

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson



Example is Everything

As you finish reloading your rifle, you realize there's a lull in the fighting. There is no gun fire, no explosions, the screaming and yelling have subsided. After three hours of battle, it's become relatively quiet on both ships. You take a moment to assess the situation.

From the beginning you've been at a disadvantage. The enemy's ship is newer, bigger, faster, and has more guns than yours. You admit she's a beauty, built to be a warship, unlike yours which was retrofitted for war from an aging merchant ship designed for trade and cargo.

Your opponent hit you pretty hard with its first volley. Those big guns ripped huge holes in the sides of your ship. You had some pretty big guns too, but the first one fired exploded and took out all the cannon around it. Now that deck is useless and most of the men on it are dead.

The battle started at nightfall, and you've been fighting by moonlight. There are other ships on both sides, but in the smoke and the darkness no one can tell friend from foe. One of your own ships, thinking you were the enemy, fired a broadside which killed a dozen of your men.

You believe you have the smarter captain. He has outmaneuvered the enemy at least once. He saw that the big warship had turned in such a way as to lose all the wind in its sails. Rather than take the opportunity to flee, he took the more daring option of sailing right up against it, so that the two ships were side by side. Your captain was even the first to start lashing your ship to the enemy's so they could not get away.

At that point the battle really became fierce. The enemy's cannons continued to blow holes in your ship. However, now with the two ships locked together, the cannon balls shoot straight through the hull and out the existing holes on the other side limiting the destruction.

Unfortunately, the damage has been done, water is pouring in and your ship is sinking. You can feel it and see it. Your top deck is already lower than the enemy's. Half an hour ago, they tried to take advantage of that by boarding your

ship. You and your fellow sailors engaged in savage hand-to-hand combat led by your captain until you forced the enemy to retreat back to their ship.

Nevertheless, things are looking pretty grim. You're not just sinking; one of the decks below is on fire. Plus, all your sails are aflame, lighting up the night and making all the damage to your ship clearly visible. You can see that half your crew is dead. You were outnumbered to begin with, now the odds seem impossible. You can feel the fatigue starting to seep into your muscles, and you figure the fight is over and that you'll soon be in chains in the warship's brig.

The British Captain is thinking the same thing, and yells across the bow, "Do you surrender?"

You look around, but the captain is nowhere in sight. A shipmate says the captain and the first mate are dead. Suddenly, the ship's carpenter takes it upon himself to give up and starts yelling, "We must strike the colors!" You think the ship must be gravely damaged, and sinking faster than you thought if the ship's carpenter is crying out for surrender.

You hear someone shout, "Stop!" It's the captain, who has just appeared out of the smoke. The carpenter doesn't hear and continues running toward the flag pole. The captain pulls a pistol from his belt. You think he is going to shoot the carpenter, but instead he throws it with pinpoint accuracy hitting the man in the head and knocking him out cold.

Once again, the British captain cries out, "Do you surrender?"

Your captain, John Paul Jones, replies loud enough for everyone on both ships to hear, "I have not yet begun to fight!"

A rallying cheer erupts on board your ship, and you think, "This man is amazing!" You fire your musket as everyone on

board begins to fight again. You double your efforts and reload faster than you ever have before. A shipmate throws a grenade, hitting a pile of munitions on the British ship. There is a massive explosion and moments later, you and your crew swarm over the gunwales onto the top deck of the enemy ship. Within minutes that deck is captured and the British captain surrenders by pulling down his flag.

You look at Captain Jones and think, "It looks like we had the advantage all along."

Time and again, John Paul Jones led by example and motivated his crew to fight on against unimaginable odds. That hard won naval victory is, to this day, considered the most important in U.S. history because it set the standard for the American navy.

Leading successfully begins with being a good role model. I recall my parents saying, "Do as I say, not as I do." In the end, I always did as they did. What they did not realize is that whether you intend to or not, you always lead by example. Mahatma Gandhi understood this when he said, "We must become the change we want to see."

When you communicate by example, you say non-verbally that you would not ask your employees to perform anything that you are not willing to do yourself.

Or as Albert Schweitzer observed, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

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