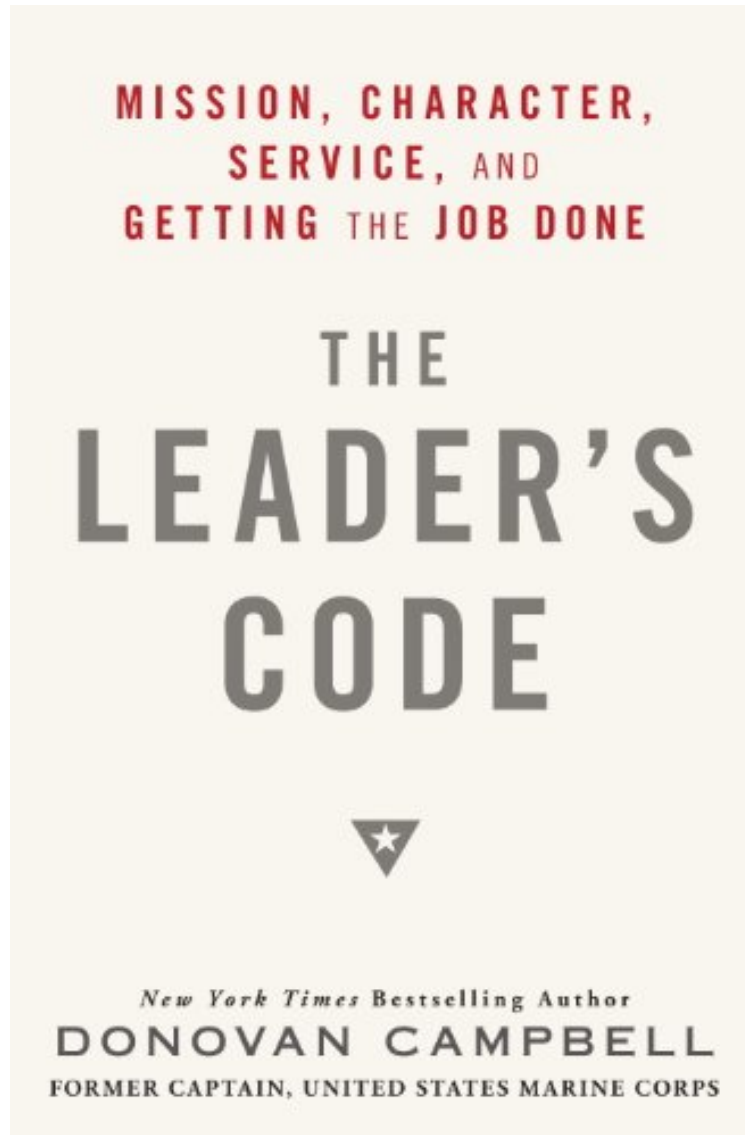


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The Leader's Code: Mission, Character, Service, and Getting the Job Done

Donovan Campbell

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What does it take to be a great leader? In a word: character. This unique book by decorated U.S. Marine Corps veteran Donovan Campbell, the New York Times bestselling author of *Joker One*, draws on his years of training and combat experience to reveal the specific virtues that underpin effective leadership—and how anyone can stand up, serve others, and make a difference in the world by bringing out the best in a team. *The Leader's Code* is a practical action plan that can be applied to any situation in which exemplary leadership is required, whether that be at home or in the workplace. Moreover, *The Leader's Code* unpacks the military servant-leader model—a leader must take care of his mission first, his team second, and himself a distant third—and explains why this concept of self-sacrifice is so needed in today's world. Focusing on the development of character as the foundation of servant-leadership, Campbell identifies character's six key attributes: humility, excellence, kindness, discipline, courage, and wisdom. Then, drawing on lessons from his time in the Corps and stories from history, Scripture, and American business, he shows us how to develop those virtues in order to take the helm with confidence, conviction, and a passion to bring out the best in others. Being a leader is about being worthy of being followed. True leaders, Campbell argues, foster compassion for others and they pursue excellence in all that they do. They are humble and know how to self-correct. Campbell's exploration of these vital qualities is wide-ranging, as he takes us from the boardrooms of the world's most successful companies to the Infantry Officer Course, the intense twelve-week training gauntlet that Marines use to prepare their leaders to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of others. With faith in our political and business leaders at an all-time low, America is in the midst of a crisis of trust. Yet public opinion polls show that there is one institution that still commands widespread respect because of its commitment to character and sacrifice: the United States military. *The Leader's Code* shows that this same servant-leader model can help us all become our best selves—and provide a way forward for our nation. Advance praise for *The Leader's Code* "A refreshing model for leadership, offering convincing principles and motivating examples that are sure to make a difference in a leader's personal and professional life. I can't remember a leadership book that has had more influence on my thinking."—Steve Reinemund, dean of business, Wake Forest University, and retired chairman and CEO, PepsiCo "Donovan Campbell has written a superb, thoughtful, all-encompassing examination of leadership and leaders. His key lessons, easily understood and well articulated, are applicable at home, within the community, and to professionals in all walks of life. *The Leader's Code* is an important book for anyone concerned about today's leadership crisis in our country and in our communities."—General Mike Hagee, USMC (Ret.), 33rd Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps "Donovan Campbell nails it as he speaks to our country's need for leadership at every level: at home, in the marketplace, in education, in government, and in the military. *The Leader's Code* is a clear call to be focused on the right mission, in the right way, and at the right time. This is a thoughtful book that will keep you awake at night and challenge you to dream in the daytime."—Dennis Rainey, president and CEO, FamilyLife From the Hardcover edition.

