

Never Quit

I've had several opportunities to hear Navy SEALs speak of their training, their active duty and their philosophies toward life. I am always awed by their heroic patriotism, mental clarity and skilled leadership.

I was in awe once again as Navy SEAL Rob O'Neill addressed attendees at a past Cattle Industry Convention. O'Neill dedicated 10 years of active duty to the country and was part of the SEAL team that killed Osama bin Laden.

Having been active in more than 400 combat missions around the globe, O'Neill shared several stories from his grueling SEAL training and his life-and-death experiences from his combat missions. He noted lessons learned in combat can be applied to strategies for achieving success in daily life. The following are among his leadership principles from which we can all learn:

Hone your people skills. O'Neill shared SEALs are trained and work in teams that rely on one another in high-stress situations, and he said, "We learned people work harder if appreciated...No one wants to work for a jerk."

Recognize planning vs. being overprepared. O'Neill pointed out there is no such thing as a perfect plan — and often people overplan for things that will never happen. He said, "Life is what happens around you while you are making the perfect plan." Rather, O'Neill encouraged planning and preparation but advised having the ability to adapt and to adjust to survive and to be successful.

Learn how to take emotion out of the professional decision-making process. O'Neill shared how in stressful situations most people react emotionally. He advised, "Often your initial reaction [to something] is the wrong reaction. Take a second to make an informed decision. I tell my guys [the SEALs] 'Don't react. Do respond.'"

Never quit. O'Neill noted combat — and life — can be grueling. But to that he said, "Remind yourself you are not having a bad life, you are having a bad day. Never quit, it will get better."

Have a sense of humor. O'Neill says humor helps everyone get through each day.

Small goals lead to long-term goals. A lesson O'Neill learned in his SEAL training: To achieve a long-term goal, think about little victories throughout the day, then repeat that process each day. During his grueling training, he says, he would break the day into mini-goals a few hours at a time.

Learn to handle stress. Regarding stress, O'Neill says, "It's self-induced. It's in your mind. It's a bag of bricks. You can carry it like guilt, or you can put it down and you should. You only feel the amount of stress you allow yourself to feel."

Recognize fear vs. panic. "Fear is good, it makes you think. But panic is contagious and in combat it'll get a team killed. Panicking is not going to help you," O'Neill says. He also emphasizes letting go of mistakes. "If you dwell on a mistake, you can't go on to the next activity. It's a total mind game."

Communicate. "People as a team work better when they know what they are doing and why," O'Neill says. "Preparation comes from training, communication, and repetition... Just because you are talking doesn't mean you are communicating. Learn effective communication, so when you are done saying what you need to say, stop."

Avoid complacency. Lastly, and most powerfully, O'Neill says complacency kills. That is a cardinal rule among SEALs. O'Neill notes, "Success causes complacency." He says one of his favorite quotes comes from basketball great Michael Jordan, who said: "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed."

O'Neill concluded by stating a successful mission means you are "prepared to fight, can perform under fire, trust your people and will never quit."

He added, "The enemy is often all the doubts in your head. Keep moving forward and never quit, and you will be just fine." **HW**

Editor's note: Watch a documentary with O'Neill sharing his experiences in his own words at robertjoneill.com. O'Neill also encourages support of YourGratefulNation.org, which is devoted to efforts to assist veterans after active duty.

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