

Transcript for Admiral William H. McRaven | That's So McRaven (Episode 654)
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WILLIAM: Certainly in my generation that we'll carp sometimes about the young kids and they just don't have the same morals we did and they don't have the same sense of work ethic, and I said, "Well, then you haven't spent much time around them." And we the United States of America are going to be in great hands with this generation.

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm Jordan Harbinger and I'm here with producer Jason DeFillippo. Today we'll be talking with Admiral William McRaven. You might know him either from his 2014 commencement speech, which has gone crazy viral online or as the man who masterminded and executed the Bin Laden mission. Today we'll discuss the types of mindsets and intensity it takes to succeed in an organization like the SEAL teams in the Navy, uncover what we can take from military special operations forces, and bring into our own lives and careers in order to stand out, and learn what keeps a man who's seen it all up at night in a post Bin Laden world. This and a whole lot more on this episode of The Art of Charm. Jason, this was such a good episode. I loved this. This was worth waking up at freaking 5:30 or whenever we got up today to do this.

JASON: Yeah, we had our SEAL team moment this morning when the alarm is going off before the sun comes up.

JORDAN: Yeah, getting up at night before the sun is up, that's as far as I can make it in SEAL training I think. This is a great episode. Really a lot of great stuff from Admiral McRaven, a lot of off script -- we didn't talk just about, "Make your bed, the end. Bye." You know, I really think we went beyond some of the stuff here and asked them some real questions and got some interesting answers about current events as well. So, enjoy this episode with Admiral William McRaven.

Sounds like you were cut from the right cloth from the beginning though. I mean, first of all, if I were going to name a naval officer and a SEAL and a marvel comic action movie, you really couldn't do much better than the name McRaven, so you're right on the nose, I think.

WILLIAM: Well, it's got a little bit of a punch to it. My kids love the name because they like the raven analogy as part of it. And of course we've got Scotch-Irish roots and that's always helpful.

JORDAN: Yeah, absolutely. From the very beginning though, you were ahead of your time because you started SCUBA training at age 13, which is something that most people don't attempt until they're old enough to move out of their mom's house who forbade them from SCUBA training in the first place.

WILLIAM: When I was a kid I started reading books about this Frenchman. Most people didn't know who the Frenchman was at the time and it was back somewhere in junior high school, I went to write a paper on this Frenchman because we had to write a paper on prominent people. And my teacher had to ask me who this guy named Jacque Cousteau was and of course this was well before the underwater world of Jacque Cousteau but I had grown up in France. My father had been stationed over there and I was just fascinated with everything that had to do with life underwater and the aqualung and all the things that Cousteau did with his ship the Calypso, travelling around the world. The first chance I could, I went down to the YMCA and took SCUBA lessons, and that was at the age of 13. Did my first dive in a lake and then my second dive out in the Gulf of Mexico. So, you bet, started early.

JORDAN: Wow, there was no sort of like, "Hey, maybe we should wait until he's a little older." I guess this is maybe before everybody started suing everybody for everything. So they said, "Okay, cool. He's got the -- the check cleared so he can join the class."

WILLIAM: I think you're exactly right. I think there may have been a minimum age of 13 but I'm not certain. But back then the regulations were probably a little bit looser.

JORDAN: Right, that makes sense. Were you intense in other ways as a kid as well? I know you grew up with older sisters and things like that. Were you more intense than them or were they kind of equally on the same page?

WILLIAM: Well, you know, I have two fabulous sisters, but as tends to happen when you're the youngest, the sisters make you tough. My sisters in particular used to have good natured harassment as I was growing up until I got big enough to handle myself. I loved sports growing up, my father had played professional football with the then Cleveland Rams, back in the late '30s and he was also a star baseball/basketball player. We were a family that did a lot of sports and while I was real small growing up, I didn't really start hitting my growth spurt until late in high school and early college. The guys that I hung around with in high school, we played every sport imaginable and that toughens you up a little bit.

JORDAN: What point in your life did you know that you were going to do something special? Was it kind of early on, you were always ahead of the game, or was this later on you decided, "Okay, maybe I should get serious about achieving something next level?"

WILLIAM: Yeah, you know I'd like to tell you that I had this whole thing mapped out to begin with but that's just not the case. In fact, I was kind of a C student in high school. I worked hard at my grades but I also worked hard at running track and having fun. I wasn't one of these guys that had what I would consider great ambitions. What I did do was I worked as hard as I could at whatever I was doing. So particularly playing sports, I think I was very competitive. I figured that I didn't have the talent a lot of other kids had so I would have to outwork them, particularly when I started running track and cross country. That was an individual sport, it was a gut check every day, and I liked that

aspect of it. I liked figuring out whether or not I could be tougher than the next guy, even if I didn't have the talent, by outrunning them by overcoming the pain.

As I went through high school, I was on the football team but frankly never played it down. I just wasn't very big. I migrated into cross country and track I think my junior year in high school and that seemed to suit me well when I started growing. But it was a great sport for me as it one, Increased my aerobic capability, so when I finally went to SEAL training, I knew how to run. I was a good runner. So I think all of these things kind of put me on the right path. But having said that, what I did was I took care of business that day. When you go through SEAL training, they have this saying, "You take it one evolution at a time."

