Shield AI

Company Culture



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Company Culture

The greatest victory requires no war.

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Welcome to your next adventure.

FOREWORD BY RYAN TSENG, CEO

Welcome to Shield AI and a great adventure! It will be a journey defined by victory and defeat, discovery and mystery, pride and embarrassment, but most importantly it will be a story of defining the possible, fostering personal growth, forging lifelong friendships, and making life-changing impact for our service members and civilians in conflict around the world.

The most important part of Shield AI has always been, and will always be, our people. Nothing is more important to the achievement of our mission than the success of our teams and teammates – when our teammates win, we strengthen our company and advance a noble mission. In the spirit of empowering you and our team to be the very best, here are the most important things you should know about Shield AI.

1. We are committed to our mission. Security and stability have been the foundation of human progress throughout history. They are prerequisite conditions for progress in economies, technology, medicine, education, and more. Erosion of security, peace, and stability is a global problem - in 2023, 120 million people were displaced by violence and persecution, up from 45 million in 2011. Swaths of humanity have experienced decadal setbacks. New conflicts are fomenting as global tensions between superpowers reach the highest levels since the Cold War. The United States and Allies have diminished capacity to win wars and protect peace. Shield AI was founded to do something about this; to protect service members and civilians, to bring people home safely to their families, and most fundamentally to deter war by changing it – by bringing AI to the battlefield.

2. We do what honor dictates. Some of the most celebrated figures in history – Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. – changed the world because they had the courage to stand up for the right thing, even when it was the hard thing. Too often in business, government, and social forums, people build habits of painting shades of gray to avoid conflict or to seek convenience. We reject this approach as shortsighted and wrong. We choose to operate with unimpeachable integrity and always do the right thing, even when it is the hard thing – even at great personal cost or cost to our business.

3. We pursue excellence. Those who change the world are the best in the world, and so shall we be. We strive to be the best in the world and do what it takes to make it a credible aspiration. We are bold, smart, gritty, hardworking, and confident. Our approach has yielded remarkable outcomes, such as the first-ever AI pilot on the battlefield, the first-ever tail-sitting aircraft to be operationally deployed, and a historic F-16 flight by Hivemind that was recognized as one of the highest achievements in American aerospace and astronautics. A commitment to excellence is required as we relentlessly push the boundaries of what's possible in AI and aviation, preparing us to lead in tomorrow's technological landscapes.

4. We embrace servant leadership. "Ship, shipmate, self." We are here to serve the mission and our teams. At Shield AI, leadership means being in the trenches with the team because strong leadership demands empathy, empathy requires understanding, and understanding is built by doing. True leadership goes beyond just getting the work done; it's about investing in people. We are committed to providing the opportunity to take on challenging, high-risk, business-critical assignments – crucibles that drive personal and professional growth. We provide the guidance, mentorship, and resources necessary for success, ensuring that every team member is equipped and empowered to be their best.

5. We believe AI pilots will revolutionize warfare. Since 2015, Shield AI has pioneered autonomous systems designed to operate effectively in GPS-and-communications-denied environments – crucial in modern warfare where traditional remotely piloted systems are compromised, and anti-air systems are highly lethal. Our AI pilots will deliver intelligent, affordable mass, overcoming the challenges of the modern battlefield and transforming worldwide military forces. AI pilots are the most consequential technology of this century for global defense.

6. Our vision is a world without war. This vision guides us as we develop technologies aimed at changing the face of warfare to one of deterrence and defense – so we may quiet humanity's greatest challenges, resolve the worst injustices, and drive human progress – from a platform of peace and stability.

Shield AI stands ready to play a critical role in restoring and maintaining peace. Our work to deploy intelligent systems at scale represents the most consequential initiative for national security and global stability this century, and we are the best team to deliver on this promise.

