Awards for

*Engage with Honor: Building a Culture of Courageous Accountability*

2017 Award Winner
11th Annual Indie Excellence Book Awards
(Winner – Leadership Category, Finalist – Cover Design Non-Fiction)

2017 Award Winner
Reader Views Reviewers Choice Award
(First Place – Business/Sales/Economics Category)

2017 Award Finalist
International Book Awards
(Finalist – Business: Management & Leadership Category)

2016 Award Finalist
Best Book Awards
(Business: Management & Leadership Category,
Best Cover Design: Non-Fiction)

Praise for

*Engage with Honor: Building a Culture of Courageous Accountability*

“...Ellis demonstrates that this difference comes from having the character and courage to do the right thing. A must read for all leaders.”

**Dr. J. Phillip London,**
*Executive Chairman and Chairman of the Board – CACI International Inc.*

“I believe our country is at one of the most crucial periods in our entire history. Lee’s book represents an important ‘instruction manual’ for righting the ship.”

**Bob Littell,**
*Chief NetWeaver – NetWeaving International & The Enrichment Co.*
“The latest book by Lee Ellis titled Engage With Honor tackles one of the most important challenges that we face in life and business—accountability. This book can change your life and your leadership at home and in the marketplace.”

Arlin Sorensen,
CEO and Founder of Heartland Companies

“Lee Ellis provides you with the most robust how-to framework and skills required for keeping yourself and others on track to perform at the highest level.”

Hugh Massie,
President and Founder – DNA Behavior International

“In his book Engage with Honor, Lee provides valuable lessons in leadership learned from the world’s toughest ‘leadership lab,’ The Hanoi Hilton. Another great read by my old friend.”

Gene Smith,
Former Vietnam POW; Past National President and Chairman of the Board, Air Force Association

“Once again, Lee has integrated his very personal life experiences as a Vietnam POW to provide very pertinent and valuable leadership lessons applicable for any leader!! The lessons shared served as not only a refresher but a graduate level course in leadership as well.”

Carol H. Burrell,
President and CEO, Northeast Georgia Health System

“In this book you will find stories that engage you, insights that transform you, and practical advice you can put in your pocket (or purse) for everyday living. Read it, and find new depth in your own levels of growth.”

Laurie Beth Jones,
Author of Jesus, CEO; The Path; and Jesus, Life Coach
“Lee Ellis has a powerful story, is an outstanding author, and drives home the message of courageous accountability in a compelling way. You will want to give this book to your leadership team to positively impact your organization!”

Dan Busby,
President – ECFA

“Engage with Honor is a winner all around! Lee Ellis has surpassed his last book, Leading with Honor, which I thoroughly treasured and quoted often in my own writings.”

Archie B. Carroll, PhD,
Professor of Management Emeritus – Terry College of Business, University of Georgia

“Lee artfully tackles the difficult and often misunderstood role of accountability in effective leadership. Courageous Accountability...a must in every leader’s tool kit.”

Lt. Gen. Doug Owens, USAF (Ret),
National Commander, Order of Daedalians

“Highly relevant, clear, and practical, Engage with Honor provides leaders with models that enable critical thinking and inspire intentional action. If you desire to lead from heart with courage and accountability, then this is the book to guide you!”

Tami Heim,
President & CEO of Christian Leadership Alliance

“I can’t think of a better person to write about engaging with honor than Lee Ellis. Every leader on every level needs to read this book to engage a culture where honor is lacking and needed more than ever before.”

Dick Bruso,
Founder of Heard Above The Noise
“[In Engage with Honor], you have taken a challenging time in your life [as a POW] and extracted the very best lessons from it that continue to build layers upon layers to offer greater perspective on our life’s full journey.”

Janine Sijan Rozina,
*Sister of Vietnam POW Lance Sijan (MOH) and Founder of Team Sijan*

“His Courageous Accountability Model holds true whether you raising a family, managing a 5-person working group or leading a Fortune 500 company. Engage with honor is precision engagement at its best.”

Brig. Gen. Guy Walsh, USAF (Ret),
*Former commander of the 451st Air Expeditionary Wing, Afghanistan*

“Engage with Honor is fascinating to read. The leadership lessons from his years as a POW are compelling, and it’s clear that the elements of his Courageous Accountability model—Character, Courage, and Commitment—are very real in his own life.”

Bob and Lyn Turknett,
*Founders, Turknett Leadership Group*

“Colonel Ellis’s latest book, Engage with Honor: Building a Culture of Courageous Accountability, is a useful book that offers practical—not just theoretical—advice on how to authentically link honor and accountability.”

Taylor Baldwin Kiland,
*Co-author of Lessons from the Hanoi Hilton: Six Characteristics of High-Performance Teams, and Open Doors: Vietnam POWs Thirty Years Later*
ENDORSEMENTS

“There are books that I have read and store on the shelf, and then there are books that I read and keep close so I can refer back time and time again...this is one of those books.”

**Dan Olson,**
*Vice President and General Manager, Armament Systems Division – Orbital ATK*

“His courageous accountability model is an excellent guide to learning our way through uncertainty and complexity. It is a must read for generations of leaders to come.”

**LTG James L. Terry,**
*Retired Commanding General, United States Army Central*

“I’m honored to endorse Lee’s book. He is an inspiration to us all. Lee relates his own experiences to prepare you to become a better leader.”

**Bruce N. Whitman,**
*Immediate Past Co-Chairman, Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation; Chairman, President & CEO, FlightSafety International*

“I believe anyone who reads this book and strives to live it’s very clear recommendations and explanations will experience runaway success in motivational, practical leadership.”

**Capt. Guy D. Gruters, USAF (Ret),**
*Vietnam POW 1967-1973*

“If there is anyone anywhere who combines both practice and scholarship on the subject equal to Lee, I am certainly not aware of it. All practitioners of the art can learn from this extraordinary man.”

**Gen. Charles G. Boyd, USAF (Ret),**
*Former Deputy Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command*  
*Vietnam POW 1966-1973*
“I am honored to know Lee Ellis and I am proud to endorse his latest literary accomplishment. I would encourage any aspiring leader to take his words to heart and live as Lee does, by a code of honor!”

Gen. Michael Hostage, III, USAF (Ret),  
Former commander Air Combat Command

“[Engage with Honor] is a powerful, poignant read that is an absolute must for today’s current and future leaders, both in military and civilian environments.”

CDR Mary Kelly, USN (Ret),  
Author of Why Leaders Fail and  
The 7 Prescriptions for Success

“Lee Ellis has written a must-read book full of important information for those of us who want to lead and live with character, commitment and honor. ...Read this book—and learn from a man who lives and practices its message.”

Kathy S. Schwaig PhD,  
Dean, Coles College of Business,  
Kennesaw State University

“Once again Lee Ellis has created an outstanding book on Leadership, Honor and Accountability. A must read for anyone serious about leading in our world today where honor and accountability are the keys to success!”

Gen. William R. Looney, III, USAF (Ret),  
Former Commander Air Education and Training Command

“Lee’s philosophy of respect for the individual and integrity (two of Swagelok’s core values) are on display for the reader. His experiences should serve as an inspiration to anyone who wants to take their organization to the next level of performance.”

Arthur F. Anton,  
Former Chairman, President and CEO,  
Swagelok Company
“[Engage with Honor] appropriately takes the focus from the leader to those being lead. This book is a must read if you want to lead your team to new levels of performance and create a place where people want to be accountable.”

Sam Silverstein, CSP,
Author: Non-Negotiable and No More Excuses,
Past President, National Speakers Association

“Engage with Honor inspires us to consider how accountability can be a strong thread in shaping corporate culture. Keep the passion Lee, for the ideas of honor, character, courage and commitment to shape the fabric of our culture.”

Terence Chatmon,
President and CEO, Victorious Family;
Former President, EQUIP

“Lee Ellis, with insights through his experiences and survival as a Vietnam POW, gives us a glide path to successful leadership. This is a book that leaders in all walks of life should have on their desk.”

Larry E. Favreau, CPA, CLU, FLMI,
Retired CEO, Southern Farm Bureau
Life Insurance Co.

“Lee Ellis has done it again! His focus on honor and accountability are spot-on...His real life examples provide tremendous lessons in human nature and the importance of character, courage, and commitment in the daily lives of leaders.”

RADM Tilghman D. Payne, USN (Ret)

“I have been searching for a clear way to link servant leadership and accountability. Lee provides a clear path with The Courageous Accountability Model...Thank you Lee for your lessons, life experience, and service.”

Pat Falotico, CEO,
Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership
“Lee Ellis has done it again with his latest work, *Engage with Honor*. At a time when honor and accountability seemed to be sorely lacking in our country, he has leveraged his military experience and business insights in this concise, clear work.”

**COL Leon E Moores, MD, Army,**  
*Inova Healthcare System*

“Lee builds on his success in *Leading with Honor* to give us a framework not only for professional success but lessons for success in life. The impact of applying Lee’s methods is punctuated with Lee’s inspiring stories of how his experiences in captivity can give us all the courage to *Engage with Honor*.”

