**RedZone Podcast Episode #84: High Performance IT Leadership Is a Verb: Empower Yourself with a Navy Seal Mindset!**

Bill: 06:00 All right Tom, well I wanna welcome you to the show today.

Tom: 06:08 Well thanks for having me Bill, appreciate it.

Bill: 06:10 So I think you're a similar, I'm 48, and you're a similar age to me, I think. And you were in the military, and a Navy SEAL for 27 years, is that correct?

Tom: 06:27 26 years. I'm a few years older, but sure, we're in the same generation.

Bill: 06:32 So I like to get, I'll go back to the beginning though, because I wanna find out a little bit about ... So you spent a long career as a Navy SEAL, and did you always know you were gonna go into the Navy and into the military?

Tom: 06:50 Absolutely not. I really stumbled into the SEAL community. I was a college graduate. I'd been an athlete, had a couple injuries that sidelined me. I was working, New York City, working in the mortgage industry, lamenting missing my teams that I had been part of. And I was just searching for something, and I stumbled on the SEAL community. And did a little bit of research, went and talked to a recruiter, and before I knew it I was getting my head shaved and I was in training. So I really happened by by chance.

Bill: 07:31 So when did you, just from a time frame point of view, when did you enter the military, and in particular the Navy SEAL community. Was it in the '80s? '90s?

Tom: 07:42 It was 1989. I began my journey to find my relevance. And that's a theme in my life, is relevance. That word, one of my favorite words. And when I stumbled on the SEAL opportunity, it happened fast. And really it was a matter of months, between my inquiry and my entry into OCS, which is Officer Candidate School which is in Newport, Rhode Island.

Tom: 08:14 So what I did was I first became a naval officer, and then from there I went to SEAL training< which was called BUD/S, which is an acronym which stands for Basic Underwater Demolition/Seal Training.

Bill: 08:31 We're in the Annapolis area, so we take a lot of the first year kids into a program they offer, the first year kids in particular are coming in from all over the country. So I know they have several, [inaudible 00:08:49] they become seniors, there's a whole group that end up heading over to BUD/S for their officer program. But I know that, so you're saying the OCS, there's another way to get in through the OCS program, is what you did.

Tom: 09:04 Well, there are two routes in the Navy SEAL world. You're either gonna go in enlisted, or you're gonna become a commissioned officer. And to become an officer you need to have a college degree. And there are three primary methods to become an officer in the Navy, and the SEALs as well. And that's either through Annapolis, which you're familiar with, the Naval Academy. The second way would be ROTC, which would be a program that is run through many colleges across the country. And then the third way is Officer Candidate School. And this is for people that already have college degrees and they just need to become familiar and educated and professionalized in the way of the Navy. The language, the uniform, the history, the culture. And really learn all the nuances of transitioning from being a civilian to becoming a military man or woman, and just learning what's expected of you.

Tom: 10:06 And it's a four month program. Newport, Rhode Island is where I went. And it's pretty robust, fast ... If you show the movie An Officer and a Gentleman, that was OCS.

Bill: 10:20 You know, when I was growing up there was a guy down the street that was about, probably five to seven years older than us, and he went into the Army and then he ended up going into the Green Beret community. And he would come back, and this was back in the times when Manuel Noriega was running rampant with the cartels in Central and South America. And he would come back with these stories that they would just drop him in the middle of Central and South America, and I guess they were trying to interdict with the drugs back then.

Bill: 10:55 And so that was probably in the early, early '80s, time frame. I kinda thought those were fictitious stories, I wasn't sure if he was telling the truth. But did that sort of stuff happen back in the '80s, where we were sort of putting people down into Central and South America for helping with, or trying to help or interdict with drug trafficking?

Tom: 11:20 Absolutely. I personally spent three years down there. A year of it in Colombia, and the stories your neighbor shared were probably true. 'Cause they sound familiar to the ones that I experienced.

