

Gain a Competitive Edge: Think Like a Navy SEAL

Pharmaceutical professionals, teams, and organizations can succeed at an elite level by tackling the tough mental challenges of Navy SEAL training.

Training to become a United States Navy SEAL (SEa, Land, and Air) is considered among the most intensive preparation in the world. The average successful Navy SEAL candidate spends over a year in a series of formal training environments, including a rigorous Boot Camp; Basic Underwater Demolition; Basic Parachute Training; and Advanced Specialty Training.

While most people focus on the physical challenges of SEAL training, few appreciate the arduous mental preparation that helps SEALs win a mission even before they conduct it. In his recent book, *The Way of the Seal: Think Like an Elite Warrior to Lead and Succeed*, former SEAL Mark Devine reveals many SEAL conceptual frameworks that can be used for not only military battles but also brand battles.

Devine believes that “to win at anything, we must first control our minds.” Pharmaceutical professionals, teams, and organizations can apply many of these conceptual practices to enhance their mental toughness and establish a winning attitude. Here are some of the most relevant SEAL principles to help pharmaceutical professionals succeed at an elite level.

- **Find a Way:** SEALs are mentally trained to possess a can-do attitude. They do not think or believe they are going to win; they *know* they are going to find a way to win. Winning pharma professionals and brand teams embrace a similar attitude. They manage to overcome competitive challenges, compliance issues, regulatory hurdles, resource constraints, organizational bu-

reaucracy, and—perhaps most importantly—their own real or pre-conceived limitations.

- **Train for Life:** SEALs are constantly training as individuals, in their platoons, and as part of larger task groups to maintain, enhance, and ultimately master their skills. Ironically, most pharma companies only provide competitive training for their sales representatives and not for the rest of their extended multi-disciplinary brand team members. Imagine the consequences of a SEAL Team that has only one of its SEALs trained to fight?



- **Bulletproof the Mission:** SEAL teams must identify and evaluate multiple different options to determine the optimal approach for each mission. The details of the selected option ultimately become the mission plan. Devine recommends the four question “PROP Process” to assist in this planning: What are the current priorities? What are the realities of the situation? What options do your targets offer? What path forward will you select to succeed? Pharma brand teams can learn from and adopt a version of the

PROP Process for market and competitive planning.

- **Dirt-Dive the Mission:** “Dirt-dive the mission” is SEAL-speak for “rehearsing until the team has won the mission in their minds.” Similarly, pharma companies should regularly rehearse their plans for product launches, counter-launches, and other competitive activities in the form of Competitive Simulations, the new, improved version of business war games. Like SEALs, winning companies conduct simulations for many different types of situations: franchise and portfolio planning; annual brand plans or longer-term strategic plans; new product indications or data releases; and global, regional, and local market planning.

- **Develop Front-Sight Focus:** “Front-sight focus” is how Devine describes the incredible concentration and single-mindedness that SEALs rely on when pursuing a target. Prior to their mission, SEALs deliberately select “high-value targets” where their resources are best directed to achieve the overall mission. They apply the four-question “FITS Process” to analyze and prioritize these targets: Does this target fit your team’s skills and does it give a good return on investment? How important is this target to achieving mission success? Is the timing optimal for pursuing this target? Is the target simple and clear?

Pharma professionals can leverage front-sight focus to complete prioritized projects, streamline their commitments, and start new initiatives without getting derailed. The FITS Process can help these professionals identify the three to five “highest value targets” or the essential action steps for winning against competitors.

Very few people have the ability, desire, or opportunity to become a Navy SEAL. However, pharma professionals can apply these cutting-edge approaches to learn the mental fortitude, leadership skills, and winning mentality of the world’s most elite warriors. **PE**