**Michael Bowling,**  
*President DIRECTV Latin America, Vrio Corp., AT&T Latin America*

“*Engage With Honor* is the perfect next step tool to help bring the principles [in *Leading with Honor*] into effective execution. Its focus on courageous accountability will undoubtedly help me accelerate the process of creating the culture and underlying behaviors that are critical to achieving our mission.”

**Jeff Lyash,**  
*President and CEO at Tennessee Valley Authority*
ENGAGE WITH HONOR

BUILDING A CULTURE OF COURAGEOUS ACCOUNTABILITY

LEE ELLIS
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I CAN’T THINK OF MANY individuals who can write more authentically about honor as it relates to leadership and engagement than Lee Ellis. As an American POW he survived 1,955 days of captivity in North Vietnam, where he saw fellow POW leaders—including Sen. John McCain—courageously uphold their honor and integrity in the toughest conditions.

I’ve had the pleasure of working with Lee in his civilian life as a leadership consultant and have admired the way he uses those experiences to help executives develop their own leadership models. He and I share a passion for doing business the honorable way and for developing leaders who will embody the character and the values that will help lead their organizations with the highest integrity.

Lee shared the foundation of his leadership philosophy in his first book, Leading with Honor. In this new book Lee expands the concept of honor in leadership and introduces the model to build a culture of Courageous Accountability, drawing on some of his POW experiences as examples.
In today’s fast-changing environment, marked by technological changes happening at warp speed, global competition and fluid business models, leaders are challenged with making difficult choices, often in uncharted territory. Leaders at all levels of experience will benefit from Lee’s leadership compass and Courageous Accountability Model as they navigate their organizations and teams on the right path to success.

Ralph de la Vega,
Retired Vice Chairman of AT&T Inc. and CEO of AT&T Business Solutions and AT&T International,
Author of Obstacles Welcome: Turn Adversity to Advantage in Business and Life
HAVE YOU THOUGHT about the word honor and reflected on what it means? How can one word be so powerful and yet so abstract? It’s both a noun and a verb. Think about it. We give VIPs a place of honor to sit, and then they might stand to speak and say, “It’s an honor to have the opportunity to address you.” We like to honor our veterans, and honorable people work hard to honor their commitments.

Though there are many nuances of this word, they all seem to connote something elevated, special, and right. It brings to mind truth, fidelity, and many aspects of what we hold high—some essence that we all can aspire to attain and give. In addition for our purposes here, we are looking at honor as an essential ingredient of trust and the binding agent in any long-lasting recipe for success. Fortunately, it has been a consistent thread throughout my entire life.

From the earliest days of my childhood, the charge to honor God, parents and our community set the standard for the way we were expected to live. Honor was firmly imbedded
in the Alma Mater of my high school and college and modeled throughout my four years of military training in Air Force ROTC. We wanted to honor our country, our flag, those appointed over us, and the uniform we wore.

Three days after graduating from the University of Georgia, I was commissioned and entered flight school. Less than two years later I began flying combat missions in Southeast Asia, mainly over North Vietnam. On my 53rd mission I was shot down and captured. During the next five and a half years as a POW, there were many days when my commitment to honor my country and my fellowmen in the camps was the primary motivator that enabled me to live up to the Military Code of Conduct and fulfill our mission, vision, and values, all summarized in three words—Return with Honor.

After the war I returned to flying and had a wonderful military career. It was an honor to serve. For the last eighteen years I’ve been a leadership consultant, coach, author, and speaker. What an honor and a joy it has been to help leaders gain freedom to lead higher.

In the last four years I’ve turned much of my focus to the idea of honor. This word that has been a gentle and constant refrain from the beginning has become the core of my message. The previous book was to help people lead with honor; here the intent is to go deeper and to share ideas on how to engage with honor by focusing on its guardian companion—accountability. Let’s take a quick overview of the book.
INTRODUCTION

THE STRUGGLE FOR HONOR

It seems that citizens of the entire civilized world are crying out, “Where is the honor?” Why are so many unwilling to keep their commitments? Why do we see so many shamelessly put their own self-interests above their constituents, their customers, their organizations, their teammates? Where are those who are willing to make sacrifices to keep their word and honor their commitments?

I am reminded of the dramatic line from the movie Apollo 13 that so many of that era recall and still use to indicate something is not right—“Houston, we have problem.” But it isn’t just a spaceship orbiting around the earth; it’s our entire earth orbiting around the sun—we have a planetary problem with honor.

It should be no great surprise that we are in this predicament. We human beings have struggled with this from the beginning of time—it’s in our DNA. We have free will and with that comes the opportunity to choose to be not only self-focused enough to survive, but also to be selfish to the point of violating others’ trust and our commitments in order to get what we want.

When wisdom, humility, and good judgment prevail, we usually make good choices and live honorably. But even with a commitment to ethical and moral values and strong self-discipline, we can still get off track in our integrity and honor—no one is perfect.

ACCOUNTABILITY – THE GUARDIAN COMPANION OF HONOR

The reality is that accountability and consequences are part of the natural laws of nature. The bad choice of leaping off a tall building challenges the law of gravity and gravity has no friends or enemies; it treats everyone the same. Consider
the longstanding nature of the following expressions that likely exist in every culture in the world. Generally, they are pointing out the built-in tendency for natural accountability.

- You reap what you sow.
- If you play with fire you get burned.
- Time will tell.
- What goes around comes around.
- Sooner or later the other shoe will fall.

There does seem to be a natural law here that accountability eventually comes. If you have sown good deeds and words, the consequences will be rewarding, while sowing in a negative or unhealthy manner will result in problems. Wise people welcome the guardrails that accountability provides to keep them on track and avoid going over the cliff.

It seems reasonable and helpful to refer to accountability as the guardian companion of honor. This guardrail won’t solve all the problems. Reckless choices and behaviors can still cause career and life “derailments,” but it seems like a good place to start.

And speaking of starting, the best place to begin this journey of honor and accountability is with ourselves. Of course we’d like to get everyone else to “straighten up and act right,” but for the most part, we have to begin with ourselves and the influence we have over others in our day-to-day workplace and home.

The ultimate goal of this book is to help you engage with honor. The immediate objective is to provide some specific steps that you can use to become more effective in every aspect of honor and accountability. The context is primarily focused
on work situations, but the ideas and skills will apply to any setting—even at home. In fact, that’s a good place to practice many of the skills and changes needed for our personal and leadership development.

**ENGAGE WITH THE COURAGEOUS ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL™**

If you think this book is going to tell you how to beat up on all those people who don’t come through, you’ll be disappointed. Confronting those who don’t keep their commitments is covered—but those situations are going to be minimized. Your time is much better spent on helping people be successful. In fact, as you read through the chapters (and the accountability books referenced in the endnotes) you’ll see that most leadership experts and authors believe that 90 percent or more of us want to be successful—and can be—with good leadership. Hence, the focus is on helping you grow as a leader so you can facilitate the success of your followers. If you adopt a positive mindset about accountability and follow this model, you are going to be spending much more time celebrating than confronting.

- **Section 1** – “The Struggle for Honor” (Chapters 1-3) makes the case for living and leading with honor and employing courageous accountability to help in that effort.

- **Section 2** – “The Courageous Accountability Model” (Chapters 4-10) begins with the core of the model: Character, Courage, and Commitment. It all starts with the leader’s accountability to those three C’s—linked with effective Communications.
The model then progresses logically through the steps of Clarify, Connect, Collaborate and Closeout (Celebrate or Confront). We’ve tried to make this a very “how to” oriented book. We’ve also included several other models that we use to help leaders and teams grow to a higher level of performance. Following the format of Leading with Honor, each chapter opens with a story from the POW camps and concludes with “Mission Prep” coaching questions and a Foot Stomper that summarizes the highlights of the chapter.

There are several recurring themes throughout, and the strongest one is the idea that it takes a great deal of courage to lead and engage with honor. It’s a daily struggle. I invite you to join me in this battle as we engage with honor—not only for ourselves, but for the next generation that will soon replace us.

Development of leaders is a key theme. Boomers are retiring quickly, Gen Xers are in short supply, and Millennials are already taking our place. They have grown up in a different world from most of us. Our legacy is to pass the torch of honor and accountability. If we set the example and engage them courageously, we can do it.

Thank you for taking this challenge. I look forward to hearing from you as you engage with honor and build a culture of courageous accountability.

ENDNOTES

SECTION ONE:

The Struggle for Honor
THERE IS A PART OF OUR NATURE that wants life to be easy. There is nothing wrong with that—except most of the time it’s just not that way. Success usually comes at a price. In The Return of the King there is a great line, “There is no glory without suffering.” In the movie Unbroken as Louis Zamperini was departing to go to Berlin to run in the 1936 Olympics, his older brother Pete looked him in the eye and said, “Louis, a moment of pain is worth a lifetime of glory.”

To be the person you want to be, you must commit to a struggle. Honor cannot be inherited or assumed; it must be fought for on a daily basis. I learned that early in life while serving and surviving in the crucible of Vietnam POW camps.