Bill: 11:33 Wow, fascinating. Well, I'd like to talk a little bit about leadership. And so I think I'd share with you a little bit about what the folks that are listening to this podcast, and I'd like to give them a lens into how you view the world and also, maybe before we even start out there, could you, before I get into some of my questions about leadership, could you talk a little bit about where you are now from your trajectory of being in the military as a Navy SEAL? If you could talk a little bit about what you did there and then what you're doing now as it relates to leadership, and then I can ask some of my questions related to my listeners.

Tom: 12:24 Yeah, it might be easier if I just start at the beginning and just catch you up to now, and I'll do it rapidly. As mentioned, went through Officer Candidate School, four month program. Left there and went to Newport, Rhode Island, to Coronado, California for BUD/S, for SEAL training. And I was there for about seven months. I was blessed I didn't get injured. Many students get hurt during training, get rolled back, and they're in the pipeline for a longer period than they would want.

Tom: 12:55 Training has changed since I went through. Back when I went and aspired to become a SEAL it was a six month program. You would get assigned to a SEAL team and you would finish your SEAL training in house at your SEAL team, where they would put you through a qualification process. Now they do a complete in-house one year program where everything's done, then you get your qualification, it's called the Trident, you get your insignia pin, which we wear on our chest. That happens after a year of training.

Tom: 13:29 So for me, I did the six month pipeline, I went to SEAL Team 3, which was in Coronado as well, and then began my career as a leader. And step one, I was given a group of eight men, and I was just directed to lead. And I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. I was blessed with a mentor, I was blessed with a senior enlisted advisor who was fearless in holding me accountable to the standard. And he ensured that I led and that I led effectively. And when I didn't he would mock me, he would shame me in front of the guys. And for me that's a good method to grow. I don't like to be shamed, embarrassed, and I quickly embraced the standard and the ways of the SEAL community. And I lived the culture and I loved it.

Tom: 14:19 So I had the opportunity to lead that group of eight men, then I led another group of eight men. Then they bumped me up to 60 men, and I did that three times. And then I went on to become an operations officer, where I led operations throughout a region. And I was leading a team of about 50, and then it grew to about 100. And then ultimately my milestone career mark would be when I was the commanding officer of SEAL Team 5 and then a task force commander in Iraq where I led upwards of 400 people on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tom: 14:56 So I've had the privilege to lead men, and I really do consider it a privilege. I've been across the world, 73 different countries, and working with the world's finest from America and other countries, which has been a great honor as well. Retired a couple years ago, not quite sure what I wanted to do, but I knew what I didn't want to do. And then I built a business around that. And I'm a consultant now, and I work and embed myself with sports teams and corporations that are looking to learn from my experience and my circle of influence. And I help teams and organizations build more effective leaders and create a more empowering culture. And really just go after optimizing their performance, and that's the bottom line.

Tom: 15:50 And that's what it's all about, is you're here and you want to get somewhere, which is gonna take some work. It's gonna take some changes. And one of my big coined phrases is "Leadership is a verb." It's not a noun, it's not some title or a patch that you wear on your chest, it is action. Daily action. Consistent, congruent. Just getting into it and finding out what works, what doesn't, and continually changing.

Tom: 16:21 So today I have the privilege to work with some great sports teams. I'm with the Tampa Bay Lightning, and a few corporations. DEX Imaging is one that I'll mention here on this podcast. And just exciting times for me, and it's just a privilege to continue to be part of a team.

Bill: 16:39 When you work with teams, Tom, do you focus on the athlete, or at the coaching level? Like where do you primarily focus?

Tom: 16:54 I look at it from every optic. I look at it from every angle. And building a great team, it doesn't happen by accident. You look at the most consistent teams in history, we'll say the New England Patriots are definitely up there, the Yankees at times. And it's a cultural thing. And when they look at it ... And Alabama Crimson Tide, I had the privilege to work with Coach Saban a few years back. And every angle is scrutinized. From the athlete himself. From the coach. From the staff. From the culture. From the media, the marketing. From ... Everything that touches the player you have to look at it from every angle. Because everything influences them. Everything will have a different action that will propel them in a different direction. And really synchronizing and orchestrating that to best effect is what we're after.

