

# **COURAGE TO EXECUTE**

**What Elite U.S. Military Units Can Teach Business  
About Leadership and Team Performance**



**JAMES D. MURPHY**

**Author of *Business is Combat* and *Flawless Execution***

**WILEY**



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# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>xi</b>
 <b>Chapter 1</b>	
The Military Response to a Complex World: The New Value of Effective Execution	1
 <b>Chapter 2</b>	
Basic Training: Indoctrinating Your People with Values and Skills	13
 <b>Chapter 3</b>	
Team Alignment: Connecting the Troops with the Leader's Intent	37
 <b>Chapter 4</b>	
Mission Preparation: Moving from Strategy toward Accountable Actions	63
 <b>Chapter 5</b>	
Battle Rhythm: On Track, On Target, and On Time	89



<b>Chapter 6</b>	
Continuous Improvement: The Debrief Imperative	119
 <b>Chapter 7</b>	
Leadership on Purpose: Developing Teams and Leaders from Day One	143
 <b>Chapter 8</b>	
The Courage to Execute: A Smart Bias toward the Right Action	163
 <b>Appendix: Mission Checklists</b>	171
<b>Bibliography</b>	179
<b>Index</b>	183

## PREFACE

Elite military warriors are trained to perform at exceptionally high levels. They're put through the paces until they have the individual skills necessary to accomplish their missions, then these warriors come together as a team. They come from all walks of life but emerge from their training as Army Rangers or Navy SEALs. It doesn't take a pedigree and it isn't a birthright. You have to earn it. If you want to make the cut and be on that team, you need determination, motivation, confidence, courage, and the willingness to sacrifice your personal identity for the group's identity.

None of that is easy—the washout rate is high—but there are some encouraging words here. The first is training. In truth, you don't need special skills or background to become the best of the best—our entire military establishment was designed to take a diverse group of young people straight off the streets and put them into a process that molds them into fighter pilots, Rangers, SEALs, and ultimately enables them to execute in the business world outside the military. One day I was a farm boy from Kentucky, then entered the process. Next thing I knew, I was an F-15 fighter pilot. A decade later, I was teaching companies how to execute like a well-trained squadron. True story. And all because of a process.

You see, people who become elite in any field go against the grain and challenge accepted theories. Sometimes, conventional wisdom holds that the elite are somehow born, not made, that they came to their status naturally, not through training. That's simply not true. As the pages ahead will show you, you *can* train perfection, you *can* train



courage, and guess what? You can train to become elite. It's not about luck or the right school or good genes. It's about you.

I'd barely learned to fly a Cessna when the air force took me off the streets and started making me into a top-notch fighter pilot. Not long after, I was flying a supersonic fighter jet over that farm in Kentucky. I wanted it. I worked hard. I made the cut. But I had no special skills. Need more proof? Just look around. There are plenty of examples of individuals and teams becoming extraordinary. It just takes a process.

You'd think everyone knows that. But in my years working with some of the most successful organizations in the world, I've found that most leaders have trouble actualizing that knowledge—implementing and following the processes they know can take them to the next level. It really hit me in the fall of 2011. If anyone was executing well, I thought surely it was the NFL. Then as we began working with teams like the Packers, Giants, and Broncos, we learned that everyone struggles to find and follow a winning process. The New York Giants' season had started slowly, they were having trouble. Then they began adopting elements of our military-inspired model and things began to change. They began winning and by Christmas, they were Super Bowl contenders. They continued improving and in February, they won the 2012 Super Bowl, crediting hard work, each other, and our process.

Organizations like the Broncos and Giants felt alone in the struggle to execute; they thought everyone else was doing it better. What we've discovered is that most businesses and teams have not learned what I learned in the military. Individual execution is one thing, but organizational execution is everything. And it shouldn't be as complex as the world we're competing in.

Inspired by the Giants, we went back and looked at our country's elite warriors and their history. We examined the spec ops community, aircraft carrier operations, aerial performance teams, and more. We began to see the patterns, the traits that give teams what I call the courage to execute. We found that every member of every elite team came in without any particular gifts—but they had all been trained, they had been indoctrinated with common standards and values, they



had all rehearsed the scenarios they would face. What seems confusing and bewildering to you or me looks like a walk in the park to them. They're so well trained that they view a demanding mission as just "executing the plan." They know to keep it simple, and just follow the process.

In the pages that follow, you'll see how our elite military forces execute, and through these examples you'll learn how to develop, hone, and spread their ability to execute across your entire organization. You just need determination to be the best. One day I was a farm boy, the next, an F-15 fighter pilot. Process. Now you can see how that process works for some of our nation's finest, in the most challenging of conditions. And you'll see some spectacular results.