And remember in SEAL training, you're going from being what we refer to as a tadpole to a frogman. So, you are evolving from a tadpole, which was the new guy, to a frogman, which was of course, being a Navy SEAL. So they were called evolutions. They were just events. You'd have a long run or a long swim or an obstacle course.

But if you started looking too far down the road, if you looked at your day and said, "Oh, my gosh, I've got a hard physical training to start with, then we've got a short break, then we've got a 4.5 mile run in the soft sand, then we've got a short break, then we've got a 5 mile swim, then we've got a short break, then we've got another calisthenic session," -- if you started to look too far, you weren't going to make it. Guys would get tired just looking down the schedule.

JORDAN: That day sounds like my 2015.

WILLIAM: I can appreciate that. So what you ended up doing was you just -- you took it one evolution at a time, and I would tell you my life was kind of like that. Wherever I was, I just tried to do the very best I could and work as hard as I could, and things just kind of took care of themselves after that.

JORDAN: So, you don't look too far down the line at what needs to get done. It seems like that's good for your psychology in the short term but how do you plan ahead if you are kind of deliberately not looking that far ahead in the first place.

WILLIAM: Well, there's a balance obviously. You don't want to be completely cavalier about your future. You obviously have to set some goals for your future, but I am concerned -- you start saying, "Well this is where I want to be 20 years from now," I can almost guarantee you, you will not be where you thought you were going to be 20 years from now.

You want to make sure again, as you were looking at your future, that you set realistic goals or aspirational goals, and do the best you can to achieve them. But I think you have to realize that life is going to take you on a lot of twists and turns, and you have to adjust to life when it does that. And then, again, look down the road at your next path, where the next fork in the road is and say, "Well, I thought I was going to go left but it looks like now I'm going to have to go right. Now, what are my goals for moving right?" Be flexible enough to adapt and adjust to life.

JORDAN: That makes sense. I think a lot of people get really obsessed with things. I remember there was a kid when I was in elementary school who had his whole life plan mapped out to becoming a C level executive at -- I don't know, some company that probably doesn't exist anymore. Actually, we grew up in Detroit, so it was probably an auto company, which you know -- I don't know if that's the cool thing to do now, is become a C level executive at a car maker, who knows? And he had it all mapped out through business school. And I'm talking about -- I think we were in third grade at this point so it was really strange for us to see that.

As we grew older in high school, he started to run into problems because he was no longer the top of the class without trying, he was no longer running in the same circles. I think his parents had gotten divorced as well, so things started to break down a little bit for him and without the flexibility of being a kid and

going, "Well, you know, I'm just going to take it one day at a time," he actually ran into a lot of problems. Because he saw that he wasn't going to hit the goals and the timestamps in the path and he started to just lose it. And at that point, I think he kind of said, "To hell with it," and he started getting in trouble and doing a lot of other things as well.

So he threw the whole plan out. He threw the baby out with the bathwater because he was looking way too far down the road way too early on, and it seems like he got discouraged. It kind of sounds like what you were saying, if you're looking at what you're supposed to do be doing at 8pm at the four mile, five mile swim, and you just barely got done with whatever it was, rolling around in the sand at 5:30 in the morning, you're going to defeat yourself before you get off the starting block.

WILLIAM:

I think that's exactly right. And again, I can tell you in my career, when I joined the SEALs, there was no career. So this was back in 1977, after I graduated from the University of Texas and I went through their ROTC program and I show up at SEAL training and all of my advisors in ROTC had said, "Why would you go be a Navy SEAL? There's no future there," and there really wasn't.

Back then we were a small organization. Nobody even knew who SEALs were back in 1977, hard to believe now but that's the way it was when I joined. But that was all right. I wanted to go, I wanted to challenge myself by going through SEAL training, and then after I got through SEAL training, at the time, the best you could hope for was to be a SEAL platoon commander.

That was kind of the apex of your operational time. If you were a platoon commander, which you were young enough then, you were going to be a Navy lieutenant, so about 25-26 years old, you had a group of about 14 or 16 guys with you that were your SEAL platoon. Then after that, it was kind of all administrative. Well what happened of course, was things began to change.

I became a SEAL platoon commander, but then about that time, right after my SEAL platoon commander tour, I did a short admin tour and then Desert Shield and Desert Storm broke out. Well, they needed operational people and so the next thing you know, I said, "Yeah, I'll raise my hand and go do that." Life continued to change. I never thought -- you couldn't be an admiral when I joined the SEALs. So there was no expectation that I was going to be a Navy admiral, certainly not a SEAL admiral.

As the road in front of me began to move a little bit, you had to adjust. You said, "Well, okay, I'll do this, and I'll do the best job I can there," and then other opportunities presented themselves and you had to really take advantage of the opportunities. I think that's probably more important than charting your path, is being able to see opportunities, and move to where the opportunities are.

JORDAN: How were you training yourself to spot those opportunities? Because I think right now, if you're in a career and you're right in the middle of it, looking back you can see opportunities that you capitalized on or maybe missed, but how do you spot them in real time?