The letter below is an unedited excerpt from a three-page letter I wrote to my parents on March 12, 1973, two days before our release. My purpose was to help them understand a son they had not seen in almost six years. After spending 1,955 days there in captivity and knowing I would soon be free, my main goal was to continue a struggle—the one that I had already begun—to engage with honor.

12 March 1973

Dear Family,

I am hopeful that the next three days will bring silver wings to bear me back to the land of milk and honey, to freedom and a wonderful reunion with you. For you, I know these many years have been very difficult and I regret that you have had to suffer so much. We have a saying here, “It’s harder on them than on us,” because for you there has been uncertainty and many ups and downs. We have had faith and confidence in your welfare, but for you our situation was mostly unknown.
For me, the years have passed rather rapidly and yet it seems that the first 23 years of my life were a dream, or perhaps the experiences of a person whom I once knew. This has become a way of life and the world in which you have lived was a faraway thing. Yet at no time have I ever given up my faith in God, my family, my country and those things for which our heritage has always stood.

My mental health has fared quite well also, I think. Of course my only measure is my memory and a comparison with those in this closed society. I have matured and I think my judgment is better. I have learned more about responsibility and I think you will find me more industrious. I have gained self-confidence and a deep sense of pride. By that I mean that if I do a job I want to do the best job possible, for to do less would bring dishonor upon myself, and those who believe in me would be disappointed. I feel that I have learned a great deal about human nature from myself and those with whom I have lived so intimately these past years. I have learned patience and understanding and to try to do those things which should be done when the opportunity arises.

To imply that I've perfected these virtues would be far from the truth for I have not, nor shall I ever. But here lies the essence of my philosophy. To constantly work to improve in these areas and to always be correcting back to the course which I have charted for my life. I believe that happiness in life comes from achievement; not just materialistic achievement, but more specifically in the small victories gained from day-to-day in man's struggle to be the type of person that he thinks he should be.
This achievement not only brings honor to the man and his family, but more important it glorifies God. The last line of the poem which my roommate has just written sums up these ideas quite well. “More majestic monuments than men who live their faith cannot be found.”

I hope that I have not sounded too egotistical nor philosophized too much, but I wanted to paint a picture of myself. Granted, it has been from my own eyes, so you could know what to expect...

All my love,

Lee

As we move into the three chapters of Section 1, we’ll look at the costs of dis-honor, the battle for honor, and the role of accountability in helping us preserve honor and achieve true success. I trust that you will see the need for honor, the way forward, and the rewards of engaging with honor and its guardian companion, courageous accountability.

ENDNOTES

1 http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/unbroken/moment-of-pain
Critical Failures in Honor

“To know what is right and not do it is the worst cowardice.”

~ Confucius

The F-4 Phantom was powerful, supersonic and highly reliable. But when ours was hit over enemy territory, it folded like a wounded duck on opening day. Fortunately, the ejection system worked perfectly. Unfortunately, it launched me from the protected womb of the cockpit into my worst personal and professional nightmare—a nylon letdown into the hands of the gunners below. We were some sixty miles into enemy territory—there was no way to evade. I was captured immediately, as was my partner whom I would not see again for ten days.

Hands tied, blindfolded and with a rope around my neck, I was pulled along like a reluctant hound, as we wound our way through bamboo hamlets toward the nearest “truck park” on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Externally I had remained calm, the result of my training and default discipline. But as the shock wore off and the reality of my situation sank in, I fought an internal battle with fear. On one hand, their militia displayed a degree of order and control, which calmed me. On the other
hand, I was an American pilot taken prisoner in an area we had been bombing for more than two years.

Several times when the locals discovered I was passing through, they came after me with a vengeance. I survived only because of the honorable leadership of the Vietnamese sergeant in charge of my detail. He did his duty, protecting me and making sure I was delivered safely to the collection prison farther north, near the provincial town of Vinh.

As we got closer to Hanoi, the anxiety I felt was likely similar to what soldiers have felt throughout the ages as they closed into battle. I had fears, but I would lean in and do my best. My new battle would be to live up to my responsibilities as outlined in the Code of Conduct\(^2\) for prisoners of war. I knew I would be held accountable by others, but first and most importantly, I was accountable to myself. I did not want to fail in keeping my commitments—someday I wanted to return with honor.

On the last leg of this agonizing journey north, I joined up with my aircraft commander and fellow pilot, Capt. Ken Fisher, as well as two other POWs. We were bound and then tied to the side rails of a military truck. As we hit partially repaired bomb craters and mud holes, we repeatedly bounced high in the air and then slammed down on the truck floor for 8-10 hours each night. One of the two new guys was Lt. Col. Minter,\(^3\) who would be our senior officer—at least for a short while.

The four of us who had made that journey north together ended up in a small six-and-a-half-foot by seven-foot cell at Hỏa Lò (the infamous Hanoi Hilton). It soon became clear that our senior ranking officer (SRO) did not share the same values and perspectives on our country’s role in the war. Though a gung-ho leader prior to his shoot-down, he now freely provided military-related information to the enemy and defended their
positions on the war. It was both angering and agonizing to see my leader failing in his duties.

Fortunately, I was not the only one deeply troubled by our senior officer’s behavior. While Minter was away at a “quiz” one day, Capt. Fisher, our second-ranking officer, shared his concerns about Minter’s actions. He asked Lt. Warner (our other cellmate) and me if we would support him if he removed our senior ranking officer (SRO) from command and took over our cell. That was a huge step. In essence we would mutiny, and we had no idea how it would play out. But clearly something needed to be done, so we agreed that it would be the best course of action under the circumstances; we would give Capt. Fisher our full allegiance.

The tension in our cell escalated when Minter returned and Fisher confronted him. Minter seemed a little surprised, but did not become overly hostile, explaining that because this was
not a declared war, the Code of Conduct did not apply, and basically, it was every man for himself. Even as a fresh twenty-four-year-old lieutenant, I knew better and could not have imagined anyone responding this way. He was rationalizing to the point of being irrational. Sure, our situation had changed by the nature of our capture, but as military members, our responsibilities and accountability were even more crucial now than before.

Minter’s response was beyond disappointing. Listening to him defend his abandonment of duty, I saw firsthand how a leader’s character could crumble when faced with a difficult choice to do the right thing to fulfill his duty—especially when the consequences might be painful. It appeared that Minter decided his self-interest mattered more than his professional commitments. Or, to put it another way, he was willing to abandon his honor to better his situation in the moment.

In contrast, Captain Fisher turned out to be the exact opposite kind of leader. He endured torture and suffering to do his duty and remain faithful to our cause. As my SRO for nearly three years, he modeled honor and courage—inspiring me to grow stronger and helping me to become the person I am today.

“In the concentration camps, for example, in this living laboratory and on this testing ground, we watched and witnessed some of our comrades behave like swine while others behaved like saints. Man has both potentialities within himself; which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions.”

**Viktor E. Frankl,**
Psychiatrist, WWII Holocaust Survivor, and Author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*
DIS-HONORABLE* BEHAVIOR RUNS DEEP IN OUR DNA

Neglecting one’s duty and pursuing selfish choices is part of the human condition; it’s been that way since the beginning of time. Consider the example of David, the shepherd boy who slew the giant Goliath and later became king. You probably know the story of this revered leader and historical figure, but it’s worth reviewing as we engage the subject of honor and accountability.

From his early youth David was known for his courage and his commitment to honor God. As a young shepherd he killed bears with his bare hands. As an adult, he was the most famous and celebrated warrior in the history of Israel. When Saul died in battle, David became a beloved and successful king.

And then one spring when kings normally go off to war, he stayed home. That’s when his downfall began—on a warm day when he looked down from his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing. She happened to be the wife of one of his soldiers. David sent for her and had his way. When she became pregnant, David hatched a simple scheme to conceal his problem and protect Bathsheba from scandal—he would bring Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, back from the war for a few days of R&R with his wife.

But Uriah—being a man of great loyalty to his fellow soldiers—refused to go home to Bathsheba. Instead, he slept at the palace with the servants. David’s cover-up ploy was foiled, so his deception intensified. He sent Uriah back to the battle with orders to Joab, his general, to make sure that Uriah was at the front of the attack. Then he was to pull back and let him be killed. It worked. Then David brought Bathsheba to the palace as his wife.

* We have intentionally shown the word dishonor as “dis-honor” to emphasize the prefix associated with honor in this instance (the “Dis” prefix meaning “apart,” “asunder,” “away,” “utterly,” or having a privative, negative, or reversing force).
Later, the prophet Nathan confronted David in an amazing exchange that brought repentance. David was forgiven, but the consequences of his actions were disastrous. The child died and David’s family was plagued with dysfunction—including incest, rape, murder, rebellion, and the death of his son, Absalom. David lost the trust and confidence of his people, and his life and leadership were never the same.

David had been “a man after God’s own heart,” yet he had acted as though he could take what he wanted without consequences. When he feared his deeds would be exposed, he used his power to cover up, protect his image, and avoid the negative consequences. But accountability eventually came.

