aka the officer or senior enlisted is killed) the team can still prosecute the task to satisfy the end state intent. I obviously do not have a business or private sector background but I have habitually seen organizations / people falter or lose steam because they don't have a crystalized vision in their head of what to do when someone is not telling them what to do. This concept allows individuals at all levels of an organization to absorb information and make informed decisions without having to be slowed down by the "mother may I" syndrome. Ask the Germans how having to check in with HHQ for everything worked out in WWII.”

Deploying Action

“An additional key concept is the ability to rapidly mass or disaggregate depending on the situation. I like to ask my guys the question "how would you organize if no one ever told you how you should organize for this?" Team components and models need to shift depending on the task at hand. Understanding this concept can help reduce clinging to outdated paradigms, cut out positions that are not required and add ones that are as the market and world evolve. Most will never get this. They will say ... a Platoon is a Platoon. Well, do we need a Platoon for this target? Or do I need a series of enabling talents (military working dogs, communications specialists, medics, etc) with only a squad of shooters? Do I need to put a Company on the ground when the problem can be solved with a Sniper / Spotter pair and keep everyone else as a quick reaction force so that we remain undetected? Each operation will be different depending on the CDR's intent and mission statement.

Whether you are leading a high performance team in the hills of Afghanistan or in the glass towers of corporate combat, the ability to effectively guide to team to initiate the right kind of action starts with the right bias.