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own life. Donovan Campbell provides a brilliant recipe of simple yet key ingredients gleaned from his experiences in the military to remind us that true leadership is about honor—through our personal character and how we serve others. Campbell's stories of his own experiences and the experiences of others who have lived this code made for an inspiring read. I couldn't put the book down.—Betsy Myers, author of *Take the Lead*;

Against the chaotic backdrop of a nation struggling to make sense of shootings, scandals, and a malaise of political vision, Captain Donovan Campbell offers a compelling and necessary way ahead in *The Leader's Code*. This is a textbook in real character-based leadership—leading by serving. Campbell reminds us of the importance of mission by highlighting time-tested military virtues and how they can be instilled in our own leadership journey. This inspirational work will be the benchmark for every leader to follow.—Colonel (Ret.) Dave Mead, director of military ministry, *The Navigators*

About the Author Donovan Campbell grew up in Dallas, Texas, as the oldest of five brothers. He graduated with high honors from Princeton University in May 2001 and joined the Marine Corps as a second lieutenant in November of the same year. At Basic School, Donovan graduated first in his class and first in every single evaluated area, and he later deployed twice to Iraq. He was awarded a Bronze Star with Valor for heroism during his second deployment, in which he led a forty-man infantry platoon through some of the fiercest fighting of the war. After leaving active service in 2005, Donovan attended Harvard Business School, where he graduated with high distinction and was named a Baker Scholar for performing in the top 5 percent of his class. During his second year of the masters program, Donovan was recalled to active service, and in 2008 he deployed to Afghanistan as a captain supporting Special Operations Command, Central. He was awarded a Defense Meritorious Service Medal for exceptional service overseas. Since entering the business world, Donovan has worked as a senior director in PepsiCo's elite leadership development program and as the chief operating officer of one of North America's top fifty printing companies. He is currently working as a management consultant for Credera, a Dallas-based strategy and technology consulting company. He lives in Dallas with his wife, Christy, and his three daughters, Ally, Avery, and Isabelle.

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Chapter 1 Mission

My first major firefight occurred on April 6, 2004. At the time, the forty-man infantry platoon I led was garrisoned in a city called Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's Anbar Province. Anbar was soon to be the epicenter of the insurgency that blossomed across Iraq in 2004, and Ramadi was the heart of that dangerous province. With close to four hundred thousand people packed into less than ten square miles, Ramadi had one of the highest population densities on earth. To police them, we had 160 infantry Marines, 90 percent of whom were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two. Its buildings were equally close-packed. Throughout most of the city, two-story walled compounds joined together to form three-hundred-yard-long urban canyons, with the only breaks between them being street intersections. In the commercial district downtown, on the city's western side, several buildings rose ten stories or higher, and the walled compounds here housed small shops. In some places, the streets were wide enough to drive two Humvees side by side. In others, the streets were so narrow that it was difficult for two men to walk side by side. And everywhere the people thronged, at least until the serious fighting started.