Isn’t it amazing how this story parallels so much of what we see today? It’s common to hear about a leader who commits a crime—or some ethical violation—and then weaves an intricate cover-up. And when that begins to unravel, we hear outright denials, and then the blame game escalates—along with more excuses, justifications, and rationalizations. Typically, the whistle-blowers are demonized. And sometimes the guilty try to destroy the reputation of their accusers, or use their power to bury them figuratively—and sometimes literally. These are the high profile ones (like David) we hear so much about, but we all carry this same mutated gene that drives our egos to try to take whatever we want, without really considering what’s ultimately at stake. When honor fails, we all lose; when honor fails and there is a lack of accountability, the loss undermines the culture and the structure of the organization.

FAILURES IN INDUSTRY

In recent years, key players in the auto industry have stumbled, failing to do the honorable thing. At least three auto-
makers have dominated the news by their persistent denial of alleged problems in some of their vehicles.

In these cases, they disavowed any culpability for years until they were confronted with evidence by state and federal authorities. Only then did they finally come clean—at least the leaders did—but the aftermath affected millions of their shareholders, employees, and customers.

FAILURES IN GOVERNMENT

Our citizens are dismayed by the performance of our government and its agencies. Politics aside, let’s look at the evidence. Only 17 percent of the country has a favorable impression of Congress, yet no one seems to be able to hold them accountable. Regardless of which party is in power, the national debt grows at an ever-increasing rate to the point that the curve looks like a hockey stick.

The EPA has been under fire for their inability to deal with dis-honorable behavior. In one case it was a top-level employee accused of viewing porn several hours a day while at work. Even though investigators found 7,000 pornographic files on his computer and even caught him watching porn, he remained on the payroll. In another situation, leaders involved in ongoing sexual harassment—for more than ten years—were allowed to retire with full pensions. They were not held accountable.

The most persistent failure from a government agency (at least according to the news) seems to be the VA (Veterans Administration). Over the past several years, repeatedly there has been a new horror story of mismanagement, deception, duplicity and most troubling of all—a lack of accountability.

There are similar stories from the alphabet soup of agen-
cies that spend our hard-earned money. Consider the following examples:

- GSA (General Services Administration) indulged in Las Vegas at our expense.
- IRS has been under fire for unethical practices.\(^8\)
- GAO (Government Accounting Office) has investigated CMS (Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services), which is a part of the Dept. of HHS (Health and Human Services). They’ve found significant problems with oversight of monies provided by CMS to the states for the implementation of state health care exchanges. Basically, millions of dollars are not accounted for by the state or the federal government.\(^9\) Did it just disappear? No one seems to know. Where is the honor? Where is the accountability?
- The DOE (Department of Energy) blew $500 million on Solyndra, a company on the verge of going broke—as well as millions more in other “green” energy companies that went under. The \textit{Washington Post} did extensive research and reporting on the “Solyndra Scandal” and concluded that government documents showed that “Obama’s green-technology program was infused with politics at every level.”\(^10\)

The question that seems to have normal working people scratching their heads is, “Can anybody in the government be fired for ethical and performance failures?” Actually, there’s been a sick joke going around for quite a while now—“A civil service employee is much more likely to die of a heart attack at work than to be fired.” Sad, but probably true. Where is the accountability? Where is the honor?
As you would expect, the DOD (Department of Defense) seems to have done a better job of firing people for ethical violations than the other departments. Still, it is concerning that a spate of dis-honorable and illegal behaviors by generals and admirals is undermining the “good order and discipline” of the armed services. For example: an admiral fired for gambling with fake poker chips, generals and admirals disciplined for sexual harassment, assault, alcohol abuse, and improper use of government assets for personal benefit. And then there is General Petraeus. One can only conclude that success and power skewed his ethical compass, and the honor of one of our true heroes was shattered. What happened to his honor code?

FAILURES IN FINANCIAL SERVICES
Enron was a fast-rising flash in the pan. Arthur Andersen was old, established, and respected. Together, they were tossed into the pile of fallen icons—gone forevermore, because they lost sight of honor. Then in 2008 we learned that many banks and their Wall Street hucksters were selling bundles of loans that looked good on the outside, but on the inside they were rank with risk. The Ponzi scheme worked for a while, but eventually someone was left holding the bag—the American taxpayer. Do you recall TARP? You should. It cost you $475 Billion—that’s with a B.

FAILURES IN EDUCATION
You would think that educators—those responsible for developing our youth—would be above these self-centered, take-care-of-myself behaviors. But not so. The former Chicago Public Schools chief pled guilty to steering “more than $23 million in no-bid contracts from the school system to her previous
employers in exchange for kickbacks that would have made her millions of dollars.”

In the Atlanta public schools, thirty-five educators and administrators were convicted of racketeering when they conspired to change students’ answers on standardized tests in order for the students to get higher scores. The goal was to protect the educators from the consequences of not meeting standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act. The kids were left even further behind as the teachers scrambled to the trough to feed their own needs. Where was the honor? Eventually, there was accountability and the consequences came too.

At a small local high school in North Georgia, thirty-five students were accused of cheating in their online AP US History course—after they were caught sharing answers through their Google accounts. The school superintendent said, “Most students confessed to cheating and know what they did was wrong.” Don’t you wonder why they did something they knew was wrong? I wonder to what degree they might have been affected by the general loss of honor in our society, and how that might have been expedited by dis-honorable behaviors by high profile leaders and famous performers who seem to get away with a lot—with a wink and a nod.

FAILURES IN HONOR
Honor suffers from Main Street to Pennsylvania Avenue. The story above about top high school students cheating reminds us that honor issues are not just revealed in folks who are “out there.” Character and ethical failures are in our neighborhoods, in our homes, and even in us—if we fail to be “on guard.” Reflect with me.

An Illinois cop embezzled funds from youth organizations
to pay off his mortgage and to pay for adult websites. Rather than face the music, he committed suicide—making it look like he was a murder victim. In my immediate region, I’m aware of an HR manager in a Christian ministry who embezzled money from the funds set aside for medical payments. Two nearby Chamber of Commerce managers—as well as bookkeepers and employees in several other local county offices—have gone to jail for embezzlement. In every case these were solid citizens from good families.

Last year I was in San Antonio to speak for a client’s event. When I checked into the hotel, the headlines of the local paper proclaimed: “Lawyer pleads guilty to bribing state court judge.”[^15] That was an eye opener, but it didn’t stop there. In the first section of the paper I counted stories of twelve different ethical violations. While writing this chapter, the campus pastor at a large local church resigned, confessing years of adultery, leaving a disappointed congregation and more importantly a shattered life for his wife and three children.

In David’s time they wanted kings. Today in our country, we have presidents, governors and mayors—but not much else has changed. If we assume that our top public servants’ track record of honor is replicated in the culture, we can estimate the magnitude of the problem. In my lifetime I’ve seen President Nixon resign in the face of impeachment for Watergate and its cover-up. President Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives for perjury and obstruction of justice.[^16] There have been apparent ethical scandals in several of the other administrations from both political parties.

Does it mean anything that one state has three governors that have gone to prison? The long list of mayors of large cities that have been locked up for dis-honorable service is telling
about the human condition.\textsuperscript{17} (Take a look at the link in this endnote.)

We see how easy it is not only for regular people like our next door neighbors—but also the nation’s highest, most powerful leaders—to slide into arrogant, selfish assumptions, thinking they are above the law and choosing to do what is right in their own eyes. The lesson is clear. We are all cut from the same cloth. Without clear standards and intentional accountability, we can lose our true north and thus, our honor. Without a consistent commitment to character, our sense of duty, responsibility, accountability, and honor fades away.

\begin{quote}
“Without honor a society can slip into chaos and even tyranny.”
\end{quote}

\textbf{Lee Ellis}

We must take a stand for honor. As the POWs took a stand to return with honor, we must each take a stand to engage with honor—both within ourselves and with our teams. In the next chapter, we'll look at what that will require. But before we go further, take time now to reflect on your perspectives regarding honor, using the Mission Prep and Foot Stomper features on the next page.
MISSION PREP

1. Do you agree that we are all capable of dis-honorable behavior?
2. Have you ever done something dis-honorable? How did it turn out? What would you do differently now?
3. What do you think causes good people to do dis-honorable deeds?
4. How do you personally guard against dis-honorable behavior?
5. How can you influence our younger generations to live and lead with honor?