Each section of this book offers insight into the aspects that make Shield AI unique. From the battlefield to the boardroom, these pages reflect the lessons learned and the milestones achieved, providing a roadmap for those who dare to join us in pushing the boundaries of technology and making a meaningful impact on the world. As you turn these pages, we hope you feel the gravity of our mission and the passion of our people.

The greatest victory requires no war.



"Throughout America's adventure in free government, our basic purposes have been to keep the peace; to foster progress in human achievement, and to enhance liberty, dignity and integrity among people and among nations."

– DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Our mission is to protect service members and civilians with intelligent systems.

At Shield AI, alignment with our mission is paramount; it guides everything we do. Ensuring that every team member fully embraces our mission is crucial, as their commitment directly influences our success and the satisfaction of those we serve. We strive to make service members proud of their decision to work with us. They should feel confident saying, “We chose Shield AI and we’re proud of that decision because of what they have delivered.” Achieving this level of satisfaction is challenging, but it serves as our North Star, inspiring us to exceed expectations and deliver results that not only meet but redefine industry standards.



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Impacting lives through our mission.

Brandon Tseng (US) 10/15/23 2:57 PM

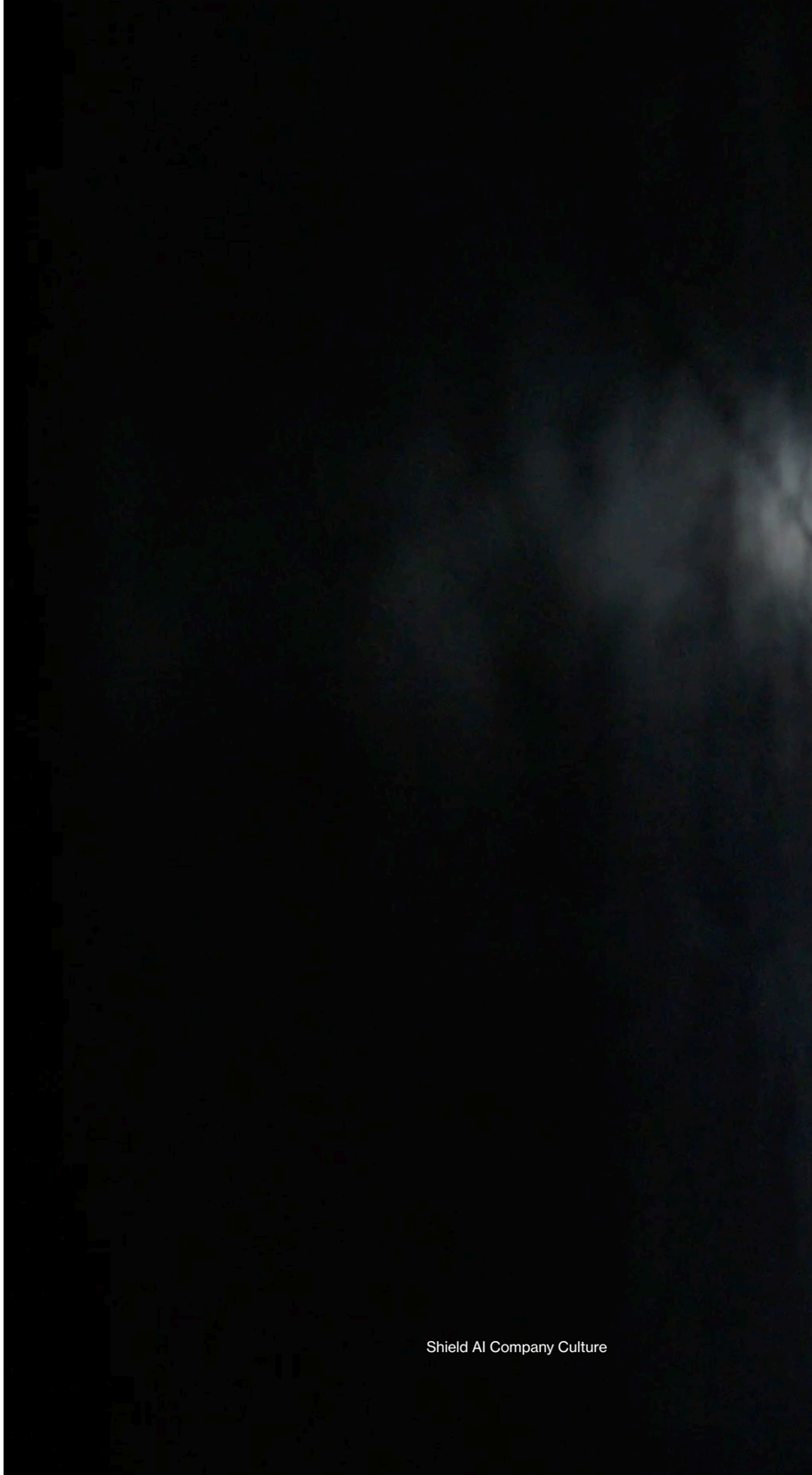
More mission impact in Israel: “Nova saved many lives in combat”