WILLIAM: Yeah, I think that's a great question. I'm blessed to have -- if there is this sort of 6th sense of looking at things, for me it's being able to see opportunities and say, "I think that's the right way to go." You don't always get it right, believe me. I've made a lot of mistakes but the opportunities, to me, are always the jobs that nobody else wants. And sometimes the worst job is going but in big companies, invariably there's that job that, again, those folks looking for the c-suite, they say, "I'd never do that job. That is not the job I want."

Well, those are the sort of jobs that I would go do, and I would go do them to do a couple things. One, reinforce the folks that I'm not above doing windows. If you need a hard job done, if you need a high risk job done, if you need a high risk low payoff job done, I'm your guy. And I would go do those jobs as best I could

and most of the time they turned out well. And then the senior leadership would say, "He didn't need to go do that job but he did it. Let's see what else he can do," and then it puts you in a position to then be looked at for other opportunities. I also think you have to be a little bit of a riverboat gambler. I can tell you in my career I took a lot of risks. Professional risks and some personal risks. And when you take professional risks, sometimes it doesn't always succeed. But I will tell you, I think the people outside, when they see you taking those risks -- those gambles -- even if you're not successful, most leaders are looking for someone like that that will step up and accept the tough challenge and do the best they can, even if they don't succeed.

JORDAN: Rather than trying to always gun for the position that everybody else wants. The backwoods route of going through all the jobs nobody else will take might be the path of least resistance, because nobody is gunning for those position. Everybody thinks, "What a sucker. He's going to go do that? What is he thinking? Ow, man. He's just one thing after another, he's knocking down these jobs nobody wants," and then eventually you're the guy who can get anything done.

WILLIAM: Exactly right. And people will notice you. A lot of folks want to go to jobs that have less risk because they realize if they want to move up the ladder, well they feel like, "I can't afford to have a significant stumble, so let me go take a job that will move me up the ladder but is relatively low risk." Those are not the jobs that will make you a better employee or better leader. The better leaders, are the ones that go do the tough jobs with the tough team that nobody wanted because they were the bad news bears, and you take the bad news bears and you turn them into a team that works. One, you learn a lot of of doing that, you begin to build a certain amount of respect from your teammates as you have helped them go places they might not elsewhere have gone -- so I think these are important attributes and the only way you do that is you take the tough jobs and you do the best job you can at it.

JORDAN: How is it trying to earn respect in a field or in a group like SEAL Team 6 or SEALs in general where everyone is an ultra high performer? How do you stand out in a group like that? Everybody's in the top .01 percent, right, of soldiers?

WILLIAM: Yeah, I think you have to play to your strengths and you have to realize there's somebody out there that's always better than you are. When I was in the SEAL teams, there was always somebody that was bigger, stronger, faster, or more talented, and you have to recognize those strengths. You have to use those strengths in the team to make the team better. The most important thing about leadership is, I believe, this idea of servant leadership. My responsibility as a leader, is to make the Oh team better. And in making it better, it's never about you. If you make it about you, then invariably -- the team might excel, but it won't excel as far as it could because you've got to play to the strengths of the other people on the team. So again, I had guys in my team, young enlisted guys, that were the best divers or the best skydivers or the best at planning a mission. So some of these things you said, "Well, I'm the officer. I have to do this," yet there was somebody in your team that could do it and you say, "You know what? Let's bring up the best talent we have within our team, let's make the team successful," and by making the team successful, again, you earn the respect of the team members. And the people above you realize that, again, this is not about McRaven, this is about the team succeeding.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: How do you recreate that sort of leadership environment outside the SEALs? Because it seems like in corporate environment you hear you a lot about people who try to bring these ideals in, maybe it doesn't always work.

WILLIAM: I have had a chance to talk to a number of corporate leaders and they always believe that there's a different model in business because business is driven by the bottom line, it's not driven by some sort of ethos. The military is driven by the bottom line as well but the bottom line is getting the mission done. It's

obviously not about money in the military. I would offer that the fundamentals of leadership are no different. And I think where some businesses fail is they focus almost entirely on the bottom line and that works for a little while but if you don't build a culture of servant leadership in your business, if you don't build a culture about the mission and the team before the individual, at some point in time, that business will look like a house of cards and come tumbling down.

You have to have a strong ethical foundation, everything you do ought to be moral, legal, and ethical, and sometimes people say, "Well, you know that sounds good but you don't understand the dog eat dog nature of business." Oh, yeah I do. What you don't understand sometimes is that if you're moral, legal, and ethical, your business will be incredibly strong and it will withstand whatever bad winds come its way, in terms of financial difficulties or personnel difficulties or anything else. So build that strong foundation, build the teamwork, and then the dollars will come. If all you do is focus on the dollars, my sense of things is, that will work for a while, but it won't work for a long while.

JORDAN:

Yeah it's easy for someone's reputation to come back and catch up and just kind of cross that line. And you see it a lot, especially in businesses that are started on the Internet. Somebody's doing really well and you think, "Man, if I just took shortcuts, maybe I would be there," and then in five years, four years later -- I find myself personally looking back at businesses and individuals in business -- I was so envious and now I look at them and go, "Wow, I am really glad I didn't do that because now everyone knows this person is full of bologna or a scammer or has a terrible reputation or burnt so hot that they burned out and there's no coming back from it." And it's always been better looking back 20/20 hindsight only.

