

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## *Leadership Strategy and Tactics* by Jocko Willink

**Best Wildland Fire Leadership Level to read this book:**

- Level 2 New Leader and Level 3 Leader of People.
- Level 4 and 5 leaders as a refresher or continuing education.

### Why Read *Leadership Strategy and Tactics*?

*“The goal of leadership seems simple: to get people to do what they need to do to support the mission and the team. But the practice of leadership is different for everyone. There are nuances to leadership that everyone has to uncover for themselves.”*

*“I often tell people that what makes leadership so hard is dealing with people, and people are crazy. And the craziest person a leader has to deal with is themselves. That being said, even crazy has a pattern; there are patterns to human behavior. If you can recognize the patterns, you can predict the way things are likely to unfold and influence them.”*

*“Leaders are never good enough. A leader must be constantly improving and learning... Do everything humanly possible to know and understand everything there is to know about your profession and be a leader in that profession. Strive every day to learn and become a better leader.”*

*Leadership Strategies and Tactics* is a great field manual for new and developing leaders to build a deeper understanding of leadership practices and concepts. The book makes it easy to take the ideas from the text and apply them in your day-to-day life, giving examples that apply in any setting. Having trouble working with a supervisor? Get passed over for a promotion? Have a difficult employee? Identified a gap in personal skills that keeps tripping you up? Jocko gives examples of how he has worked through those problems and more that you can use to be a better leader and accomplish the mission.

This book is a great leadership tool that should be on every fire leader’s desk or bookshelf.

There are many good videos by Jocko and the Echelon Front team on the internet. The one linked below is a good one that references *Leadership Strategies and Tactics*.

- **The Key Trait All Great Leaders Have | Jocko Willink | Leif Babin (9 minutes):**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9XKfnp2B\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9XKfnp2B_I)

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwccg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

## Leadership Strategy and Tactics Discussion Questions

### Part One: Leadership Strategies

Section one: Foundations. What do you think about the idea of detaching as a leadership tool, the way Jocko describes it in the First Platoon section? How can you lead while still being open to ideas from more experienced people around you that you might “outrank?” What lessons have you learned early in your career that have been valuable later? Why do you think (or maybe don’t think) that humility is such a powerful and important leadership trait? How does the example from the Third Platoon section about knowing when to lead and when to follow apply to your position?

How important are relationships and “playing the long game” in your current role? What about past and future roles? What are some of your leadership strengths and weaknesses, and what are you doing to improve? How can you take advantage of team strengths to cover for any weaknesses you might have? Have you experienced any issues with ego in your career? Your ego, or others? How can humility and self-awareness be a confidence-building tool?

Section two: Core Tenets. How can you defer to expertise in situations where you aren’t the “best” or the expert, but you need to lead a team? Why is it important to be able to quickly and clearly share the “why” of a task to your team? What can you do every day to build or show ownership of your team, as a follower, and a leader? When is it important in your role to “pick up brass” with your team? What do you think about the different times a leader might need to lead from the front, the middle, or the rear? Why do you think it’s important for leaders and followers to remember that “everyone is the same, everyone is different”? How can you tell the difference between what is important and what is not, especially in times of change?

Section three: Principles. How do you let people on your team know their role is important to the success of the team as a whole? What do you think of Jocko’s version of “taking care of your people” in this section? How can you make sure you have buy-in from your team and don’t have to resort to imposed discipline? How does your unit build pride in the team (in a good way)? What do you think of the “good teams with bad leaders” concept?

### Part Two: Leadership Tactics

Section one: Becoming a Leader. What do you think of the 12 fundamental rules that start this section? Have you ever had to deal with getting passed over for a promotion? How did that affect you, and what did you learn from it? Would you do anything differently after reading this part of the book? How does Jocko’s description of moving from a follower position to a leader position match your experience? What lessons can you learn from his examples? What are some things you can do to make a good transition from follower to leader on the same team or unit? What about when making the transition to a new team or organization?

Section two: Leadership Skills. How can you avoid taking things personally as a leader? Why do you want to avoid overcommitting to any one plan, idea, or way of doing things? What can you do to keep an open mind about new people you interact with? When might it be important to conform as a leader or follower? How can you build the ability to influence others as a follower or peer? Why is important to stay positive but realistic as a leader?

Section three: Maneuvers. How can placing people in leadership roles, and giving them responsibility, be used to fix problems in a team? How can that backfire? What are some ways that you can build confidence on the team or unit while keeping egos in check? Why is it important to know how to successfully work under different types of bosses (micromanagers, indecisive leaders, or “weak” leaders)? How can you find the balance between micromanaging and hands-off styles of leadership? Why is it important to be able to support your leader, even if they aren’t as strong or capable as you’d like? How can you support the boss while making sure the mission is completed, even when you disagree with how it’s being done? How do you know when to quit as a leader?

Section four: Communication. Why is it important for leaders to pass along information to the team constantly? How can being truthful, clear, direct, and timely with sharing information improve communication on a team or unit? Why is it important to think about what you communicate from the perspective of the people you are sharing it with? Will people at different levels of the organization have different perspectives and interpretations of the things you share? What are some ways you can fix it if you’ve missed the mark in communicating the “why” with your team? How can you use “extreme ownership” concepts to navigate tough conversations about performance with team members? What are some ways you can give effective praise and feedback to your team? Why is it so important to set the example?