The night before the battle had been a long one for my platoon—call sign Joker One—and me. We had spent the entire evening, from sundown to sunup, out of our base, lying awake in fighting positions on the roof of Ramadi's government center or conducting patrols in its immediate area. Shortly after first light broke, we patrolled on foot back to our base, sweeping Ramadi's main thoroughfare for bombs as we went. We found one. When we got back into our rudimentary base, we debriefed, then turned in to catch a bit of rest. Since we were a designated quick-reaction force that day, I slept with my boots on. And a good thing it was that I did so, since barely an hour after I had fallen asleep, I was woken up again and ordered to assemble my platoon and launch them into the city. A fellow platoon had been ambushed by hundreds of attackers and separated into three disparate houses. The casualties were high—several wounded, at least one dead—and the attackers were pressing their advantage. Fragmented reports indicated that the insurgents had penetrated the compounds of several of the houses and were firing at the Marines through the windows. In other places, Marines and insurgents stood on opposite sides of the same wall, lobbing grenades back and forth. Our friends were running low on ammunition, and the casualties were mounting. Someone needed to relieve them, and quickly. Several minutes after waking up, Joker One and I headed into the city, driving as far as we could and then dismounting. We didn't know exactly where our friends were, so we ran to the sounds of the gunfire and to the black smoke that floated up above the middle of the city. We took into the fight only what we could carry on our backs. Several blocks later, we hit withering machine gun fire. From that point on, we fought house by house and block by block until we rescued our comrades. Machine guns tore up the walls all around us. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) detonated all over the city. At one point in time, an enemy grenade landed less than five feet from me and four of my men. Had it gone off, Joker One would have immediately suffered 10 percent dead. After we relieved the pressure on Third Platoon and evacuated their wounded, we fought for the rest of the day, clearing the city of the thousands of attackers that had besieged us. Shortly before nightfall, we made it back into the base, filthy, covered with dirt and gunpowder and, in some cases, blood. I was walking side by side into the base with Jon Hesener, leader of Third Platoon and my compatriot, when he calmly informed me that halfway through the day he had been knocked completely unconscious (for about five minutes) by a bullet to his Kevlar helmet. His men had started dragging his

limp body away, thinking him dead, until he suddenly came to and started swearing robustly. Jon and I headed into the command post and debriefed with our leadership for about thirty minutes. Then we headed back out, to check on our men and try to get some rest. I was walking through the hangar bay that housed our command post, headed to the small compound that housed my platoon. I didn't make it there, though. Halfway through the bay, I saw Joe Mahardy, my best radio operator, leaning up against the wall, with his gear off, smoking a cigarette. Joe was all of nineteen years old, and he looked it. With his gear off, he stood a skinny six feet tall, weighing maybe 150 pounds. He came from a tight-knit family of five from New York, and he'd left Syracuse University, where he was on the dean's list, to join the Marines in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He was sharp as a tack and mouthy, which is why he'd made him the platoon's radio operator. He knew what I would ask before I did, which saved me a lot of time in the middle of a firefight. As I walked by Joe this time, though, he looked contemplative, and he didn't say anything as I passed. He just smoked his cigarette and stared off into the distance. I walked past Joe, wanting to get over to the platoon's house and check on the bulk of my men. But I stopped. A quiet Joe was unusual. I asked him how he was doing. It was, after all, our first daylong house-to-house firefight. Joe thought for a minute. "I'm fine, sir." Then he said something that amazed me. "Hey, sir, do you think we fought well today? I mean, do you think that all the Marines who fought at Iwo Jima and Okinawa would have been proud of us? Did we live up to them, sir? Did we do our part?" I didn't know what to say. My skinny, nineteen-year-old lance corporal had just been through what was arguably the most difficult day of his young life to date. He had helped carry his wounded and dead friends into the backs of medevac ambulances. He had radioed into headquarters that his comrade, Hallal, was lying dead in the street with his throat cut. He had taken cover as machine gun fire cut up the wall next to him. He had fought for twelve straight hours on almost no sleep, carrying all of his gear plus twenty extra pounds of radio. By all rights, he should have been worried about what tomorrow would hold—would he have to fight again, would he see such death, would he return to base, and if he did would he still have all of his limbs? But he wasn't worried about these things. Mahardy wondered only one thing: Had he kept the faith with the men who preceded him? Had he upheld the honor of the United States Marine Corps? What is it that makes a nineteen-year-old more concerned with his service than his life? Why was Nelson Mandela able to spend more than a decade in prison for daring to believe that all men are created equal and then emerge to plead to his nation to forgive those who had imprisoned him? Why was Mohandas Gandhi able to steadfastly refuse the call to violence in the face of increasingly violent oppression? Why did Mother Teresa pour out her life in the slums of Calcutta? Why is it that the most respected people, and the most respected leaders, can endure hardship, pain, and even the prospect of their certain death and still persevere without bitterness and self-pity? In Mahardy's case, it was because he was more concerned with the honor of the Corps—and how he upheld it—than he was with his own death. Mahardy was not an unusual Marine. He was not particularly more dedicated than his peers, and he was not a uniquely created human being, born with the ability to transcend his own well-being for the greater good. He was simply a normal nineteen-year-old who knew exactly what his mission in life was. The day he graduated from boot camp, Mahardy had sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Ever since that day, he had submitted his whole self—and dedicated his entire life—to the pursuit of that mission, and he considered that mission more important than his own life. All of my Marines felt the same way, which was why all of them performed amazing acts of heroism: sprinting into fire to rescue wounded children, waving their arms in the air to distract an enemy machine gunner—to make him fire at them rather than their wounded comrades—running straight toward the sounds of the gunfire to help pinned-down units. The average age of my Marines was nineteen years old.

