

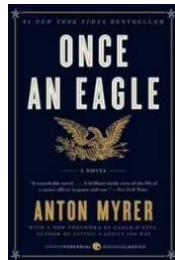
Passages on Leadership from *About Face* and *Once an Eagle*



A memoir from the most decorated U.S. soldier of the 20th century, with over 90 medals awarded, including eight purple hearts. From age fifteen to forty David Hackworth devoted himself to the US Army and fast became a living legend. From Korea to Berlin, from the Cuban missile crisis to Vietnam, Hackworth's story is that of an exemplary patriot, played out against the backdrop of the changing fortunes of America and the American military.

About Face is "required reading for anyone who wants to understand leadership under fire." --Admiral Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

"A book that changed the way I thought about war and leadership and life—in fact, it changed the way I thought about everything." Jocko Willink, Navy SEAL Team Leader



Required reading for West Point and Marine Corps cadets, *Once An Eagle* is the story of one special man, a soldier named Sam Damon, and his adversary over a lifetime, fellow officer Courtney Massengale. Damon is a professional who puts duty, honor, and the men he commands above self-interest. Massengale, however, brilliantly advances by making the right connections behind the lines and in Washington's corridors of power. Beginning in the French countryside during the Great War, the conflict between these adversaries solidifies in the isolated garrison life marking peacetime, intensifies in the deadly Pacific jungles of World War II, and reaches its treacherous conclusion in the last major battleground of the Cold War--Vietnam.

"Simply the best work of fiction on leadership in print." --General Martin E. Dempsey, 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Foundations of Leadership: Discipline and the Importance of Training

1. From *About Face* by David Hackworth

Excerpt (Page 38):

"The rationale was simple: mistakes on the training field will be mistakes on the battlefield, and mistakes on the battlefield lead to men's deaths. 'If you learn it right, you'll do it right the rest of your life,' Prazenka would growl as the endless repetition of one thing or another began to take its toll on his charges. 'If you learn it wrong, you'll do it wrong, and you'll spend the rest of your life trying to learn to do it right.'

They cut absolutely no slack as they worked overtime molding us into soldiers, and what we gained as a result: first, a respect and appreciation for details (the basic building blocks, which, if neglected, can foul up the works completely), and second, an incredible boost to our morale when, wonder of wonders, we got it right.

This attention to detail didn't just ensure we looked sharp but also meant that when the chips were down, we'd instinctively do things correctly the first time. Later, I learned an essential truth: once you've learned something wrong, it's damn near impossible to unlearn it. That's why training had to be relentless—getting it right in the beginning was the only way to ensure we'd get it right forever."

2. From *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer

Excerpt (Page 42):

"Uncle Bill had been solidly, mountainously right. He had been drilled until he staggered, he'd been kept at attention under a merciless sun and swarms of gnats, he had dug great square holes in the ground; he had done KP duty for a bunk that looked as far as he could see just like all the others, he had scrubbed mess tables and dug out latrines. Sadistic and horny-handed sergeants rode him, he did more manual labor in less time than he would have believed possible. He was woefully disconcerted. He kept his rifle spotless, he mastered the intricacies of close-order drill and the care of his personal equipment—and it all led to nothing. It was even as Uncle Bill had said: he was a rookie and was made to feel it."

Writing Prompts

1. Training and Leadership Foundations

Both Hackworth and Damon emphasize the importance (and frustrations) of rigorous early training. How do these passages connect the discipline of training to success and survival in battle? What do these lessons suggest about the qualities of effective leadership?

2. Lessons from Shared Hardships

Reflect on the shared hardships described in these excerpts. How do these challenges shape the relationships between soldiers and build a foundation for leadership? How does this concept resonate with your own experiences or expectations as a cadet?

3. The Cost of Getting it Wrong

Hackworth underscores the danger of learning things incorrectly, while Damon learns how repetitive discipline builds lasting habits. Compare their perspectives. How do these lessons apply beyond the military, and how might they influence your approach to learning and leading?

Camaraderie Among Troops and Shared Sense of Purpose

1. From *About Face* by David Hackworth

Excerpt (Page 111):

"And yet, right there lay the key to why I was so gung ho, and why I'd never quit. Sure, I was fighting for America, for all that was 'right' and 'true,' for the flag, the national anthem, and Mom's Apple Pie. But all that came second to the fact that the reason I fought was for my friends. My platoon. And as I walked on, I concluded that that was why most other soldiers fought, too. The incredible bonding that occurred through shared danger; the implicit trust in the phrase 'cover me'—these were the things that kept me going, kept me fighting here in Korea, and why I'd come back for more, for as long as my bottle held out.

And though I did like the “glory” inherent in my steadily growing reputation as a good warrior, the most important thing was that I knew with other troops respect came their *trust*: they knew I wouldn’t let them down. And to the best of my ability, I never would."

2. From *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer

Excerpt (Page 686):

"There, in that outpost, on that three-square-feet of ground, was where the real war was being fought, no matter who denied it; and how that private did tonight—whether he had the hardihood and the craft to resist exhaustion and debility and slumber and kill the weary, sick, resourceful enemy who sought his life—would decide who would win this war, and nothing else. His own son was dead, that boy out there on the outpost was his son, they all were. Death was not an individual matter. We liked to think it was, but it was not. The death of one man touched us all, stripped us all.