Watch Lee’s Coaching Clip on this chapter.
Go to EngageWithHonor.com

FOOT STOMPER

Honor is not automatic—it cannot be assumed. The strongest and most courageous leaders in history have fallen short. Everyday people like you and me are lying, stealing, cheating, and embezzling. You and I can win this battle if we truly believe that honor matters—and we are diligent to hold ourselves accountable. Our example will influence others—leadership always makes a difference.
ENAGAGE WITH HONOR

ENDNOTES

1  See a photo of the Phantom at Appendix A.
3  Not his real name.
4  http://veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1380
5  On the upside, Capt. Fisher was our new senior ranking officer (SRO) and over the next two plus years, his wise and courageous leadership inspired me and others to even higher levels of commitment and resistance. Like the other great leaders in that crucible, he went first into the torture and deprivation, courageously setting the example for others. You can read more in my previous book Leading with Honor: Leadership Lessons from the Hanoi Hilton.
10 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/specialreports/solyndra-scandal/
12 http://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/troubled-asset-relief-program-tarp.asp
14 Megan Studdard and Mat Payne, "Rabun County High School: Students knew they were wrong." May 7, 2015, ©the claytontribune.com.
17  In flight training and many military training programs, the instructors will tell the students that “If I stomp my foot on a topic, you had better know it because it’s very important and likely to be on the exam.” Hence, the term Foot Stomper is widely used to underscore important points, and that’s the way we’ll use the term to underscore the key points of each chapter.
TWO:

Battling for Honor and Accountability

“I have had more trouble with myself than with any other man I have ever met.”
~ Dwight Lyman Moody

WHEN WE MOVED AWAY from our deposed SRO, Lt. Col. Minter, he continued his wayward path and expanded his negative influence. In a clever move, our captors put him with another senior officer who had similar views. Soon a third insecure senior joined them and came under the spell of the two ringleaders. A year or so later, the V added several recently captured junior officers to this group. The new guys didn’t know much about the camp situation—their cell was all they knew, so for a while they were heavily influenced by the three senior reprobates.

Fortunately, the camp situation changed two years later when the V responded to a Special Operations raid on the Son Tay camp, where 53 of us had lived for two years (but vacated four months prior to the raid). Fearing another raid, the V quickly moved almost all POWs in North Vietnam back to the heart of the capital to Hòa Lò prison (the Hanoi Hilton) where
we occupied a section formerly inhabited by Vietnamese prisoners. To our amazement and delight, there were some 330 POWs in one location. With excellent, covert communications we came together in a way never before experienced in the camps. Our leaders named our new digs “Camp Unity.” And they designated our war-weary but still ornery group as a formal military unit, the 4th Allied POW Wing.

As soon as we were settled in and had identified who was in camp, the senior staff sent a message to the reprobate leaders and their followers, stating that they must “repent” and follow the Code of Conduct. If they chose to make that commitment, they would be forgiven and accepted back into our POW organization and community. If not, they would face serious consequences—alienation from the group and court martial proceedings after the war. Within a few weeks, all but two (Minter and one other senior officer from the original three) pledged their allegiance, agreeing to follow the rules. Their attitudes and behaviors fell in line, and they remained in good standing with our team. They corrected back on course and came home with honor. Unfortunately, the other two remained outcasts—barred from command authority and denied access to sensitive camp information, with formal consequences to come after repatriation. They were among the very few who didn’t return with honor.

Considering the suffering and sacrifices our senior leaders had endured in their efforts to live by the code and fulfill their duties, this positive approach of offering a fresh start seemed almost counterintuitive. In fact, some in our group strongly disagreed with this grace policy, believing it to be too lenient. But our leaders stuck to their decision. Their wisdom in showing both strength and compassion set an example for the rest of us,
one that continues to inform my understanding of honor and accountability.

A CULTURE OF HONOR
Over the years since our return, I’ve had many people say, “I couldn’t have done what you guys did.” Others ask, “How did you guys do it? How were you able to resist the enemy, even when you knew they had the power to make you submit?” Like battling cancer and other unique life challenges, our ordeal is hard to explain to the person who hasn’t walked through the experience. Let me share my perspective.

In retrospect, most of the POWs grew up in the ’30s, ’40s, and ’50s, so we were part of the “traditional” generation. Expectations for work and responsibility were taught and accountability was very important. Children were generally taught to honor God and their parents and to respect their elders, especially their teachers. One could argue that in that era honor played a more important role than in more recent generations.

Moreover, those of us who entered in military service experienced a strong and consistent message about responsibility and personal accountability that began in the earliest days of basic training. Such indoctrination was a key part of our culture—what the military calls “good order and discipline”—and clearly it gave us a common standard of expectations for ourselves and others. This “no excuse, sir” attitude toward responsibility and accountability equipped both the individual and the organization with the mindset and backbone to stand strong in the face of temptation and adversity.

With this foundation, even when thrown in the crucible of a POW camp, leaders and followers alike knew what was expected—to choose honor and do your duty to the best of your
ability. For everyone (and especially our leaders) that meant enduring the pain and horrors of torture and isolation in order to fulfill their commitments. As they clearly demonstrated, the honorable way often means making hard choices that require sacrifice, even suffering in the moment. As a follower, hard choices were much easier when you saw your leaders setting the example.

For me personally, the example of my parents was also important. Life was hard, but they leaned into the pain to do the right thing. Likewise the responsibilities of growing up on a farm in the '50s, and the grind of five years of football practice played a key role in my makeup. But beyond those early influences, it was the military training and the example of my POW leaders and teammates that motivated me to choose honor. I wanted to live up to their standards and expectations and match their level of commitment.

In the context of living honorably, there was another quality that was essential—accountability. The guardian companion of honor was the idea of personal accountability—at home and at school. And then later, the importance of accountability was reinforced in my military life. Those in authority were preparing me for the future by making sure that I understood that I was responsible for my actions. And all along the way, it was made very clear that there would definitely be consequences affecting me (and others) if I didn't come through. That critical preparation paid off when facing temptations and difficult times.

The fears about POW camps that people imagine were definitely there. Just hearing the jailer’s keys rattling at odd hours would cause my stomach to swirl and sink. But I was inspired and supported by a culture of honorable leadership and personal accountability. It was the courageous examples of
senior leaders like Fisher, Risner, Denton, Stockdale, Crayton, Day and so many more, that inspired me. Looking back, I can’t imagine POW life without them. As a young lieutenant, facing the hard choices required to serve with honor would have been much more difficult.

THE BATTLE FOR HONOR

The sad stories of lost honor in Chapter 1 aren’t just for information—undoubtedly, you’ve already noticed this growing problem. The stories were intended to highlight the magnitude of the problem in today’s culture, and even more to remind us that getting off course can happen to anyone, and that sooner or later there is a cost—consequences will come. Most importantly, I hope those stories stirred you to respond—to engage in the battle for honor on all fronts. Obviously, we can’t saddle up and go out and fix all “those people” that are off course. That would be like charging windmills.

At the same time, I hope that you haven’t given up in this battle for honor. Some, perhaps many, have put their heads in the sand, rather than engage in the issues. Even more disheartening are those who with a wink and a nod ignore dis-honorable behaviors—especially if the guilty are associated with the same race, religion, political ideology, or favorite sports team.

This mindset of tribal loyalty is common to human nature, but when related to accountability it can be very dangerous, taking us away from truth and justice. When “winning at the expense of truth” takes over, the “the ends justify the means” mentality follows right behind. We experienced this firsthand with the communists. They told us that truth was “that which most benefitted the party.” Therefore, torturing POWs to sign false confessions was completely justified in their minds.
If we care about our freedom and the ethics of our culture, we must be proactive in the battle for honor. I want to invite you to join me in engaging and promoting the idea of honor, along with its guardian companion, accountability. You and I know it’s not only a worthy challenge, but it’s also an essential responsibility of citizens. Honor and truth are crucial to our culture and survival as a free society.

Regardless of how negative the societal landscape appears, I’m convinced that there is an overwhelming silent majority that believes in honor and accountability. We need to be heard on this critical subject; we can make a difference.

But it has to start with one—and before we can be heard, we have to be seen, walking the talk. Each individual that chooses to engage with honor can be like the leaders in the POW camps; we can engage and take others with us into this battle. If you serve in any capacity as a leader, then you have the responsibility and privilege of showing the way for others. You can lead them to a higher level. I know you can and I’m here to help. Let’s get started.

**IT TAKES MORE THAN GOOD INTENTIONS**

Even when we’re able to identify the honorable path forward, it doesn’t necessarily make it any easier. In fact, often just the opposite occurs—if you can’t cut corners, then you must work harder; you must make tougher choices. We have to overcome our natural inclination for the path of least resistance. Knowledge, clear thinking, and good logic are important tools for helping us overcome our natural inertia, but the hill of honor is a steep climb.

Good intentions, rationally made, are helpful, but usually not sufficient. Just consider the hall of shame that we recounted
in Chapter 1 and the many other examples we’ve witnessed in recent years. We’ve seen the fall of politicians and public servants, preachers and pro athletes, professionals and practitioners, pundits and promoters, patriots and priests. These people didn’t just wake up one morning and say, “Hey, I think I’ll cut some corners and be dis-honorable today.”

Most of us have learned about good character values. We know the talk—it’s the walk that gets tough. The Watergate conspirators provide great insights into human frailty when faced with temptations that match our points of ambitious self-interests. These were bright, well-educated, successful professionals. Yet they made very serious—almost unbelievable—errors in judgment. What happened to their character? White House counsel Jeb McGruder explained this problem quite well saying, “Somewhere between my ambition and my ideals, I lost my ethical compass. I found myself on a path that had not been intended for me by my parents or my principles or by my own ethical instincts.”