In the moment it felt awful, felt slow, felt like a sloth, slow off the ball, but now 20/20 hindsight, this slow growth with integrity and doing the right thing and making sure we knew what was good for our audience was really the good play, long

term. It sure didn't seem that way in the moment though, I'll tell you that.

WILLIAM: No I understand.

JORDAN: Was there any point in your career that you thought, "I can't do this. This is a huge pain. I'm taking all these crappy jobs nobody wants, I should just tap out. I've got a good education, I can go do anything I want."

WILLIAM: Yeah, I mean there were a number of times in my career where I thought about leaving. Fortunately, I think each time it happened, my wife counseled me and said, "Look, you really love what you're doing, don't make this decision at this time," and of course she was right every single time and I'm thankful I stuck around.

But everybody's going to have times where you question whether or not what you're doing is the right thing and are you moving at the rate pace? Are you achieving the goals you'd hope to achieve? And then sometimes people just beat you down. I mean, this is the nature, I think, of any organization is, the job wears you down, the people wear you down sometimes. But really for the military, when I step back and look at those days and those times, they were few and far between. Ninety-nine percent of my time in the service, I loved every minute of it.

JORDAN: It seems like you're pretty good at deciding on a career path or any path and sticking to it. You've been married to your wife for almost -- is it 40 years now? I could be looking at old info here.

WILLIAM: No you're right. Coming up on 40 years next year.

JORDAN: Yeah, one career the whole time. Well, now I guess you're sort of doing a different one but this is just a retirement gig I think, right? Not a different career entirely?

WILLIAM: Yeah, it's been a great transition to go from the military to running the University of Texas system. So this is my second

career, but you're right, 37 years in the military. I'm just a guy that likes my routines.

JORDAN:

Yeah, I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think now my generation and the guys and gals younger than me, we have it a little bit differently I think. There's a chart I saw recently which was, we're shifting jobs every four years and the people that are even younger than us might shift jobs every two years. My parent's generation, your generation, it was, "Hey, go work for this company," or "Stick with this particular career," or "Work for this set of companies," you know the auto industry, for example. And that's what you do for 30 or 40 years, and you stick with it.

And I think now your advice still holds up, maybe even more so, in an environment where you have to switch, or we are tending to switch careers and jobs all the time. It doesn't seem any less valid to then go and attack the jobs in the areas the people don't want to do instead. Because I think there's a lot of folks maybe saying, "Well, that's easy for him to say, he was in the military for 40 years. Yeah, go do these jobs, you're still within the same organization." Do you feel like this advice holds up even if you're switching careers, switching jobs, switching duties every four years, maybe even every two?

WILLIAM:

The great thing about the military was while from the outside it looks like I did the same job for 37 years, the reality of the matter was about every two years, three years at the most, I'd go to a new command. So you're really kind of starting all over again, or not starting all over again, you certainly take your expertise with you. But there are new people you meet, you're put in new situations, so that reenergizes every couple of years.

So while the enlisted guy is sometimes at commands longer, the officers generally move every couple of years. So you never get stale. You come to a job, you work as hard as you can for two to three years, you take a week or so break, and the next thing you know, you're at another command and then you go hard again.

So to those folks -- and I will tell you, I'm a huge fan of the millennials. And I think that always surprises people but I saw them at my time in the military, certainly after 9/11. These were great young men and women that came to serve their country. As I told folks, they will be considered this century's greatest generation when you look at the fact that they raised their hand and they said, "I want to come and serve at a time of war," and they all knew they were going to war, that's pretty remarkable.

And the young men and women I see at the University of Texas, across the University of Texas system, do they question a lot? Yeah they do, but that's okay. They are questioning but they are hard working, they are entrepreneurial, they go out of their way to explore new ideas, to challenge conventional wisdom -- I think this is exactly what everybody needs to do. So again, I'm a big fan of the millennials, and I do understand that they have this need every couple of years to make a change, and I think that's fine. As long as it is a job that they're excited about or interested in and it kind of moves them in the right trajectory.

JORDAN: I think it's basically a stereotype for people who are at your level in any organization to say, "I just don't understand this," or, "They need to learn this," or, "They're lazy and entitled." And especially coming from a military background, it seems like this particular outlook is quite surprising to me to hear.

WILLIAM: Well, they are absolutely not lazy and entitled. I mean, there are anecdotes out there. You know, every generation. I was a baby boomer generation. Let me tell you, we had our lazy and entitled folks just like the World War II generation did. We tend to focus on that a little too much. What we sometimes miss is, these young men and women, they are active about issues. You see the activism in them and I think this is healthy. Again, you see this remarkable entrepreneurial spirit, which I think is going to be terrific for the nation.

And I tell folks, certainly in my generation, that we'll carp sometimes about the young kids, and, "They just don't have the

same morals we did and they don't have the same sense of work ethic," and I said, "Well, then you haven't spent much time around them." And we, the United States of America, are going to be in great hands with this generation. I sleep well at night knowing the millennials are going to be running the world for us.