Tom: 18:03 And it continually changes. And then I'll go back to my phrase that "Leadership is a verb." And really, getting after it and never stopping is the only way. And in looking for those consistent best practices that work within that organization ... Are what we're after.

Bill: 18:25 When you say "Leadership is a verb," can you give me an example of one or two actions that you, so if you could go into a leader's brain and just flip a switch on if you saw it off, and related to this action, verb, what would be some of the switches that you would turn on in their brain?

Tom: 18:44 I like how you framed that question. That really helped me conceptualize in my thought right now of exactly what we're after. And the reality is, a lot of leaders look at it as a title. And I'll see captains of sports teams, I'll see leaders of corporations, it's just a title. And they don't take that to the level they need to to influence. And at the bottommost, low level you can go, it's about behavior modification. You've got a team. You want them to do something different. You need to modify their behavior to change the trajectory of their outcomes. Does that sound fair enough?

Bill: 19:33 Yes, for sure.

Tom: 19:36 So if you look at leadership as just a title and you do nothing, there'll be no change. But if you really embrace the concept of, it's continual action, it's a verb, you look at this team and you're like "Okay, we've been doing X, Y, and Z, for the past year, the past two years, and we haven't really changed. We haven't gotten to where we're after. Our objectives are not being met." So you need to look for what can we change? What needs to be different? What do we have to focus on?

Tom: 20:12 And it could be anything from communication being properly, a foundational piece. How you communicate. Do we communicate effectively? Do I as a leader give my guys, and gals if it's a coed environment, do I give my team the empowerment to be part of the equation? And in most cases the answer is no, frankly. I'll tell you, in the SEAL community, that is one thing that we embrace unbelievably well. Everybody has a voice. Everybody.

Bill: 20:49 The empowerment side?

Tom: 20:50 Everybody's expected ... Excuse me?

Bill: 20:53 Is that what you mean, like when you say "voice," you mean they're empowered to speak up? As a part of their, an eight person team, can you explain what that means?

Tom: 21:04 Yes. Every teammate in an eight man team, as you just described, 16 man, or even larger, and it gets tougher the larger the team, obviously. But they're given a voice where if they feel we can do something differently, more effectively, they have the opportunity and the venue and the empowerment to share that. We may not use it, but we'll give them a reason and we'll respect their idea. And we may use a piece of it and move forward to come up with a collective solution.

Tom: 21:42 So having a voice, to me, is where it all begins. Communication is everything. We have a thing in the military, and we embrace it to the nth degree in the SEAL community called the hot wash. And all this is is simply, after everything we do, whether it be training, a real world mission, whatever, we'll all go into the room, we'll pull our rank off. I may have been the commanding officer of SEAL Team 5, but when I went into a hot wash with my teammates, I put my rank on the table, and then we spoke. Openly. Candidly. And we went through every element of what we just completed, and we looked at what did we do well?

Tom: 22:29 And more importantly, what did we not do as effectively as we needed to? Why? What could have we changed? We take notes. We capture it. And we don't wanna make the same mistake twice. 'Cause you see, the reality is, if you're familiar with Simon Sinek and It Starts With Why ...

Bill: 22:48 Sure.

Tom: 22:49 You know, I love his message there. This is the huge advantage we have in the SEAL community. Our "Why" is so darn powerful. Our missions are of strategic importance. If we do not get it right in training and on the battlefield, if we do not get it right, there could be death.

Tom: 23:11 And the reality is that it's not so much individual death, it's being the reason that one of our teammates dies, on our left or right, because of a mistake we made. I'll tell you, when you have a why like that looking over you, you listen differently. You tie your shoes differently. You plan differently. And if you ever have been exposed to the concept of kaizen, continual improvement, it's a Japanese term, you embrace kaizen and you are always looking to get better. You are looking at your gear, how could I make it more effective? You are looking at your physical training, how can I get stronger? How can I get faster? You're looking at your shooting skills. How can I think more clearly? How can I focus? How can I improve? Tom: 24:03 I'll tell you what, when you don't have that, you're not as compelled to improve. I was an athlete for years, I played football and I skied competitively. You know what? I was that guy that was considered the hardest worker. And I had to be, I mean I was a good athlete, not the best. I was good. But I wanted to be better, and I had to will myself over those hurdles to improve. And frankly, I thought when I was an athlete, I was the guy. But when I became a SEAL, I realized I had no clue what dedication and focus were until I had those realities of death being a potential outcome looming over me.