We were all one erring family, and nothing made us more conscious of this unalterable fact than loss. We were all one, tied together by the fear, the hope, the weight of responsibility. In those moments, you realized that war wasn't just about strategy or bravery—it was about the human connection, the shared burden of survival, and the unspoken promise to look after each other no matter what."

Writing Prompts

1. The Bonds of Shared Danger

Reflect on Hackworth's and Damon's insights about the camaraderie among soldiers. How does the shared danger they describe create trust and motivation? How do these bonds shape the role of a leader?

2. The Collective Experience of War

Compare the two passages' depictions of camaraderie. Hackworth focuses on the practical bonds among soldiers, while Damon reflects on the shared burden of survival. How do these perspectives complement each other in understanding the unity of troops?

3. The Role of Leadership in Fostering Camaraderie

Both Hackworth and Damon describe leaders who care for and connect with their men. How does leadership influence the camaraderie and shared purpose of a unit? Provide examples from the passages and your own experiences.

What Is Leadership?

1. From *About Face* by David Hackworth

Excerpt (Page 402):

"Johns was a leader who taught by example, so most of the points he made weren't exactly new to us. But to hear in a single speech this great man's basic philosophy of soldiering was like being let in on the secret ingredients of some magical formula. To wit:

Strive to do small things well. Be a doer and a self-starter—aggressiveness and initiative are two most admired qualities in a leader—but you must also put your feet up and think. Strive for self-improvement through constant self-evaluation. Never be satisfied. Ask of any project, How can it be done better?

Don't overinspect or oversupervise. Allow your leaders to make mistakes in training, so they can profit from the errors and not make them in combat. Keep the troops informed; telling them 'what, how, and why' builds their confidence. The harder the training, the more troops will brag.

Enthusiasm, fairness, and moral and physical courage—four of the most important aspects of leadership. Showmanship—a vital technique of leadership. The ability to speak and write well—two essential tools of leadership. There is a salient difference between profanity and obscenity; while a leader employs profanity (tempered with discretion), he never uses obscenities.

Have consideration for others. Yelling detracts from your dignity; take men aside to counsel them. Understand and use judgment; know when to stop fighting for something you believe is right. Discuss and argue your point of view until a decision is made, and then support the decision wholeheartedly. Stay ahead of your boss."

2. From *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer

Excerpt (page 399):

"Damon had taken over a company whose commanding officer, he'd been tersely informed, had been sent home on a medical survey—which he soon found out was a pleasant euphemism for acute alcoholism. The outfit was slack. The noncoms were good enough but they'd gone stale; they were merely coasting, running out the string. The topkick was a phlegmatic, morose man named Huber who was interested in nothing more than rounding out his fifth hitch and playing cribbage in the company office. The food was catastrophic.

Damon had changed all that in short order. He'd busted Huber and replaced him; heads rolled among the cooks until the food was up to what it should have been. He drilled the company hard, hiked them back into shape, worked on their quarters and their personal appearance. He overhauled the ball team and got it rolling again. He demanded a full, hard day, but he was generous with passes. The company got the word quickly enough; and when they found he was willing to listen to their troubles after retreat and would go to bat for them, they began to respond.

At the end of four months they were calling themselves Damon's Demons, were known throughout Luzon as the Hiking Fools, and were easily the smartest company in the regiment."

Writing Prompts

1. "Actions Speak Louder Than Words"

Hackworth and Damon both emphasize leading by example. Reflect on how their actions as leaders inspire change and motivate their troops. How does this align with your view of effective leadership?

2. "Transforming a Unit"

Damon took a struggling company and turned it into a cohesive, high-performing unit. Compare his approach to Hackworth's emphasis on discipline and communication. What lessons can be drawn about leadership in challenging situations?

3. "Building Morale Through Leadership"

Both leaders focus on morale as a critical component of leadership. Reflect on how Damon's and Hackworth's approaches to improving morale differ and how they achieve their goals.

Character in Leadership

From *About Face* by David Hackworth

Excerpt (page 269):

"The thing was, you had to look after your soldiers. It was true that a commanding officer's first priority was the mission, but a conflicting requirement was the welfare of the men. It was true that the whole purpose of the military establishment was to get a doughfoot eyeball-to-eyeball with the enemy, and it was equally true that the troops were the ones who paid the price, in blood, for an objective secured.

These facts made—and make—an infantry commanding officer a hanging judge. He has incredible power over the lives and deaths not only of a faceless enemy, but of his men. Sometimes that power causes a leader to become hardened: he stops seeing his troops as human beings. They become faceless assets to him; he becomes afraid to get close or to feel, instead constructing a concrete barrier in his head to keep out the guilt and the pain of lives lost at his behest.

In the process he forgets that though he may give the orders, it is the soldier who makes them happen—or doesn't. He forgets that if you want 100 percent from a trooper, you have to give him 200 percent as a commander. You will have to keep your boys well fed and well clothed whenever possible, and well trained *always*.

From *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer

Excerpt (page 677):

"That's the whole challenge of life—to act with honor and hope and generosity, no matter what you've drawn. You can't help when or what you were born, you may not be able to help how you die; but you can—and you should—try to pass the days between as a good man."

Writing Prompt

Both Hackworth in *About Face* and Damon in *Once an Eagle* argue that leadership is not just about achieving objectives but about building trust and respect through moral character. Hackworth emphasizes the balance between mission and caring for one's men, while Damon speaks to the daily effort of living and leading with integrity. Compare how each passage defines the relationship between leadership and character. How do these lessons apply to your own leadership journey?