JORDAN:

There's a quote I didn't expect to come out of this interview. That's great though. I appreciate that as well. I think I'm right on the border of millennial and whatever came before that. So, for me that's great because whenever there's anything good about millennials, I can say, "Hey, that includes me," and whenever they're like, "Lazy and entitled," I can say, "Look, I was born a little earlier than that, so don't look at me."

You're credited with organizing and essentially executing Operation Neptune Spear, which is the raid that led to the death of Osama Bin Laden. And we at Art of Charm in our boot camps and our live programs, we actually had a bunch of SEAL Team 6 guys come through before the mission, which we didn't find out during that. We found out after the fact that they weren't guys who sold farm equipment, which made a lot of sense. I thought, "These guys must work out a lot. I mean farming equipment must be a really physically intense industry." But, what did it feel like to close the loop on Bin Laden? Is there an element of neutralizing some sort of arch faux here or what is it more like, "All right, good. On to the next," with little personal fanfare?

WILLIAM:

I think probably from my standpoint, it certainly wasn't as dramatic as people saw it from the outside. It has taken me a number of years really to understand and appreciate what folks, certainly in the United States -- how they viewed it. And the reason was, we were doing missions every day. I think that night we ran 11 or 12 missions in Afghanistan. And it's not that this was just another mission, I knew it was not just another mission. I knew the political ramifications if things went wrong, I knew the risks that were involved to my troops, reputational risks to the United States if this went south -- so I wasn't naive to any of that. But the mission itself, tactically it

was a difficult mission but it was not the hardest mission we had ever done. It was a long flight into Abbottabad, where he was. It was 162 miles, I think in there. We knew we needed to get past the Pakistani integrated air defenses, we had to get in there quietly, we certainly didn't want to alert Bin Laden, although we didn't really know he was in the compound at the time, but whoever was in there, we didn't want to alert them. I was real pleased, obviously, with the way the mission turned out. But frankly, the next day, we were kind of back to doing missions again. Now I went back and this was at the end of my three star command tour, so I was only in command of that organization for another two months, I think, before I moved to another command. It wasn't until later that year actually, I went up to New York City. I was invited up to be a guest speaker and I began to appreciate at that point in time, because by this time my name had leaked out as the guy that had organized and commanded the raid. And New Yorkers, of course, had a feeling that was very difficult because I was not in New York at the time. And while I had great empathy and sympathy for the New Yorkers, I tell you when you see it first hand, when the people come up and thank you, and you realize the magnitude of the destruction at the towers, it really does begin to hit home, or it certainly did begin to hit home for me then. And so as we had this event, I think that's the first time I really understood the magnitude of being able to bring Bin Laden to justice. And for me it really wasn't about the SEALs. As I've told folks before, there were hundreds of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines, civilians, and the intel world, the law enforcement world, the state department -- they were all part of this mission. We were just fortunate enough to be the guys that finally kind of got on target and pulled the trigger. But this is a credit to everybody, not just in the United States, but all of our allies and our partners that were part of keeping Al Qaeda at bay and helping both Iraq and Afghanistan and really chasing Bin Laden for all those years.

JORDAN:

There's this photo of everybody watching the Bin Laden raid happening in the White House. Where were you watching this particular mission go down? How were you monitoring this?

Were you in there or were you on the ground? How did this work?

WILLIAM: I was commanding the mission from Afghanistan. I had a video link back to the White House. That iconic photo that you see, there's a gentleman in that photo was working for me. He was my liaison to the white house. They were talking to me and seeing much of the same thing I was seeing.

JORDAN: Obviously looking at this picture of Obama and Hillary Clinton just frozen staring at the screen, this is Game of Thrones season finale times 100, right? What's the feeling you got for yourself, because you're in a different position.

WILLIAM: The drama where we were in my command post -- we still had a mission to finish up. That moment that that picture was taken is when the helicopter had a hard landing inside the compound. The reason they are a little bit aghast is, they have seen what they believe to be a helicopter crash. I have seen a lot of helicopter crashes and I knew this was not a helicopter crash, it was a hard landing, and I had communications with the guys on the ground, and I knew pretty soon after the landing that the guys were okay. So I wasn't overly concerned and we had a plan B and we had a plan C and plan D and a plan E.

So we just kind of shifted to plan B in there and I had another helicopter on standby and we brought it in. So, from my standpoint, they were obviously concerned. I had to continue on with the mission so I stayed focus on ensuring that we finished up the mission, the guys got on the helicopter safely, and we got back to Afghanistan. This to me was about completing the mission at the time. Again later when I looked back on that iconic photo, it obviously brings back memory about where was I at that time. I was sitting in a small command center with a set of headphones on, watching the events unfold but knowing that we had to make the next decision to keep the mission moving.

JORDAN: Who are you monitoring at the time? You can't see everybody at the same time so, who are you talking to and how are you keeping everybody straight? Because there's a lot of guys in there and there's a lot going on and it's happening really quickly. What are you even paying attention to at that point?