So how do we stay on course? How do we guard our character and protect our honor?
As trite as it sounds, we need both a carrot and a stick. The carrot comes from our deepest desires, our strongest sources of energy—the source of our purest motives. These deep desires include needs like: to be safe and secure, to use our talents, to provide and protect, to be known and understood, to be valued and cared for, to love and be loved, to have meaning and purpose, and to come through in our assignments and hear, “Well done.” There are others, but you can see how these can energize us to press on through hardship and sacrifice to reach a higher level.

You can also see how the drive to succeed in meeting these strong desires might get distorted and cause us to cut corners. If we are looking for an easy way or a quick fix, any of us can lose sight of true north on our ethical compass. Navigating by our selfish desires and arrogant beliefs is a time-tested tactic for losing our way. That’s where the stick of courageous accountability has to be in play—the awareness that someone is going to hold us accountable. As in the character failures in Chapter 1, we will have to answer for our choices, behaviors, and actions; eventually, we will have to give an account. This awareness of consequences plays a key role in keeping human nature on track, climbing higher to reach our lofty goals. And that’s why accountability is essential for: (1) successful living, (2) leading with honor, and (3) excellence in performance and execution.

THE ENEMY IS US

By now I hope you are convinced that every person is capable of dis-honorable behavior—that includes you and me. Andrew Carnegie, the famous industrialist of the 19th century, put it this way: “All honor’s wounds are self-inflicted.”³
In a more down home way, the famous cartoon character philosopher, Pogo the possum, expressed our situation by saying, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

CORRECTING BACK MUST BE A WAY OF LIFE

Certainly there are things in my life that I’m not proud of—decisions and behaviors that I wish I could replay and do differently. That’s not possible for anyone, but we can learn from our mistakes. We can use them to correct back on track. Early recognition allows us to make small corrections—before we get far out of position or way off course.

As an instructor pilot teaching students how to fly the wing position in formation, I emphasized how important it was to always be correcting back to proper position. Small corrections are easy to make, but when you drift significantly out of position, recovery can be a challenge for even experienced pilots. Likewise in navigation, you have a planned course and checkpoints along the way. All pilots get off course and off altitude—but they learn to recognize it quickly and correct back.

The earlier story of Minter’s followers is an example of good men that were influenced by bad leaders and got a bit off course. When accountability came, they recognized their error, made a course correction, and were welcomed back into the fold.

In the pursuit of honor there is no easy day—human nature can be weak—and temptations never sleep. The challenge for leaders is that we have to set the example for others while simultaneously fighting to stay on course ourselves. That kind of vulnerability only comes through self-confidence that is anchored in character, courage, and commitment. Capt. Fisher had it; Minter did not.
“The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it.”

H. Norman Schwarzkopf, General USA, Commander of Forces in the Persian Gulf War

SET THE EXAMPLE
As a leader you have great influence, and thus your personal battle for honor is crucial. People are watching you. Once while sitting in with a group of senior HR managers in a Fortune 500 company, I listened to a discussion about a particular manager in the company whose behaviors were rude and bullying. Surprising everyone, the senior VP spoke up and shared the shocking comment, “I used to behave like that routinely.” Immediately heads snapped around with looks of disbelief and even some comments like, “No way.” But the courageous VP came back, “Oh yes, I did. That’s how my first boss operated, and so I thought that’s the way leaders behaved. Eventually, another boss saw what I was doing, got my attention, and then mentored me on the power of respecting others. I learned that I could be kind and firm and get much better results.”

This example of the bullying leader isn’t as extreme as you might think. But you may have experienced more of the opposite—the passive leader—the one who fears to properly use his authority to lead and manage with courageous accountability. Maybe you have some characteristics of one or both of these extremes. How can you correct back? We’ll cover the “how to” in much more detail in the chapters ahead, but it all begins with you, the individual—and you, the leader. Have you clarified your core beliefs and what characterizes honorable behavior?
Without that clarity, how will you know when you are drifting off course? How can you avoid losing your way like those who might have had good intentions, but ended up as an example of how not to live?

Recognizing that this concept of honor is broad and may bring to mind an assortment of images, our company decided to clarify and codify the foundational principles of what most of us would consider honorable behavior. We published it in the fall of 2014 as the Honor Code and have shared it with our clients and social media tribe.⁴ Consider your example of honor in keeping these basic commitments.

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**1. Tell the truth, even when it's difficult.**
Avoid duplicity and deceitful behavior.

**2. Treat others with dignity and respect.**
Take the lead, and show value to others.

**3. Keep your word and your commitments.**
Ask for relief sooner than later if necessary.

**4. Be ethical.**
Operate within the laws of the land, the guidelines of your profession, and the policies of your employer.

**5. Act responsibly; do your duty, and be accountable.**
Own your mistakes, and work to do better in the future.

**6. Be courageous.**
Lean into the pain of your fears to do what you know is right even when it feels unnatural or uncomfortable.

**7. Live your values.**
Be faithful to your spiritual core, your conscience, and your deepest intuitions.

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*The Honor Code by Lee Ellis*
As you can see, the Honor Code is very simple. It seems so obvious—yet we all know that it’s difficult to live up to these standards.

That’s why the idea of regularly correcting back to course is so important. You can also imagine how great your influence will be when you consistently choose to engage with honor by authentically striving to live out these seven principles.

We must never forget that values, behavior, and honor are “caught” much more than they’re “taught.” We must become the example we want to see in others, knowing that the power of our example far exceeds what we might imagine. Use it wisely—engage with honor and be authentic when you fall short.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS YOUR FRIEND

If you are intent on guarding your character and correcting back to course, you are heading in the right direction. But it will require more than good intentions. You will need accountability, the practical, day-to-day guardian companion of honor. Living and leading in the light of accountability isn’t easy, and it’s not for the faint of heart. It requires character, courage, and commitment—and leaders must go first. In the chapters ahead, you’ll see how to make accountability your friend and how to lead with friendly accountability.
MISSION PREP

1. On a scale of 1-10, how important is it for you to live and lead with honor? What deep desire(s) anchor your commitment to honor?
2. Are you convinced that your assumptions and intentions will not be sufficient to keep you on course with honor?
3. What will be the impact of your genuine commitment to engage with honor?
4. Can you be vulnerable and authentic about your walk by leading others while at the same time correcting back to course yourself?

Watch Lee’s Coaching Clip on this chapter.
Go to EngageWithHonor.com

FOOT STOMPER

Honor is acquired by winning daily battles to overcome our ego and distorted self-interests. It can be “taught,” but it’s more likely “caught” from the example of those most influential in our lives—especially our leaders. Accountability requires a carrot and a stick; we need both to stay on course.
ENDNOTES

1  http://www.quotegarden.com/integrity.html
3  http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/honor_2.html#BTzjMmy4puQBZeCy.99
4  You can download a full page color copy of the Honor Code from our website at www.leadingwithhonor.com/code.
Building a Culture of Accountability

“A bias for results means being accountable to oneself and holding others accountable.”

~ Bill Wiersma

AFTER MORE THAN THREE YEARS of incarceration without any attacks near Hanoi, there was a general feeling in the camps that our political leaders lacked the will to truly prosecute the war. As military men, we knew that we were expendable in the big picture, but at the same time you want your team to win. And personally, we all longed to go home. Capt. Ken Fisher had a daughter he hadn’t seen in five years; Capt. Smitty Harris had a seven-year-old son he had never met; Smitty could only imagine what he looked like. I wanted to see my family, and like everyone I longed for freedom. But compared to the married guys, I could never feel sorry for myself. I hurt too much for them.

The spring of 1972 brought changes in the war. With the warmer weather and the dryer conditions, the Communist North launched a conventional style widespread invasion into the South. The first week of May the US responded with a ven-
engeance, striking the railroads and factories near Hanoi. From our sideline seats, the fireworks were like New Year’s Eve and the Fourth of July Independence Day celebration all rolled into one—only on steroids. Bomb explosions shook the ground, anti-aircraft artillery clapped in the skies, surface to air missile (SAM) launches provided the hissing sounds of rockets, and the supersonic booms from our fighter buddies overhead all combined to give us a glorious symphony—the long awaited sounds of rolling thunder on a clear day.

Inside the prison walls we were celebrating—a few risked cheering out loud—and the ambience was electrifying. Everyone was energized and hopeful. You see, we believed that we might never get out unless the communist leaders were personally threatened. The guards were obviously terrified; seeing the fear in their eyes added to our optimism. This could be the beginning of the end.

After a few days of attacks—on Mother’s Day to be exact—they loaded half the camp into trucks and headed for the Chinese
border. We assumed this move was to have us stashed away like an insurance policy. In case the US invaded or inadvertently struck the prison, they would have prisoners as hostages for leverage in negotiations. There was no way to know if the move was a good sign or a bad one—but for sure life was going to be different.

Riding blindfolded and handcuffed in the back of a canvas-covered truck wasn’t new—most of us had done that several times when changing camps in the past. But this was a seventeen-hour jaunt of bouncing over bombed out roads, with little food and water. In the stress of the humid heat (along with the rough ride), some men struggled physically to keep their primary body systems working.