The End in Mind I believe that all truly great leaders know their overarching mission in life with the same clarity with which Mahardy and my men knew their overarching mission in Iraq. Nelson Mandela, Mohandas Gandhi, and Mother Teresa, to name a few of the twentieth century's finest, made a lasting impact on the world because 1) they had a cause and 2) they committed to it regardless of the consequences. They had determined that their reason for being was something greater than they were, something that mattered far more than did their own comfort, happiness, or well-being. But how did they develop such clarity of mission? What makes a leader capable of such self-sacrifice? How can a person keep the faith and persevere through the worst of times, for decades if necessary? First off, I believe that great leaders have an intuitive understanding of the simple fact that our time on earth is limited, and that understanding sharpens their vision of what is truly important. Accepting the idea that we have a defined window to make an impact on this earth and integrating this acceptance into our lives helps to put our lives into a different perspective. The day-to-day, just-get-through-the-day mentality is more easily overcome once you have accepted that today may be our last chance to make an impact. If we can focus on making the most of the time at hand, it becomes easier to focus on what really matters, too. I learned this lesson the hard way, at twenty-four, as an infantry officer leading forty young men in heavy combat in Ramadi. It took me a while to understand my own mortality, and even longer to embrace it, because even though we had simulated casualties during training, nothing can prepare you for the experience of watching one of your nineteen-year-old Marines hop to shelter on one leg—and then collapse—because he's just been shot through both his shinbones. Until something like that happens, and then happens again, and again, and again you think that you and

everyone you lead are immortal. After all, you're only twenty-four years old, and they're even younger: nineteen on average. But as combat intensified, and as the days like April 6 piled up, those endless days where we fought for hours and returned fewer than went out, every one of us on the front lines began to encounter the weekly deaths of our comrades. It was strange, your friends and co-workers dying while going about their daily business. One morning, you'd trade jokes with your buddy, and then you'd leave and go your separate ways on patrol, and the morning would pass, and the afternoon would come, and you'd come back in to the base to learn that your friend wasn't there anymore. His lower half had disappeared in an explosion two hours ago, and no one thought you'd live through the flight to Germany he was now on. And you'd learn in a few days that, sure enough, he did not make it. As the days went on, these horrible discoveries began happening more frequently. So, I began to dwell on my own death—specifically, on how I might avoid it. For no logical reason, I absolutely rejected the idea that death could happen to me, even as I feared tremendously that it might. I spent a great deal of time terrified for my safety. My life's goal became preventing my life from ending. I played out countless scenarios in my head, trying to guess at what the near future held, hoping it wouldn't be as bad as the recent past and that if it was, then at least I could plan for the evil and mitigate its consequences. With enough skill and foresight and discipline, I believed, that which had happened to so many around me would never happen to me. Ironically, the more I fixated on preserving my life, the less effective I became at living it. My refusal to accept the inevitable led to selfishness, which crowded out my duty to my men and our mission. Human beings have a finite supply of energy, and they can have only one first love. I chose to expend my best energy, and my first love, on myself. Thus I spent my time after missions lying in bed, sleepless, when I should have been debriefing my men, or checking on them as they stood post on the walls. I spent the time before missions scared, thinking about all of the possible ways I could be wounded, with comparatively little thought spared for what might happen to my men. I did not lead well, and my Marines suffered for it. One day, though, I jettisoned my preoccupation with the avoidance of death. I'll never forget it—I was lying in bed, sleepless as usual, imagining everything that might happen and how I might miss the worst of it, when suddenly I stopped and told myself in my head that I wouldn't live through the deployment. I told myself that I would certainly die within the next four months, and that that was acceptable. It was almost like flipping a switch, and it never switched back. It freed me. Since I now understood that I would die, and that I would likely die sometime in the near future, my goal was no longer to keep myself safe and comfortable. My goal was to use my time to take care of my men and protect the people of Iraq from the random violence that was engulfing us. I became a much better leader, because I finally understood my mission.