WILLIAM: Well I had good, as we refer to as situational awareness. I knew what the guys on the ground were going through and I kind of knew where the bad guys were and I had better situational awareness than the guys in the White House did. They were looking at a very specific video feed. I had the advantage of not only that video feed but other video feeds. I had radio feeds coming in, so I had a better sense of what was happening around us and therefore again, I knew the situation on the ground, I knew we had control of it, there wasn't a lot of anxiousness on my part, we just had to move on to the next part of the mission.

JORDAN: That seems pretty fascinating. Because for me it almost sounds like you're trying to watch 12 TV shows at once and you're trying to dictate what has to happen next. But this seems like maybe the guys are acting more or less autonomously. I mean their training is up to the point where you're not telling them what to do next, right?

WILLIAM: Yeah, that's exactly right. So once the mission started, I had only a handful of decisions that needed to be made if things went south. And of course we had rehearsed it a number of times. So you bet, at this point in time, you trust the helicopter pilots, you trust the SEALs, you trust the folks that are working for you. I'm not a guy that micromanages things unless I have to. And the only time I would do that is when I had a decision to make regarding bringing in the second helicopter or whatever was necessary. But those were easy decisions to make. Rely on the guys that you have trained, we had kind of hand picked all these guys, they were all combat veterans, I was very confident in the leadership, and I knew they would do well. So once the mission started, my ability to dramatically change things was

limited to about a handful of decisions and that was only going to happen if things went south.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Is this something that the guys could have done without your input if the blank had gone dead or something like that? How hands off can you possibly be? Because it seems a little dangerous to rely on your flowcharts and then, I don't know, you get a sandstorm and the thing goes dark.

WILLIAM: Yeah so there were -- as we do in all missions, you have a mission execution checklist. And there was a point of no return. So what I would tell you is, once we hit the point of no return, if things had all gone dark, and we were past that point, then I would have been perfectly comfortable just relying on the guys to finish the mission. Now I'm sure other people outside me would not have been very comfortable but I knew the leadership, I knew the guys, once we got past that point of no return -- it wasn't on autopilot, there were still some decisions and some discussions I had to have with the leadership on the ground, but all of that would have been fine had I not been there after the point of no return.

JORDAN: I assume you gave these guys some kind of pep talk before the mission or some sort of speech. I mean, you have that great commencement speech, we'll link to that in the show notes but what do you say before a mission like this? You don't need to motivate these guys probably, right? This is one team that's already motivated.

WILLIAM: Right. Yeah, they were already motivated. I mean the story that has already been told, so I feel comfortable telling it was -- and I think it was the night before the mission. I'm not exactly sure I remember the chronology but we were doing one of our final debriefings and I brought up the story of [Hoosiers](#). So if you remember the great movie [Hoosiers](#), it's about a small town basketball team in Indiana that goes to play for the state championship and they go up to Indianapolis. Well they were

raised in a small town, the gym didn't hold but a couple hundred people, and now all of a sudden they're in this giant dome in Indianapolis and it seats thousands of people.

The coach brings the team onto the court and he has one of the players -- he says, "Johnny, grab the tape measure." He says, "I want you to get up here on this ladder and tell me how high the hoop is." So the player gets up on there and he says, "Coach, it's 10 feet high." He goes, "Okay." He says, "Now, walk off the court. How long is the court?" The guy comes back and he says, "The court is 90 feet long." And he turns to his players and he says something to the effect of, "It's the same court. It's the same height on the basketball." And my message to the guys was, "You have done this hundreds of times before. Don't let the magnitude of the game change the way you do business. Just go out and do what you have done and it'll all be okay."

And I was surprised at how many folks -- I was probably a little bit more eloquent that day, although I did not rehearse it, it was just one of those things that came to me in the spur of the moment. But, a number of folks came back to me later and reminded me about the [Hoosiers](#) speech. And the point was, don't think of this as the Super Bowl, don't think of it as the national championship, it's just another game and the size of the playing field is exactly like the one you've been on. And the size of the court in this case, exactly like the one you've been on 100 times before. Just go do your job.

JORDAN:

The level of anxiety that the guys might have had before would have been pretty high knowing that everybody's watching. Although, if you train in something enough, you're kind of just a robot at that point, right? A lot of this is muscle memory at that point, even though they hadn't been on the ground in that exact house. There's things you read online that you guys had built a replica as close as you could figure out in the middle of the desert, run through that things a 1000 times or something, so it's probably a good idea to not build it up too much. I assume though they still got no sleep the night before or the day before.

WILLIAM: Yeah, my guess is they didn't get a whole lot of sleep.

JORDAN: Yeah, don't think of this as the Super Bowl and it's like, okay well, don't think of a pink elephant. Dang it, come on. Give me a break. I assume that these types of extremely publicized missions are once in a career if that even, not something that's usual.

WILLIAM: Certainly, there was no mission quite like the Bin Laden mission because of the nature of who Bin Laden was. It was about bringing justice to the guy that led to 9/11. But in terms of the heroism, the courage, the determination, there were missions almost every single night in Iraq and Afghanistan that you could write a book about in terms of how the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, the folks who were part of it -- how they stuck up in tough times, how they saved their buddies, how they were wounded but continued to fight. There are some remarkable stories that I hope at some point in time are told about their courage and the skill -- again, not just of our special operators but of all the infantrymen and Marines that were out there. So, this was an important mission and again I'm proud of the work the guys did. There are a lot of other heroics going on around the theater at the same time.