By the time the sun came up, even the guards were exhausted. They began to drop their “guard” somewhat, letting us take off our blindfolds. Through the back opening we could see some beautifully manicured rice fields and farmers driving their water buffaloes, carrying on as though they had not been troubled by this war, nor the many wars that the Tonkinese had fought against the Chinese in this buffer border over the last thousand years. Toward noon we were climbing via what seemed like unending switchbacks into the rugged and beautiful karst-like mountains so often seen in pictures of Southeast Asia.

Mercifully, we finally arrived at our destination. The trucks stopped at a remote compound and delivered our group of some 205 POWs to a mountain camp just three kilometers from the Chinese border. This outpost (we named it Dogpatch) consisted of a dozen or so primitive buildings perched on the side of small rocky hills that were too rough to farm.

Each building housed 15-20 prisoners. The interior and exterior walls were constructed with crude slabs of limestone
rock, more than a foot thick, giving the aroma and aura of an abandoned mine shaft. The cells were dirty and apparently had not been occupied by humans for some time. Our first task was to expel the critters that had taken up residence—the guys in one building were greeted by a cobra.

With all respects to Tom Bodett, it wasn’t easy to “sleep well” in this motel—and there was no light left on to welcome us. Dogpatch was my only camp experience that had no electricity. The barred openings for windows were high on the walls and tiny, allowing only a sliver of light even on the sunniest days. It was a dreadfully dark place. The only warmth of home came from the solace of our brotherhood. At least we were not alone.

In August as I was closing out my fifth year as a POW, actress Jane Fonda made a two week “peace” visit to the DRV, communist North Vietnam. After touring the country she made several emotional anti-war propaganda tapes for our enemy—and at least one was focused specifically toward US military fighters, claiming that we were using illegal weapons and intentionally bombing hospitals, schools, and dikes. This was pure false propaganda; her claims were completely alien to our rules of engagement. Showing no respect for our military, or for our laws about aiding and abetting our enemies, she openly and shamelessly encouraged us to discontinue our war efforts.

A few weeks after her visit to North Vietnam, “Hotshot” (one of the English-speaking junior officers) came by and began setting up a battery-powered tape recorder in the largest cell in our building. Curly, our SRO, asked him, “What are we supposed to do with this?”

“You need to bring all the prisoners in here to listen to a message from Jane Fonda,” Hotshot replied.
Under his breath and out of earshot Curly said, “Yeah, right. The guys will be pumped about this! Just what we all wanted to hear this morning—Jane Fonda’s propaganda sermon!”

This summons to hear her message prompted a leadership challenge within our band of brothers. When the tape started rolling and Fonda basically called us “criminals,” cellmate Ox stood up and staunchly refused to listen anymore, saying, “No way am I gonna to sit here and listen to this crap!”

Watching this scene unfold, Oso stepped in and took up Ox’s case and made it clear that he would join him in refusing to sit in on Fonda’s broadcast. As Oso’s disgust escalated, so did his rant. Curly became frustrated and you could see the steam coming out of his ears as he barked, “I order you to stay in this room—both of you!” The two turned their back and walked out the door, returning to their individual cells.

Although Curly disagreed completely with Fonda, he chose this occasion to openly demonstrate to the V that he (as the SRO) had control of his men. Hence, he wanted everyone to obey his command to stay put until the tape was over.

The rest of us felt the same as the two guys (Ox and Oso) who walked out of the room, but we went along with Curly to support his leadership in front of the V. There were also some challenging historical dynamics that played into this particular situation.

For years we had fought daily mental, physical, and emotional battles with our enemy, resisting their efforts to “brainwash” us to agree with them. They referred to us as “creeminals” and used torture in an attempt to extract antiwar propaganda. So it was now grafted into our DNA to resist hearing more false propaganda. Curly, however, was adamant that these two had crossed the line. “Ox and Oso, you disregarded my order and
you must be held accountable, because your insubordination set a bad example for your fellow soldiers.”

Within a couple of days, he convened a three-man court martial and quickly found them guilty of insubordination. To his credit as a fair leader, Curly later told Ox and Oso privately that nothing would come of it, and it never did. But the public issue was that they had disobeyed and there had to be accountability. They made their point and Curly made his point.5

Under the circumstances I could relate to both sides. No doubt, Curly’s action reminded us that accountability is important and that we needed to back our leaders. On the other hand, this unique situation showed me how important it is for leaders to engage by clarifying their true goals, seeking “wise counsel” and connecting with the hearts of their people—before holding them accountable, and especially when there are matters of strong principles at stake.

A LOVE–HATE ATTITUDE

Our society seems to be somewhat bipolar about accountability. We hear passionate complaints about the lack of accountability across the spectrum—from the government, politics, education, and business to finance, religion, and the media. At the same time, when it comes to being on the receiving end, accountability seems to have earned a bad image. In fact, some people told me I should avoid using the word in this book, because it is so negative and often equated with frustration and injustice, even punishment. So in one way we want accountability, generally. But in another way we fear and reject it, personally.

Often when we see such a love-hate relationship, there is some sort of paradox going on underneath. In leadership there
is apparent paradox at every turn, and in fact this can be what makes the role so challenging. Think about it—leaders need to be bold and cautious, strong and humble, objective and empathetic, tough and compassionate, and we could make the list much longer.

So even though almost everyone would agree that accountability is not only a good thing—but an obvious necessity in most areas of life—it’s also seen as difficult and dreaded. Before looking at the many positive benefits of courageous accountability, let’s examine this paradox a bit further. I think we can reconcile the underlying psychology and philosophies that bring these strong opposing feelings about this powerful word—accountability.

**WHY WE RESIST**

Reflect on this wall of impediments to accountability. As you read through the detailed explanation of each one, see if you can identify your weak spots.

**Pride**

This is the kind of unhealthy pride, also known as “hubris” that allows us to inappropriately elevate ourselves above others. Because of an inflated ego, we may think that we’re “special” and
the rules don’t apply to us. Some people seem to think they’re so smart or so powerful that they can make their own rules.

Underneath, there may be some foundation for “specialness” based on knowledge, experience, position, or skill, but what emerges in the person’s mind is a false narrative that they are above others and therefore can operate independent of the standards expected of normal people. Of course, accountability would require vulnerability and transparency that in time might reveal one’s prideful specialness—exposing weaknesses, mistakes and in some cases, illegal acts. The expression “pride goes before a fall” certainly fits when accountability shows up.

**Fear**

There are a multitude of doubts and fears that can cause “normal” people to want to avoid accountability. Fear of failure—*I may not be able to come through.* Fear of making a mistake, fear of not measuring up, fear it will be too hard, or too risky. There is also fear of losing control, fear of being exposed as inadequate, or even as a phony. Like the issue of pride, our fears may have some foundations of truth, but generally they are blown out of proportion. So, in effect, we have given in to internal lies.

Fear and pride often lead to a downward spiral. When the stakes are high, people lacking courage and commitment may cut corners or break the rules to look good or protect themselves. Fear of accountability is often a blinding force for those who have knowingly violated policy, ethics, and the law. Then when accountability comes lurking, as with the “original couple”—Adam and Eve—they try to hide, cover up, or blame someone else rather than face the music. Watch any toddler and you will see the predisposition to avoid accountability. It’s in our DNA.
Laziness
Most of us would agree that many of the more serious issues (others’ issues, of course) are related to pride and fear. But there is a more subtle challenge that is inherent in all of us—we have to overcome our natural tendency toward laziness. Scientists now know it’s built into our brains to take the easy way out—at least in the short run. Recent studies show that the brain uses upwards of 25 percent of a person’s total energy expended each day. As such, it has a default to choose the easiest way to make decisions, accomplish tasks, and solve problems—it’s called habit. Consider how little thought it takes to brush your teeth or tie your shoes.

From the outside what may look like laziness, or taking the easy way out, is really the brain following habitual “cow paths” back to the barn. In a sense, this brain default to conserve energy and follow habits and mindsets can be a beautiful thing, driving us toward efficiency and innovation—think elevators and escalators and so many other improvements over the eons.

However, there is also a downside to habits and mindsets—they can be either good or bad—wisdom is not always included. Thus, a part of our problem is that the wisdom of responsibility usually requires us to forego taking the easy way out, so we must expend extra energy. To be responsible means taking ownership; it often requires going the second mile—and ultimately it always requires us to be accountable.

Lack of Experience, Knowledge, and Planning
Some people just don’t know how to step out and follow through and are hesitant to be accountable or hold others accountable. Perhaps they’ve not seen a good role model for accountabil-
ity. Or it stems from an underlying fear as mentioned above. If this is problematic for you, this book provides a good solution. We’re going to walk you through a proven process.

**Busyness**
Related to laziness and inertia, busyness usually consumes us when we’re not living by priorities. We have busy schedules and it’s easy to procrastinate. Remember the *elephant*, the *rider*, and the *path* presented by the Heath brothers in *Switch.* Changing the rider (your logic) and the elephant (your emotions) may be too hard. So why not consider changing your environment to change the path. (Use schedules and similar tools, or ask someone to help you be accountable.)