Bill: 24:48 You know, as you were talking I was thinking, gosh, how do you make something like a small team SEAL experience relevant to business leaders? And I was kind of in my brain thinking, well, because the life and death nature is different. It's just a different ... But when you started talking about this hot wash experience and people having a say in the team, that is completely practical for a major project that a business is undertaking or an entrepreneur's undertaking and there's a small team involved in making it successful.

Bill: 25:28 And then you have the event or you have the project, and then all of a sudden you've gotta, it's circling back around and having that hot wash, that doesn't matter whether it's, that could be a small team at a business, it could be a small company, and it could be a SEAL team, correct?

Tom: 25:46 Absolutely Bill. And the reality is I start all my engagements with an outline of what a SEAL platoon or a SEAL team looks like. And the bottom line, we are exactly the same. An organization is an organization is an organization. Every function you have with your organization, I had at Seal Team 5. We had accountants, we had IT specialists, public affairs, finance. Anything you can imagine, we had it as well. Cybersecurity, that's something we're concerned about obviously as well, like the rest of the world. Every element you have, we have.

Tom: 26:33 We have people that worked logistics, we had people that did long term planning, short term planning. We had people that worked, anything that you can imagine an organization would need, we had it. The reality is, the only difference at the end of the day is we carry weapons ...

Bill: 26:51 Yep- Tom: 26:52 And our mission is different than your mission. That's it, that's the only difference in my opinion.

Bill: 26:59 Well, the other thing too, and this is where I think it's gonna be really relevant. I think everybody, I think the guys that are listening and ladies listening to this show, they're experiencing death every day. It's emotional death. And that is not physical death that a SEAL team would be exposed to, but I bet you any money if you open the brain up and looked at the wiring and looked at the impact of fear centers in the brain, I bet you would see some, they're afraid of losing their job, they're afraid of failing on the project, they're afraid of letting their teammates down, their employees, their bosses, their board of directors. I mean it goes on and on. Have you thought about it from that angle before?

Tom: 27:42 I never have quite like you framed it up. But I think you're right, absolutely. And you know, the power, people have explored what motivates somebody more: going after success or fearing failure? And studies show people are more motivated by the fear of failure. And I know I am. Sure, I wanna be successful. But the last thing I want is to fail.

Tom: 28:19 And you add that and conflate it with all these other potential fears that are out there, the fears you just listed, and it really is a lot to consider. And this is another area that I've become just unbelievably obsessed with, and I'll just call it performing under pressure. And it's just something I look at from every angle. And the reason I started with this was for my athletic career. I was never a choker, per se, but I always noticed in practice, I was a certain level. And then in the games when it really mattered, when the chips were on the table, I was just one degree less than I was in practice. And that bothered me.

Tom: 29:11 And then you look at some of these other people like John McEnroe if you know who he was-

Bill: 29:11 Sure.

Tom: 29:16 He was a great tennis player back in the '70s. And he apparently was not a great practice player. But in the matches, the guy would be like five degrees better than he was in practice. Now why could he do that and other people can't? And that's what made him so great. And the more it mattered, the better he did. And that to me is just phenomenally interesting.

Tom: 29:42 So I got after it, and I'm gonna give a little side note to a friend of mine who wrote a book called Top Dog. And her name is Ashley Merryman, and the book is fantastic. And what it does is it outlines what happens to our endocrinology, our internal chemistry if you may, when we're exposed to pressure. And it just does it in such simple terms, it does it in such a perfect manner, that when I was done reading this book I understood what was happening.