Another report of mission impact from Nova 2 in Israel came in on Saturday. You all should be proud of your work here, it truly makes a difference. I hope you find these reports as inspiring and motivating as I do!

Also - our BD and customer success team are working to get Israel some of our remaining Nova 2s over there.

Also, thanks to our customer success team for building trust with the customer and enabling these communications Mark Mason, Josh Neveadomi, Justin Maphet (and apologize as I’ve likely left people off)

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Me and my family are all good, Unfortunately I lost some friends in Saturday, but now we are fighting back with everything we got. Thank you so much for the support and the concern. USA is the best ❤️

also you should know that the nova saved many lives in combat.

7:41 PM

V-BAT has successfully completed 17 deployments, averaging six months each, with the Navy and Marine Corps teams. It has demonstrated significant real-world impact across every numbered fleet, notably aiding in the interdiction of billions of dollars' worth of drugs within the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility.

Adam Farrar (US) 10/20/23 8:26 AM

Continued V-BAT Success!

Another successful interdiction on 19 Oct 23 enabled by V-BAT and several of SAI finest Pilots! V-Bat got eyes on and observed possible illicit packets onboard the TOI. SAI outfitted PN interceptor with vehicle kit, tablet, and MPU5 with PTT for the boat officer and driver. V-Bat provided real time bloodhound track via WinTak/Atak using the sensors point of interest and target creation with dead reckoning. Partner Nation successfully interdicted TOI (go-fast), confirmed illicit drugs onboard (cocaine), and 3 male pax apprehended. Outstanding Teamwork guys!

Additional updates from 17 Oct interdiction: 1,307 Kg of cocaine seized, aprox street value of $45 Million

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Historic firsts





Historic Firsts

First fully AI-piloted drone to be deployed in combat (2018)

We pioneered autonomous battlefield capabilities with our Nova quadcopter, the first aircraft to be equipped with our Hivemind technology. It was first deployed in 2018 with special operators in the Middle East and has since excelled in GPS-and-communications-denied environments, both indoors and underground. Supported by the Defense Innovation Unit and leading private investors, we tackled one of the toughest challenges first: autonomous indoor exploration in dangerous and dynamic combat environments.

First tail-sitting vertical takeoff and landing drone to be operationally deployed (2019)

In 2019, we set a new standard in aviation with V-BAT, the first tail-sitting vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) drone to be operationally deployed. V-BAT distinguishes itself with a patented ducted fan design that increases thrust by over 80% at equivalent engine power. This innovation allows for a single power plant operation, superior payload capacity, and extended flight duration – up to half a day or prolonged hovering. Its thrust vectoring technology ensures exceptional stability in harsh weather, while the safety-enhancing duct design eliminates the need for operator safety zones, broadening tactical possibilities.