**Negativity**
If this is your challenge, you are paying a high cost. Emotions are highly contagious and negative ones zap energy and undermine teamwork. So the question is, “What are you willing to do about it?” Begin by reflecting on your attitude to discern the energy that is driving your negativity. What would it take for you to courageously believe in yourself and others in order to move forward, supporting the principles outlined here? Are you willing to follow a proven process to success? Doing so would almost surely give you more confidence in your role and build the trust of others for you as a leader.

A wise person once said that people will continue to follow their old ways until they decide there’s a greater payoff by changing to a different behavior. Certainly there is a lot of truth in that statement. So let’s look at the positive reasons to choose accountability as a foundational concept of your life and leadership.
ACCOUNTABILITY BENEFITS EVERYONE
You don’t have to be in a POW camp to value accountability. All leadership and followership is grounded in our ability to handle responsibility. Accountability is about following a process to ensure that responsibilities are fulfilled. Mike Myatt, Chairman of N2Growth explains, “Accountability is the lowest cost, most practical, and most productive form of risk management and quality assurance that can be implemented across an enterprise.”

As a leader or even a person who likes to succeed, consider the following advantages in building a culture of accountability:

Keeps the focus on results
- Requires leaders to clarify goals and objectives and manage the process to achieve them.
- Requires leaders to stay connected to resolve issues and obstacles as they arise—rather than as disappointments at the end.
- Provides the best opportunity for excellence in execution.
- Minimizes broken promises, surprises, and unmet expectations.
- Yields better outcomes that positively impact the bottom line.

Prepares people to be responsible and successful
- Uses collaboration and a supportive mindset to insure success.
- Clarifies standards of both behavior and performance for building a healthy culture.
ENGAGE WITH HONOR

► Facilitates a sense of ownership and responsibility.
► Develops people into better performers and helps them realize their potential.
► Raises morale and improves retention.
► Improves employee engagement.
► Develops the next generation of leaders for succession.

Whether you're leading a fighter squadron in Vietnam or working a job in your chosen industry, courageous accountability makes for winners. Accomplishing goals and developing people means...

A win for the individual
A win for you, the leader
A win for the team
A win for the organization

Done right, accountability is a vital part of the growth process to help the individual perform at a higher level. It also increases the odds that the person will find a line of work where his or her talents and passions are best suited. Just as important, you grow as a leader as you gain experience and confidence in doing your part to support others in being successful. Throughout the process everyone grows as you learn to respectfully and candidly hold people accountable for their performance and behaviors in the workplace.
BUILDING A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

LEADERS OWN IT

“Accountability means not just being answerable for what you do yourself, but also owning the whole thing; leaders who are accountable take responsibility for the collective effort.”

Bob and Lyn Turknett, Leadership Consultants and Co-authors of Decent People Decent Company

The first principle of leadership is that leaders are responsible for everything that happens in their domain of influence. Leaders can delegate authority and responsibility, but they always retain both. As the leader you always own it—you can’t blame others when things don’t work out.

I’ve been saying this to leaders as graciously as possible for many years. Leif Babin, former Navy SEAL and coauthor of the bestselling book Extreme Ownership, said it even more directly: “The recognition that there are no bad teams, only bad leaders, facilitates Extreme Ownership and enables leaders to build high-performance teams that dominate on any battlefield, literal or figurative.”

You may not like that statement, but it’s the reality that you may be denying. To test their theory, SEAL training managers Babin and his co-author and partner, Jocko Willink, swapped the leader from the last place team in BUD/S training with the leader of the first place team. In a remarkable and telling turnaround, very shortly the last place team became a winning team, proving the point that leadership always makes a difference. That’s your job as a leader—to make a difference and you can’t do that without a culture of accountability.
There are several leadership consultants who have written excellent books on the subject of accountability. (See Appendix D.) In preparing to write this book, I’ve read a number of them. They are all well written and very helpful, and thankfully they approach the subject from a slightly different angle from what we’re doing here. But there is a consistent message in these books that is expressed well by the authors of The Oz Principle. In their third principle of accountability, listen to what these experts say.

“When the people you count on fail to follow through and deliver on expectations, there’s only one thing to do—apply the third and final principle, the Accountability Truth. True accountability begins by looking at yourself, by holding yourself accountable. The truth is, when things go wrong, there is usually something wrong with what “I” am doing. When you embrace this principle, you harness future outcomes and strengthen your ability to hold others accountable.”

What we’re all saying is that you, the leader, must own this process. You are responsible to lead and manage it to bring about success. Most of the time that’s going to work, but when it doesn’t—look first at yourself. What could you have done differently? When you have done your part well and it doesn’t work out, you’ll be ready to bring about a positive—though it may be painful—conclusion.
A POSITIVE MINDSET IS CRUCIAL

Accountability should be positive, not punitive.
Like our POW leaders who showed courage and compassion to forgive and restore the reprobates, healthy leaders and teams have a positive mindset about people. Your goal is to do everything you can to help others succeed in their work and develop their potential. It's about accomplishing the mission, while at the same time building the competence and confidence of others. When you do this, even if it doesn't work out, you're in the best possible position to influence the next steps for the person and the organization.

The underlying principle here is that you must believe in them, and you must communicate that in your words, body language, and actions. Or, there is a good chance they will pick up on your lack of confidence, and underachieve. For those leaders who are naturally skeptical, this is going to require a major shift in your mindset. It will take courage to risk believing in people. They need your courage; it will give them courage and faith in themselves.

The process should be proactive, not postponed.
Procrastination is usually the enemy of good leadership. Procrastination can come from laziness, but more often it comes from fear—fear of personal rejection. Or it can be an issue of perfectionism—fear of getting it wrong. The truth is that most fears are anchored in the lies we believe about ourselves or others.

Good leaders plan ahead and influence outcomes, rather than react and play catchup. By believing in yourself and the process of the Courageous Accountability Model™ you can
move forward to achieve the mission and develop your people. As you will see in the next section, the model is simple and visual. And we’re going to take you through every step—all the way to “Closeout.”

**LEADERS GO FIRST**

From years of experience, we’ve seen that the most effective way to get people to develop and grow is for the leader to set the example. When leaders commit to grow, and take people with them, it makes development a team project and everyone is engaged.

When leaders are vulnerable, this authenticity builds trust and camaraderie. With the Millennial generation, this point is especially important; they are attracted to collaborative efforts. As the graph above shows, when the leader is growing and their team is growing with them, organizational performance rises and mission success can dramatically increase.
MISSION PREP

1. You may think that accountability is a good thing, but how do you feel about it? Consider how your emotions are driving your actions.

2. Would your people say they observe that you are committed to being accountable for your words and deeds and for your leadership of others? Would you be willing to ask them? Would they feel safe in sharing truthfully?

3. Where are you procrastinating in an accountability area right now? What would it take for you to be proactive and courageously move ahead?

Watch Lee’s Coaching Clip on this chapter.
Go to EngageWithHonor.com

FOOT STOMPER

Accountability is crucial to success. It requires leaders to go first, setting the example by their commitment to be responsible and accountable to themselves. Though human nature tends to resist it, accountability has many benefits, improving both individual and organizational performance. Accountability works best in a positive environment that focuses on three areas: (1) accomplishing the mission, (2) believing in and developing people, and (3) following through to ensure that responsibilities and commitments are carried out.
ENDNOTES

1 Bill Wiersma, *The Power of Professionalism*, (Los Altos, Ravel Media, (c) 2010-11 Bill Wiersma), 120.

2 Operation Rolling Thunder was the name for the bombing campaign that we were all part of at the time of our capture.

3 Jane Fonda aided the enemy with her tapes encouraging servicemen to not participate in the war. She should have been held accountable, but in an unpopular war, the government lacked political power or moral courage to make that happen. In spite of her damaging words and actions, POWs regularly denounce the nasty emails that circulate about her ratting on one of us. Those are bogus; the information is false, and we condemn these emails as such.

4 The US policy was always to avoid bombing hospitals, schools, churches, and dikes; we flyers had very strict rules of engagement about this. But the DRV propaganda machine daily claimed that was our main effort. They obviously showed Jane Fonda “exhibits” of such destruction. One of our POWs actually saw the communists blow up the side of a hospital, in order to have evidence to show a visiting “peace group” proof of their claims.

5 Ox, Oso, and Curly soon restored their relationships and we all have remained close friends for a lifetime.


7 Chip and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard*, (Broadway Books, 2010, NY)

8 Mike Myatt, 2006, A top leadership coach and bestselling author of *Hacking Leadership* (Wiley) and *Leadership Matters...*(2007), a *Forbes* leadership columnist, is a member of the board of directors at the Gordian Institute, and is the Founder and Chairman at N2Growth. http://www.n2growth.com/mike-myatt-bio/


11 BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL) Training. BUD/S is a 6-month SEAL training course held at the Naval Special Warfare Training Center in Coronado, CA.