JORDAN: What keeps you up at night in a post Bin Laden world?

WILLIAM: I do worry about North Korea. I have had for a long time. My concern with North Korea is Kim Jong-Un, the leader of North Korea is just not stable. He's not a rational actor in the classic political science term. You have a guy that you can't make your next chess move and expect him to react in a certain way. When you look at the Putins of this world or the spring leaders in Iran or whoever other bad actors we might think out there, they are rational actors. They may be bad actors but they're rational actors and you know if you do X they will probably do Y. The problem for us today is you can't do that with North Korea. If we do something we have no idea what he may do, and therefore it's very difficult to build a strategy that will play out to our benefit. Spending a lot of time in South Korea, there are

just some wonderful wonderful folks there and in Seoul. That is a very short distance from the demilitarized zone, the DMZ. If we miscalculate and the North Koreans decide to open up with artillery, thousands, potentially hundreds of thousands will be killed. We're in a very, very difficult situation and I don't envy the president or Secretary Mattis or anybody else for the problem they've got to deal with.

JORDAN: Yeah, that was my next question was is there a part of you that's like, "Okay, I handled the Bin Laden thing. I'm going to step back for a minute and let somebody else deal with this kind of thing," because it seems like a lot of pressure.

WILLIAM: Well, it is, but we've got some great folks. General Vince Brooks is over there, he runs the U.S. forces in Korea, a fabulous, fabulous officer -- he understands the nuances of the conflict in a way that few people do. I mean when you're living there in Seoul, you're getting briefed every day, you're in a position to be able to advise Secretary Jim Mattis and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Joe Dunford, and the president on the appropriate steps. So we've got great leaders in terms of our general officer crew and the secretary is in a position to make sure the president has the right advice.

JORDAN: Do you see a military civilian divide growing in this country? I mean there's a lot of media that say things like, "The civilian military divide." Do you agree with that, that it's growing?

WILLIAM: You know I haven't seen that. In terms of the population support for the military, I would tell you I thought it hit its height during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The population, the citizens of the U.S. and around the world were very, very in support of the military. They may not have supported the war but they always kind of supported the troops. Under this administration, I'm hoping that the president will continue to support the military, which he seems to be doing, and I think that's important for the young men and women that come in. The support I think always ebbs and flows a little bit. In general right now I'd say there's not that large of a gap

between the civilian and the military, at least the support for the military. Now where there is a gap is it's -- not a large percentage of Americans have ever served in the military because it's an all volunteer force. So what you are beginning to see of course, is this divergence of people that really understand what life in the military is like.

But that's all right, I don't know what life on the police force is like and I don't know what life in the corporate world is like, and I don't know what life in the the world of podcasts is like. There's always some gap between people's knowledge of other people's careers. So I don't think that is the worst thing that's happened to us, we just have to make sure that we don't end up building this military that gets to the point where it doesn't represent America in terms of the diversity of America, both ethnic diversity and diversity of thought and culture and socioeconomics. And we do have to be a little bit careful I think. We may be headed in that direction.

JORDAN: What do you think about the idea that there's these changes in policy for transgender soldiers and things like that? I mean, where do you fall in that because in your generation -- I don't even know if that existed in the public sphere.

WILLIAM: Right. You always have to make sure that unit integrity and unit morale is important for a fighting unit. Having said that, you also want to, again, reflect the fact that every American that wants to serve, ought to be given the opportunity to serve and serve with great distinction. So, I have no concerns about the transgenders or the gays serving in the military or anybody. I think we welcome everybody that wants to serve in the uniform of the United States. But the military is uniform. There's a reason that you have to have uniformity because that's the way the great armies and navies have to fight, is with a sense of discipline and good order and discipline and uniformity. So if you come into the military, I don't care who you are, black, brown, white, I don't care whether you're gay or transgender or straight, you have to accept the rules of the military in terms of the sort of uniformity in expectations. So you can't expect, if

you're going to join the military, that because you're different, we're going to allow you to express yourself in a fashion that is contrary to good order and discipline. You have to conform. The military is a conformist organization. And because it is a volunteer organization, as long as you understand that coming in, then everybody come join.

But, you know, you come into the military and if you say, "Really, I'd like to grow my hair long because I'm a guy that likes hard rock bands and that's what my idols are," the drill instructor says, "Well, thank you very much but you don't get to grow your hair long." "Well, I want to grow a beard." "You don't get to grow a beard." "Yes but, you know, I want to grow a beard." "I don't care, you're in the military now and you don't get those options." So, again, this has to do with the effectiveness of the military, which has to do with good order and discipline, which drives the morale of the unit and we welcome everybody. And I mean that seriously, but you have to understand what the rules of the game are before you come in and as long as you can adjust to those, then by all means, join us.

JORDAN: You've got a degree in journalism. What do you think of the relationship between the media and the government or the military these days? It seems a little but antagonistic right now as well. What do you think of that?

