

# Mission Ready

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## Executive Decision-Making (the Marine Corps Way)

Whenever an executive is portrayed by the media - in films, television, and in commercials - as making a "command decision," it's always portrayed as a solitary process. The executive is seen leaning back in his/her chair, staring out through the high-rise window, thinking. Finally, after much contemplation, the executive's face clears; the moment of decision has arrived; the company is saved!

A Marine General would chuckle at such a "lonely at the top" characterization. Furthermore, he would consider the above example of solitary executive meditation to be a failure of leadership.

Why? Because every Marine considers it his/her duty to cultivate leadership in his/her subordinates. To sit in an office by oneself, coming to even a brilliant decision, denies the immediate subordinate a crucial opportunity to take part in the command decision-making process. Marines do not make decisions alone, because to do so would be to squander a valuable training lesson. How else is one's subordinate going to get the hang of decision making, if not by participating in a lot of decision making?

In an NFL football game, the quarterback often calls a time-out, so that he can talk to the offensive coach. There

is always another young man who joins that conversation, also in a football uniform, but not wearing his helmet. Who is that man? The backup quarterback. The coaches want him totally involved in every sideline huddle. If the starting quarterback is suddenly injured, the backup has been mentally in the game and is ready to take the lead.

As a manager, you have a "right hand" person; one day that person may replace you, as you go higher up the corporate ladder. It is, therefore, incumbent upon you to teach two jobs: his/her job, and *your* job, so that, when the time comes, your "right hand" person is totally prepared to fill your shoes.

Command decisions, we humbly suggest, should be made the Marine Corps Way: by involving your immediate subordinate at every opportunity. You will both benefit. Your subordinate has a chance to see how you think; you have a chance to see how he/she thinks. And, suddenly, two heads are considering the original problem. Your final decision may very well be a solution incorporating both of your thoughts.

If it's "lonely at the top," chances are you're missing invaluable opportunities to groom your successor.