Tom: 30:19 And it comes down to one thing: how you perceive the conditions you're under. That's it. Like John McEnroe obviously perceived the pressure of the fifth set of the US Open men's tennis finals in a different way than most people would. And it empowered him. And if you look at it, it comes down to two things. You either perceive the pressure as a threat or a challenge. And it gets down to our earliest biological evolutionary reactions, the freeze, fight, or flight mechanism that we all have in place.

Tom: 31:04 That's what happens when you perceive something as a threat. You're about to be, whatever, eaten by a dinosaur, to just be facetious here. Most people are gonna be afraid. I'd be afraid. And if you feel threatened, your body will respond in a very, very predictable way. You will start producing chemistry that's very empowering for a very short burst of time. And then it becomes very disempowering.

Tom: 31:40 Whereas if you look at a situation as a challenge, something that you need to rise up to meet, and you have all the capabilities to do it, and you believe, deep down inside, you can, you will develop and create [inaudible 00:31:58] through your pituitary gland, a completely different set of internal chemistry through your endocrinology. You will produce empowering chemistry. And what I love as an example is, two football teams are playing a game. You're in the fourth quarter. One team is down by 21 points. It's impossible, there's no way they're gonna win, there's not enough time left. And they can barely pick themselves up off the ground after each play.

Tom: 32:31 While the other team, they're winning by 21 points. They're jumping up and down on the sideline, running around. It looks like they could play an entirely, nother complete came. Now, do we think that these teams are conditioned so differently that the team that's winning is in that much better shape? Sure, maybe they are in better shape, but I don't think it is that great a difference. What has happened is the team that was losing, they had been under threat conditions probably for the entire game, where their endocrinology has just been disempowering them. And they can't breathe as readily, they can't think as clearly. They're getting tight.

Tom: 33:16 And you know all these things, and all your listeners know this as well. While the team that's winning is producing empowering chemistry. They're pumping out much, much more empowering chemistry that's gonna fuel them to do great things. So at the end of the day, the choice is ours in how we perform under pressure. And this is what I really sought after to teach my guys, bring in experts to help teach my guys, was how do you own this dynamic? 'Cause when you own it, that's when you thrive.

Tom: 33:50 And I look at team excellence from a four point process. The first one is shared values. The second one is buy in. The third one is consistency. And then the last one is performing under pressure. When you can nail those four things, you're out to get greatness.

Bill: 34:14 Well I listened to you use the word "get after it," and I noticed this other podcast I listened to, the Jocko podcast with a, he's a SEAL team, I think SEAL guy who just runs his own podca ... It's a very interesting podcast, but he also uses that word very frequently, and I find that it's very interesting, you both use that similar, I don't even know if you know each other, but this get after it piece.

Bill: 34:39 And I was just meeting with a CIO, relatively new CIO, young CIO. But he had taken over a 3,500 person company, which was a complete mess. And his new boss is a two star general, just retired, Army general. And came in, and this guy didn't know what hit him. And I said, he was going on defense. His emotional state, the way he was talking, everything was defense. I said "You need to play offense." I said "This guy is used to high performance people around him," I said, "You can't be a snowflake. You can't crumble. You have to get up and perform."

Bill: 35:20 And it was very interesting, you talked about tennis as well. The hardest part of tennis is the seven seconds in between each point, and what you're saying to yourself. And that's why I'm super fascinated with your point about high performance and this get after it, and really shifting that endocrine state so that it is playing offense. Which I think is one of these vantages the SEAL team has, and I think people have to kinda train themselves on that when they're sort of in a less life threatening situation.

Tom: 35:53 Agree 100%. I do know Jocko, he's a good friend of mine. We spent a year together working on some projects, and Jocko's fantastic. He's one, if your listeners are interested, just google Jocko, J-O-C-K-O, Good, G-O-O-D, Jocko Good, and it's just a fantastic perspective on, when things aren't going well, what do you do with that? How do you contextualize negative things that happen and use it to your advantage? And he really captures the essence of the SEAL community there. You know, whatever happens, it's like good. I'm gonna use that to get better.