WILLIAM: Well certainly between the administration and the media, it's very antagonistic, and I think that is not good for the nation. As I've told folks, I have been raked over the coals by the press many, many times. It is a natural part of being a senior leader, particularly in the public eye. Invariably, you will do something stupid or you will do something inappropriate, maybe not intentionally, and the media is there really to kind of hold you accountable. And I think that is vastly important for a democracy like ours. I am a huge fan of the media, even though in my time -- both in uniform and now as the chancellor -- like I said, I routinely get hammered by the media. However, the points I make to young journalists as well are, "Get your facts straight." Before you decide you're going to report a story, not

only check your facts once, but twice and three times. Make sure you have an original source -- so somebody that was not kidding an eye witness to it -- or you have a document that is a verifiable document, and that your secondary sources -- that you have a couple of secondary sources -- that you are able to verify those secondary sources. The other thing about reporting -- and it is one of my concerns on the media side -- is the media is now coming in with biases. And I said, you know as a reporter -- now, it's different. Editorials are different than reporting.

Investigative reporting ought to be investigative reporting. But if you are a reporter then you should report. Report factually, accurately, without any bias. So if you come into a story and you have already decided that so and so is guilty or aha, you know there's a smoking gun out there somewhere, or you don't happen to like the individual that you're reporting on and that is reflected in the news story, then you're not a very good reporter. So the point is, we absolutely need the media. We need them to continue to do the hard work, to be investigative, to hold people accountable, to tell the stories, the good stories as well as the bad stories, but they have a responsibility as well. And that is to check their facts and then check their bias at the door before they start writing.

JORDAN: This has been fantastic. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you want to make sure you deliver?

WILLIAM: As I mentioned before, I think the millennials in particular are a wonderful, wonderful generation and I am probably their biggest fan. I do think as folks of my generation, maybe even a little younger, look at the concerns they have out there in terms of activism on the campus or the kids that show up on TV and they don't look like we look like, rest assured, we are in very good hands and this generation is going to take America to a place that we have never been before but we will be stronger because of it. And anything that I can do to help those young men and women, I'm here to do so.

JORDAN: Thank you sir. This has been wonderful. Thanks so much for coming out and doing this.

WILLIAM: My pleasure Jordan, thanks.

JORDAN: Jason, really good show with Admiral McRaven here. Like I said, you couldn't be more on the nose with the name. If I was going to name a Marvel comic character who is an admiral that used to be special forces, I think the last name McRaven -- couldn't do much better than that. He had a lot of good stuff here. This was well beyond they, "Hey everybody, wake up and make your bed so you've achieved something," type of content.

JASON: I am so glad we didn't talk about that at all, A, because I'm sure he's sick of it, but there's so much more to his story than just the make the bed stuff. And I'm really happy we finally have the make the bed guy on though because now when we keep getting pitched for shows, we can say, "Sorry, we've already had the guy who coined the term and come up with some new ideas, people."

JORDAN: Yeah, exactly. It seems like everybody who submits their pre, one of the tips is -- especially if they're a guest that's not a good fit, one of the tips is, "Well, you know, you've got to get up and make your bed," and then it's like, "Something, something, something mindfulness," and then the rest of it is fluff. And it's like, "Okay, next."

JASON: Yeah.

JORDAN: Now, yeah, we've had the original make your bed guy on the show and now we can put it to rest.

JASON: Put it back to bed where it belongs.

JORDAN: Exactly, pun intended. Cheesy pun intended. So, great big thank you to Admiral McRaven. The book title is [*Make Your Bed: Little Things that Can Change Your Life and Maybe the World*](#). And of course, that will be linked up in the show notes for this episode

along with the commencement speech that we were mentioning earlier. If you enjoyed this one, don't forget to thank Admiral McRaven on Twitter. We'll have that linked in the show notes as well. Tweet at me your number one takeaway from Admiral McRaven. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. And as usual, we'll be replying to your questions and feedback for Admiral McRaven here on Fanmail Friday. You can find the show notes for this episode at theartofcharm.com/podcast.

I also want to encourage you to join the AoC Challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge or you can text, 'AoC' to 38470. That's A-O-C to 38470. The challenge is about improving your networking and connection skills and inspiring those around you to develop a relationship with you. The idea is we're taking you through a lot of drills, a lot of different exercises, very hands on -- it's free, a lot of people aren't sure about that. It's a fun way to get the ball rolling. It's a great way to get forward momentum.

We'll also send you our fundamentals Toolbox that we talked about earlier in the show. That includes some great stuff. You can apply the stuff right away. The whole point is it's practical, it's ready to use right out of the box -- body language, nonverbal communication, charisma, attraction, negotiation techniques, networking, influence, persuasion, everything that we teach here at The Art of Charm. It will make you a better networker, a better connector, and most importantly, a better thinker. That's theartofcharm.com/challenge or text the letters AOC to the number 38470.

This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor, and the show notes on the website are Robert Fogarty. Theme music by Little People, transcriptions by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net, I'm your host Jordan Harbinger -- if you can think of anyone who might benefit from the episode you've just heard, please pay AoC the highest compliment and pay it forward by sharing this episode with that person. It only takes a moment and great ideas are meant to be shared. So, share the show with friends

and enemies, stay charming, and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.

