

Turn the Ship Around Book Summary, by L. David Marquet

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of Turn the Ship Around

How Bosses Kill Motivation

Most people enter new jobs with a lot of energy and an eagerness to be successful. They have innovative ideas that they want to share, but their supervisors tell them not to rock the boat. As a result, employees become depressed cynics who just go through the motions at work because they feel like there's no point in trying anymore. This leads to disengagement between bosses and employees, which costs businesses billions of dollars per year because it affects how efficiently their teams are able to perform tasks. Since Captain L. David Marquet was once in charge of running submarines for the US Navy (and is also a business school professor), he knows all about this kind of disengagement from his experiences as both a boss and an employee himself.

The Navy's leadership style also contributes to disenchantment. The Navy divides people into leaders and followers, but that's not the best way to lead. This traditional model of leader-follower is bad for intellectual work because it encourages blind obedience rather than thinking independently. Some leaders avoid this problem by offering employees empowerment – giving them limited control over their own decisions for a short period of time – but that only reminds people how little power they actually have in the organization.

Everyone's a Leader

As the captain of a nuclear submarine, Marquet had to replace leader-follower management with leader-leader. This system was developed based on treating everyone as a leader, which made the crew more efficient and productive. Leader-leader organizations are also more resilient than others. The USS *Santa Fe* is unforgiving due to its tight deadlines, but hierarchy is unavoidable in this environment; it's just how hierarchy is used that can be shaped differently from other hierarchies. Onboard the ship, Marquet pushed authority for making decisions toward the bottom instead of at the top where information originates and pushes up to leadership for direction.

When Marquet took command of the *Santa Fe*, it was one of the worst-performing submarines in the fleet. It had a terrible retention rate and became infamous for an embarrassing photo that showed crew members not paying attention to their duties. However, within a year of taking over as its captain, he turned it into one of the best-performing submarines in many categories—including reenlistment rates.

Before Deploying

Submarines are a vital part of the Navy. They can operate at sea for six months without returning to their home ports, and they may travel more than 30,000 miles during that time. This is because submarines often go where other ships cannot go—they're ready to fight in "hostile waters."

In December 1998, 25 days before he officially assumed command of the submarine, Marquet first boarded it. The crew's attitude made a strong impression on him. He knew that they were constantly reminded about how their sub had the worst reputation in the fleet and how humiliated they felt because of it.

Despite having limited technical knowledge about the ship's sophisticated systems, Captain Marquet was able to discover a better approach. He asked his men what they wanted him to do and not do. With their answers, he was able to figure out what changes needed to be made for the ship's success in its deployment.

Marquet also asked them what they secretly hoped he would change as captain of the ship and what their biggest frustrations were about how it was currently run.

The Minimum Required

To understand the submarine crew's responsibilities, he had to be brought around and introduced. He learned that they were very concerned about making mistakes, which biased them towards waiting for orders instead of taking initiative.

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