Tom: 36:35 I remember when I went through training, we had this thing, when you go through hell week, that everybody aspires to have a no bell hell week. And what that means is nobody rings the bell and nobody quits during hell week. Well it's happened twice to my knowledge in the history of SEAL training. And I had the instructor, right before we went in, he goes "You guys are not gonna have a no bell hell week. It's not gonna happen. The odds are against you." Do this: when you see somebody ring the bell, use that energy. Just take it, use it to propel you forward and motivate you to get to the next level and move forward another day, another two days, another two days, and keep going. And just use anything negative in your life, use it to your benefit.

Tom: 37:23 And that's one thing in the SEAL community that we really do well. And we have these gentlemen, these experienced SEALs, usually toward the end of their career, it's called training [inaudible 00:37:36] and they just go out and they fabricate just challenges for us. Chaos. And they make our lives as miserable as possible. I am so at comfort in chaotic situations because I lived in it for year after year after year in training that I essentially need chaos to perform effectively. I typically wait 'til the last minute to pack my bags. It drives my wife crazy, but I just want that feeling, that dynamic, where I only have 15 minutes to pack for a three week trip. And I literally do that, and I pack perfectly. It's just how I was trained.

Tom: 38:20 Where if I start a week ahead of time like my wife does, I won't get it right. So for me, to really perform at the level I want to, I need chaos and chaotic situations.

Bill: 38:32 You know, I look at some of the leaders that I see some of the older leaders, and they're not that old, they're in their 40s and their 50s, and I think, so many people lean into comfort. And I actually, before, I take periodic ice baths, because I love, I got trained by [inaudible 00:38:56] over in Europe, and I do it because I wanna expose myself to discomfort. Because the mind state that I want is "I'm gonna be warm." And I want that physical shift that comes from being uncomfortable and embracing that discomfort.

Bill: 39:15 Do you find that you run into situations frequently, Tom, where people are, their gear in their brain, that switch, is they're gearing towards comfort instead of actually gearing towards the growth of discomfort?

Tom: 39:31 Absolutely. You look at sports teams, particularly sports teams that either have high expectations from the media that they're gonna do well, or they've had some level of success, mostly due to the talent they have on the team. The worst enemy is that word, comfort, where they get comfortable. And a lot of organizations like when I come in. I represent uncomfort. The guys, they see me, it's not like I'm a mean guy. It's not like I get in their face, 'cause I don't. But it's just what I represent. I represent being uncomfortable.

Tom: 40:12 And that in and of itself is empowering. You could not have said it better. Embracing the suck is a saying we have in our community, embrace the suck. This is really not gonna be good. " Man, I want that." I want that because it's gonna take me to the next level. I know if I run and I feel that visceral pain in my thighs, I'm gonna be better when I'm done. Or if I stay awake for five and a half days, I've just challenged myself and took myself to a new level. I know I'm capable of doing even more next time.

Tom: 40:50 Each of these challenges propels you forward. At the end of the day, everything we do, and this is coupled with that " leadership is a verb," is, it's all about mindset. Whatever mindset you bring into whatever you're doing, you're either going to empower yourself or disempower yourself. It's not static, it's gonna be one or the other. I choose to empower myself. And embracing the suck is one way to do it. And getting comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Bill: 41:23 Are there any things that, with young kids right now, or your own kids, or just in, is there anything that you find that's a state, or something you've learned through your career, that you're like "Gosh, if my kids just have this one quality," or "If these small children that I'm surrounded with can be exposed to this one idea that I have that would help them," what would that be?

Tom: 41:55 You know, I'll just go right back and default to mindset again. I do have two boys, they're eight and nine, and my nine year old's about to turn 10. And they both play sports, and I have the unbelievable honor to coach them in football, and I love it. It's my favorite thing to do, and we're playing right now. And you know, the thing I watch, they have no idea they live in this incubator known as the [inaudible 00:42:23] laboratory, and I am looking at everything they do.