Historic Firsts



Chosen by the U.S. and allied militaries for its unmatched performance and reliability, V-BAT stands out not just for its capabilities but as the pinnacle of aircraft design.


Col James "Fangs" Valpiani
"Evil" Bill Gray
USAF Test Pilot Sc
RESCUE
DARPA
AFRL



First real-world, AI-piloted air combat flights (2023)

In 2023, Shield AI dramatically advanced aviation history as part of the DARPA ACE Team. Our Hivemind technology, previously victorious in the DARPA AlphaDogFight, autonomously piloted an F-16 at the Air Force Test Pilot School in Edwards Air Force Base, California. This showcase of sophisticated autonomous combat maneuvers earned us a nomination for the prestigious Collier Trophy, celebrating exceptional achievements in aviation and astronautics. In 2024, Shield AI reached new heights when Secretary of the Air Force, Frank Kendall, personally experienced our AI pilot's capabilities by flying in the autonomously controlled F-16.

First dual AI pilot, four-ship, jet aircraft flights in national airspace (2024)

In 2024, Shield AI achieved another historic first with the successful execution of dual AI pilot, four-ship jet aircraft flights in national airspace. These high-performance, jet-powered drones autonomously conducted formation flying and tactical maneuvers, setting a groundbreaking precedent for blended operations between crewed and uncrewed aircraft. This advancement is pivotal for the future of air combat, emphasizing the seamless collaboration between autonomous systems and human pilots, vital for next-generation aerial warfare.



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When you have two unmanned jet aircraft flying at 300-plus miles-per-hour with two manned jets in a very tight, restricted environment in terms of airspace, trust in your AI wingman takes on a whole new meaning.

Values

Pushing the boundaries of AI, autonomy, and robotics to protect service members and define the future of aerospace is hard work and not for everyone, but nothing truly worthwhile is ever easy. On our most challenging and exhausting days, we are guided by these values.



Shield AI Company Culture



Do what honor dictates.
Live as a servant leader.
Pursue excellence.

Do what honor dictates.

BY BRANDON TSENG

As I tell those who do their onboarding session with me on values, I often get asked by investors and colleagues, "why is Shield AI so successful?"... "Is it the tech?" .... "Is it a key individual?".... I explain the #1 reason by far why Shield AI is so successful is because of a common mission and a shared set of aligned values. Ryan has asked me to share where our 'Do What Honor Dictates' value comes from and what it means to me.

The phrase "Do What Honor Dictates" comes from my 1st Phase BUD/S Instructor, Matty R. In the SEAL Teams, the 1st Phase instructors are the guardians and gatekeepers of the SEAL community (like our People Experience Team and every hiring manager are to Shield AI). They are hand-picked for the role and tasked with making sure that only those who exemplify the values and qualities embodied in the SEAL ethos make it through. Matty, or as we called him at the time, 'Instructor R,' is the epitome of a warrior and one of the most respected warriors in the SEAL community.

To give you a sense of Instructor R, he is an intimidating human being. He's strong, stern, and stoic. If you didn't know him, you would never want to casually strike up a conversation with him at the bar.

At the end of the first day of 1st Phase, Instructor R told us if we make it through Hell Week, he would share the story of the battle where he "got this nasty scar on my elbow", of which many of us had heard rumors of.

Five weeks later our class finished Hell Week, and true to his word, Instructor R sat us down late one evening, poured himself a tall glass of whiskey, and shared in detail how he and his SEAL Platoon were on a mission in Fallujah in 2007 and came under heavy enemy machine gun fire. Instructor R, the Platoon's medic, and their Platoon Commander were shot. The medic was closest to him, then his Platoon Commander, who had been shot in the face (Google "Jason Redman sign" for inspiration). Instructor R, though wounded, moved to try and help his two teammates (the medic and Platoon Commander), but immediately his left arm was shot. He looked down and thought it had been severed by the bullet. Later he would learn his arm was hanging by a single tendon, and that the force had flung the dangling portion of his arm behind his back so he couldn't see it. With his uninjured arm, he grabbed his teammate and dragged him while he returned fire with his pistol.