Tom: 42:28 And fear of failure is this looming reality with every kid. I have one young boy on my younger son's team who, this kid can throw a football. It's unbelievable, he just turned seven and he can throw a football forty yards [inaudible 00:42:46] I mean an accurate [inaudible 00:42:48]. But, he can't play quarterback, because he throws the ball, he'll ultimately throw an interception, and then he starts crying uncontrollably. So I wanna protect him from this, but I'm trying to help him grow.

Tom: 43:01 So what I started doing with him is on the first play, I don't care if we win or lose. Well, let me take that back. I do care if we win or lose, but I want these kids to develop, and ultimately I want them to grow. On the first play, I tell him "Throw an interception. I want you to throw an interception." And I did that the last game. And then he came in, and the rest of the game, he was good. It was unbelievable. I gave him permission to fail. And I don't know what that dynamic is that's happening there, other than he's releasing the tension of the fear of failure.

Tom: 43:37 But it's something that, when you can get away from that, greatness can happen. I look at, I'm trying to remember the pitcher's name from the San Francisco Giants a few years back. Big guy. Ugh, shoot. It was unbelievable. The guy had ice in his veins. He came in in relief and then ended up pitching in game seven, I think, five in the third inning or something. Oh darn, I can see him.

Tom: 44:07 Anyhow, I don't know how he did that. You know, pitching, to me, and I was never a pitcher. I look at that as one of the ultimate tests of handling pressure. There you are, it's just you, the batter, and in this case, game seven of the World Series, 100 million people or whatever it is watching on primetime TV. And here is this guy who is just nailing the corners every time, 95, 96, 98 miles an hour. How could he do that? And he had zero fear of failure. You know, going back to my whole dialogue earlier about performing under pressure, when I [inaudible 00:44:51] it down to the most primal foundational principle, it came down to perception.

Tom: 44:58 For me, before I go into a situation, I ask myself "Is this gonna be a challenge or a threat? How am I gonna look at this? What mindset am I gonna bring into this phone conversation? What mindset am I gonna bring into my next public speaking engagement? Am I gonna look at it as a threat or a challenge?" So I just go "C or T, challenge or threat, C or T?" And I say C every time. It's a challenge. I am capable of doing what I'm about to do, I'm excited to do it, I'm motivated to do it. And you know what? I'm gonna make some mistakes. I've already flubbed a couple words up on this interview today. That's okay. I'm still getting my point across and being somewhat articulate, and I hope I'm bringing value to your listeners.

Tom: 45:41 But I'm not threatened at all right now, nor should I be. And when you can embrace that, when you can get to that point, you can achieve and optimize your performance every time. And that's what I'm after, is getting and setting the conditions for optimization.

Bill: 45:58 Yeah, that's amazing. I love that challenge or threat. Originally how I found you was on a TED talk, talking about that at a high performance sports academy, and yeah, that was fantastic. I just have one final question for you Tom, one regarding culture. And I know the culture of the SEAL team community is really special and unique and different, and I know you're working with some sports teams.

Bill: 46:23 And I'm particularly interested, 'cause I know my audience is, on leading millennials. Leading, I hate that term, but leading youngsters in their 20s, basically. And when you have a high performance culture like a SEAL team community, and you're training for life and death situations, you have a culture. How do you transcend the, as a leader, leading youngsters in sports or in business, like I just wanna kinda leave it a little bit open ended for you to kinda take that, how would you handle them?

Tom: 47:07 Lemme just jump in real quick and let everyone know it was Madison Bumgarner who was the pitcher. I finally remembered it.

Bill: 47:16 With ice in his veins, right? Tom: 47:19 Ice, it was unbelievable. And I had the opportunity to meet him a year after he did that and talk to him a little bit, the guy's definitely a different human, a different species than most. But back to your question about millennials, and I am not an expert on millennials, and I've heard some experts speak. And it's very interesting. But one thing, and you know, one of my last assignments before I retired was I was in charge of SEAL training, I was the deputy commander.

Tom: 47:50 So on a daily basis I'd be interacting with these young men that were aspiring to become SEALs. And it's unbelievable, you know, they say this generation's this or that. These guys are great. These young guys, they're getting after it, as Jocko and I would say. They are motivated to do great things. The one thing I did notice, and it's gonna get back to that word I used earlier, relevance. They expect to have a certain level of relevance to an organization, to a team, at a much earlier point than you and I probably did. Like when I joined a team, I knew my place at the beginning was kinda to be quiet, learn, and grow with the team. At some point I would extend myself and start looking for a little bit more relevance.

Tom: 48:44 They wanna be the most important person on the team day one. And they, I personally think, and I don't mean this as a disparaging remark, they, I think, have a little bit of a delusion toward their capability and experience when they walk in the door. And you know what? I'll take that before I'll take the other side of that coin any day. They are like "Hey, I'm gonna get after it. I can do this, I can do that." The thing is they have nothing to back it up with. That's been my experience.

Tom: 49:18 So what I had to learn to do with these young men was to find relevance that fit into their level of experience, their level of capability, and work at it. And this goes back to my whole adage that leadership is a verb. I had to look at every member on my team and go "Where could I make that guy relevant? He's not good at this, he doesn't have the experience to do that, but darn, he is really good at this, so let's get him relevance." And the one thing I learned is, like in a bank account, if you have $100,000 in it, you pull out $1,000, you're down $1,000. But if you could quantify relevance in some way, if you had a bank account of relevance, that doesn't mean I lose relevance.

Tom: 50:07 Actually, the reality of it is, as a leader, when I give somebody on my team relevance, it makes me more relevant. I'm creating more relevance. And it's kind of a growing economy. And when I learned that, it was unbelievable what happened. When I started trying to make everybody relevant in their own, unique way. And it's painful. It's painful because it takes time, you have to listen, you have to pay attention, you have to do analysis, and you have to talk with other people. And you continually have to look for those answers.

Tom: 50:40 When you do that, it's unbelievable. Because just think about it. Do you wanna be relevant? To your audience? Everybody wants to be relevant. Who doesn't want to be relevant?

Bill: 50:53 I mean, I think your message on the culture and leading just in the past couple minutes is pretty massive, just for myself and for learner ... Because you're, that's the nth tier of a military, the best of the best of the best people, and you at the top of the food chain are adjusting your leadership style to account for small nuances that could have a big impact with the type of high performance young kids that are coming into the program.

Bill: 51:26 And it's interesting, 'cause you're right. It's different than it was 20, 30 years ago. But you're making the adjustments and changes, but you're not changing the whole culture of the organization, you're just making tunes and tweaks to account for different cultural variables, which is interesting. Tom: 51:43 Absolutely.

Bill: 51:44 Well this has been great. Tom, I wanna let people know where they can find you and reach out to you for any, if people wanna reach out to you and converse or engage with you regarding opportunities they might want you to be involved in, what would be a good way for people to reach out to you?

Tom: 52:06 Well the best way to start is I have a website.

Bill: 52:08 Okay.

Tom: 52:09 And my website is tom C-H-A, B as in Bravo, Y, tomchaby.com, and you can get in touch with me, you can send me an email, I respond to all of 'em. And I would love to hear from anybody interested to talk more. I talk to people every day, some people I end up working with, other people I develop just collaboration partnerships with and just growing that circle has been a lot of fun for me but it's also been very educational. Just the more exposure I get to different thought leaders and different experts from different elements and dynamics has been just really, really fun for me. And if you're interested to get int ouch with me, please do. I'd look forward to hearing from you.

Bill: 52:56 Well I'll definitely gonna put the show notes on our website, it's gonna be propagated out throughout our community, Tom. And this has been a blast and a pleasure, and I'm sure my community of listeners is going to really enjoy listening to our conversation today. And I wanna thank you for your service and thank you for your contribution both within the military and outside now, sharing your experiences with all of us.

Tom: 53:25 Well fantastic Bill. Thanks for the opportunity, and to everybody out there, have a great day.

Bill: 53:31 Bye-bye Tom, thank you.