The story continued, but at the end of the battle, he described how he was fading into darkness on the MEDEVAC helicopter. Miraculously, he survived. For his actions that day, Instructor R was awarded the Silver Star (the 3rd highest combat decoration); he was also nominated for the Medal of Honor (he did not receive this award). Decorated SEALs who were there have described it as "the bravest thing I've seen in 17 years (as a SEAL) happened on that night. I watched Matty run forward, after he had already been shot and grab our Corpsman and drag him back....and he gets shot again, boom, spins arounds and dumps him, gets back up, and gets shot again."

At the end of the story, one of my BUD/S classmates raised their hand and asked him, "what was going through your head when you moved to help your teammates?"

Instructor R replied, "Do what honor dictates. What I wanted – or what was best for me – didn't matter. Even if it meant I would die. Honor dictated that I go help my teammates. When you recognize that honor is real... that an honorable life is real... even in the worst conditions, the decision-making... the life you choose to live... what you choose to do... becomes straightforward and clear. I hope you all remember that and take it with you to your SEAL Platoons and in life. The world needs more honorable people."

To me, 'Do What Honor Dictates' is about pursuing an honorable life – a life where we strive to do what is right day in and day out, live with integrity, and pursue a meaningful purpose, work, and positive impact. A life my friends and family will be proud that I pursued. It's a reminder that there are virtues more important than oneself, and that each day offers an opportunity to become the best version of ourselves. Additionally, it reminds us that while there are many ways to conduct ourselves, we choose to act in a manner that is moral, good, and of high standards – leaving the world better than we found it, simply because it's the right thing to do.

Every person at Shield AI is here because in some way they exemplify this value. You all should be incredibly proud of that because it is noble and honorable. I encourage you all to live this value and bring it to your teams, to Shield AI, every day.



Brandon, Co-Founder and President of Shield AI, with Charlie Platoon in Afghanistan (2013).

Live as a servant leader.

VICE ADMIRAL BOB HARWARD, UNITED STATES NAVY (RET)

In a military career of forty years, I had the privilege of serving in 26 different assignments and even more unique positions as both a leader and a servant. In fact, all of them required me to meet the objectives of both at the same time, and my time at Shield AI is no different. My military career included a wide array of roles across various ranks, departments, agencies, joint operations, and political administrations. In each and every one of these roles I learned so much from those I worked for, and even more from those I worked with.

The single greatest enabler in the performance of all those organizations and missions was a clear and concise understanding of our goals and objectives, with a focus on empowering the team and each member to do their job. As my father always told me, “You will not be remembered for what you did, you will be remembered by others for what you did for them.” Servant leaders understand this, live it, and prove it each and every day. The most effective team members not only do this with those they work for, ensuring objectives are accomplished, but also with those who work for them, and probably most importantly, those that work with them. The best teams inculcate this across the entire organization.

Essential to all of this is the ability to listen to what people need, understand their perspective, and support them in accomplishing their objectives. Open, collective, and transparent communications empower all members of the team, building trust and confidence amongst peers and with leadership. Leaders can clearly articulate this to the teams and demonstrate it each, and every day. It also needs to be instilled into their vision, mission, and operational execution. Finally, they know they are responsible and accountable for living that standard. Bottom line - they do it!



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Bob, Shield AI's Executive VP for International Business & Strategy, speaking with fellow former Navy SEALS and current Shield AI teammates.


Excellence is the bar set high
enough that we reach for it but
can never grasp it.



Nathan Michael, CTO at Shield AI and former Associate Research Professor at Carnegie Mellon University, giving Shield AI teammates a tour of the university's Resilient Intelligent Systems Lab.

Pursue excellence.

BY NATHAN MICHAEL

Excellence can be framed in many ways — the extraordinary; ideal; optimal — the pinnacle of the possible (and beyond). Excellence is a term that represents the highest levels of performance, regardless of the field. Excellence is the bar set high enough that we reach for it but can never grasp it. And as we reach for that high bar — continuously growing; learning; innovating; adapting; and evolving — the bar moves.

For many, the pursuit of excellence motivates and drives us every day. A commitment to the pursuit of excellence is a commitment to focus, discipline, work ethic, rigor, precision, clarity of thought — and patience, perseverance, courage, and humility. It is this drive for continuous improvement that causes us to accept our failures, challenge assumptions, and strive for more than the status quo and mediocrity.

As for what this value means to me — it is fundamental to who I am as a person — just as it likely is to many people. I am fortunate enough to exist in conditions of stability that permit this type of mindset; an opportunity to continuously reflect on and optimize aspects of life (as possible).

Throughout 2022, our journey was marked by a myriad of opportunities to improve and optimize.

After Shield AI acquired Martin UAV and Heron in the summer of 2021, we started the year as three (mostly) separate organizations and concluded the year as a single team. We faced numerous challenges that required extraordinary commitment from our team, pushing the limits of what we could achieve within stringent deadlines and resource constraints. As we progressed, we celebrated incredible outcomes — a testament to our team's resilience and drive. Looking back, it becomes clear that our continuous pursuit of excellence is about never settling for the status quo.

As 2023 unfolded, we built on our experiences from the previous year, strategizing to mitigate resource constraints that had once stretched us thin. We expanded our team, increased our investments in internal R&D, and honed our focus, including becoming more selective in our projects. We will intensify our focus on building a fundamentally well run (and excellent) organization by identifying our points of immaturity and bringing precision and rigor to process. We pursue excellence together as a team by identifying our limitations, failures, and challenges and taking them on constructively to create an organization that continuously improves. We are a substantially improved organization from where we were last year (or years prior), but we still have a long way to go and ample opportunity to get better.

Leadership Principles

Our leadership principles are a reflection of our mission and values. Staying true to these principles drives us and keeps us on the right path.



Shield AI Company Culture



Put the team first

Embrace teammates

Be candid

Build resilience

Demonstrate grit

Dominate

Delight our customers

Be rigorous and go fast

Earn trust

Act with kindness

Be a good steward of resources

Be enthusiastic

Mission first, people always.







Put the team first.
Embrace teammates.
Be candid.
Build resilience.

Fight to win.







Demonstrate grit.
Dominate.
Delight our customers.
Be rigorous and go fast.

Inspire through action.







Earn trust.
Act with kindness.
Be a good steward of resources.
Be enthusiastic.

Aligning with Excellence: Our Hiring Philosophy and Expectations



At Shield AI, our mission and values guide us, but it's our people who drive our success. To continue building a high-performance organization, we seek individuals who not only align with our mission and values, but also exhibit qualities that set them apart. Here are the key traits we seek in future teammates to help us build AI and deter war:

DRIVE

We value those whose commitment to mission, excellence, team, personal growth, and competitive spirit drives them to seek out and take on the hardest challenges facing the business. Our greatest teammates own their destiny and never consider themselves victims of circumstance because, with tenacity and unrelenting effort, they know – and have proven – that they can achieve anything.

INTELLECT

We value people who learn insanely fast because of their intellect, intuition, and grasp of first principles. Great teammates have a knack for focusing on the most important problems and then asking the right questions about the problems and themselves. They use rapid learning, rigorous scientific process, teamwork, and smart decision-making to swiftly, efficiently, and effectively drive progress.

TRACK RECORD OF EXCELLENCE

Continuation of past exceptional performance is an order of magnitude more likely than sudden improvement. We value teammates with a proven history of delivering exceptional results consistently over time. Their past achievements are a testament to their capability, dedication, and resilience, and their knowledge of "what right looks like" elevates the entire team.

ROCKETSHIP TRAJECTORY

We value those who are on a steep, upward trajectory in their professional and personal growth. Our people are consistently pushing the boundaries of their potential, seeking new challenges, and expanding their impact. A rocketship trajectory reflects a growth mindset that prepares a teammate to take on new, hard, widely varying challenges, and succeed.

In December 2016, co-founder Brandon Tseng wrote a letter to the company that remains as relevant today as it was then.

TO THE SHIELD AI TEAM:

I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you for your incredible work, energy, and determination this past year and also to share some thoughts about the year ahead. What you are doing is very difficult and despite the overwhelming number of technical challenges you face day to day, you have made incredible progress this past year towards building a game-changing capability that will have an immediate impact for our service members and the civilians stuck in the conflict areas our service members operate in.

2017 is going to be an exciting year for Shield; we will finish our 1st product, we will grow, and we will continue to dominate.

At the same time, 2017 will present its own set of challenges, and to overcome these challenges, we have to be great. That's why I wanted to share with you the most important lessons, ideas, and ideals I took away from my time in the SEAL Teams. It's a mindset I try to approach all challenges with. I think they are very applicable to living life if you want to be great... regardless of whether you are a SEAL...and I wanted to share them with all of you because, if you're at Shield, you clearly want to be great. These ideals are very difficult to live up to, I have fallen short many times. The important thing is to recognize when you fall short and adjust course accordingly.

1. If you choose to do anything, dominate it, crush it, give it your everything; anything worth doing, is worth doing 100%.

2. Lead by example, follow by example, everybody is always watching, always judging... your reputation is everything. Be known as intelligent, hard-working, reliable, and someone who gets things done no matter what. You're only as good as your last performance, you earn your spot on the Team every single day, you earn your reputation every single day.

3. Take ownership of tasks no one wants or are difficult. Learn to love difficult things. Take pride in your work. The only easy day was yesterday.

4. Details distinguish professionals from amateurs.

5. There are no good excuses for failing or falling short. There is no such thing as a good excuse. Find a way to win. Every time. Mission success is the expectation.

6. Become an expert in your domain. Expertise leads to confidence; confidence is critical to success.

7. Ask for help when you need it, that's what teammates are for. Ask questions when things are unclear.

8. Focus on success, plan for contingencies, not failure. There is a saying in skydiving: "Look towards the field and you'll land in the field, look at the trees and you'll land in the trees." Don't land in the trees.

9. Positive attitudes are contagious, no one likes to work with people who are negative. Attitude is everything. Relentless energy is required to win. It's what distinguishes champions from those who are very good.

10. The best only want to be led by the best. The best will only follow the best. The best only want to work with the best.

11. Every day is an opportunity to become better at what you do. Seek out brutally honest feedback to improve and give brutally honest feedback to improve others. Don't be offended by honest feedback. Feedback isn't something that happens once a year, make it a habit, make it regular.

12. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Rehearsing is preparation. Preparation leads to professionalism. Professionalism leads to credibility. Credibility leads to opportunity.

13. You are more capable than you can imagine. You can push yourself to do things others can't or won't... if you choose to.

14. When you concern yourself with the well-being of the team, the team will concern itself with the well-being of you. Your actions should serve the team.

15. Sometimes the obvious isn't obvious. Speak up, it could be the difference between success and failure.

16. If your life is not in danger, life is pretty good.

17. Do what honor dictates.

18. You will get knocked down more times than you can imagine. Get back up. When in doubt, just keep moving forward, one step at a time. Never quit.

In the SEAL Teams, there is no greater honor than to be recognized as a Teammate. I am so honored, humbled, and thankful to be part of the Shield AI Team; you all have been and continue to be incredible Teammates.

There's still some time left in 2016, but, Happy New Year, let's make it a great one.







Make our service members proud.


Shield AI


The greatest victory requires no war.
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