

**United States Marine Corps
Commandant's Professional Reading List
Marine Leader Discussion Guide**


Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us about the Business of Life
James Kerr (2015)

I. Introduction.

II. Preparatory Work. Read the book and be prepared to engage others with your perceptions and perspectives of the book. As you read, keep track of key points that spike your interest or points you consider important when building and operating within a team.

III. Overview of the Book. James Kerr blends extensive research with interviews from a wide spectrum of professional enterprises including the U. S. Marine Corps to explain why some organizations reach and sustain success in what they do. In his book, Kerr interviews legends of rugby, business high performers and psychology experts ranging from All Blacks coaches, corporate CEO's, and sports psychologist.

Kerr provides clear and exceptional examples of how All Blacks use key cultural and proven individual and team principles that emphasize unity of character and purpose of a team. What Kerr shares can be applied in any organization that strives to reach perfection in what their mission drives them to attain. As part of his explanation of how an organization reaches world-class status, is an emphasis on the Marine Corps' reputation as a premier fighting force, second to none. He singles out the Marine Corps because of its emphasis on Core Values and holding all Marines accountable to living those three pillars of what makes Marines different and unique to other military organizations throughout the world.

Kerr provides 15 key learning lessons that explain why the All Blacks—the New Zealand Rugby Team has attained excellence in professional sports. These 15 learning lessons address a continuum of leader and team character traits and principles commonly understood and practiced in the Marine Corps. In between the two ends of the continuum are stories and useful examples based on research of successful teams that explain why character and purpose merge to form successful teams like the All Blacks rugby team.

Kerr explains why All Blacks success is easily transferable to any type of team, especially the Marine Corps. The structure of Kerr's story lends itself to team leader discussions from small unit to large Marine organizations. His explanation of why character triumphs over talent parallels the rich history of Marine Corps.

IV. Guided Discussion Design. The design of this discussion guide is to evoke a Socratic style seminar conversation that is facilitated by a unit leader. The power of seminars is the depth and breadth of discussions based off the experiences and maturity of the Marines. The key is that there are no “right or preferred” answers, but rather individual perceptions and perspectives that each Marine explains and defends.

As part of the design of this guide, first, provide a brief overview of the discussion guide framework and the purpose of the questions. For example, state that each question is open-ended and is intended to generate responses from each Marine’s perspective. Second, note the location within the book from where each question has been generated, and the key take-aways that Marines should gain from discussing a given question. The following section provides several suggested questions for seminar discussions. The seminar leader is not limited by the five following questions.

V. Guided Discussion Actions and Questions. The following questions are designed to engage the seminar audience with its discussion leader.

1. Kerr addresses the important issue of individual character and how it affects the attitude and cohesiveness of teams. His emphasis aligns well with the Marine Corps’ focus on individual humility. Kerr states, “A collection of talented individuals without personal discipline will ultimately fail. Character triumphs over talent.” (p. 7)
 - How do you form and maintain your individual character? (p. 7)
 - Does your character contribute to your team’s ability to accomplish its mission? (pp. 7-11)
2. A key component of leading oneself and others is a clear “vision” of where one is and the path to reach one’s purpose and passion. For Marine leaders, this easily translates to what is our mission and how do we achieve excellence through training and education. Kerr writes, “Vision without action is a dream; and Action without a vision is a nightmare.” (pp. 11-12)
 - How does a leader form a vision for his unit? (pp. 8-11)
 - How does an action plan drive goal and vision achievement? (pp. 10-11)
3. The purpose of why we do anything has to be understood and appreciated to achieve excellence in whatever we strive to achieve in our lives. In Kerr’s book (p. 36), he states “Personal meaning is the way we connect to a wider team purpose.” Finding a personal purpose in our lives requires us to do serious self-reflection and ask ourselves “who am I and what is my destiny?”
 - How does one define their purpose? (Review p. 8)
 - How does a leader create team purpose? (pp. 43-44)

4. Kerr writes (pp. 93-96) of the relationship between successful leaders and their ability to tell stories. Kerr stresses that story telling reveals much of our inner views of life and mission achievement. Scholars profess that humans are story tellers, and those who mastered story telling have met with much success. The power of the narrative cannot be overly stressed. Kerr references John Kotter's view that successful leaders share stories that are relevant to their followers (p. 95).
 - When communicating with subordinates, how does story telling contribute to better understanding and compliance? (pp. 94-96)
 - Is story telling an effective way to promote Marine Corps traditions and customs? (p. 95)

5. Kerr addresses Marine Corps Core Values (p. 146) and how those values form the bond and provide the cohesion that distinguishes Marines from other militaries. It is these values that Marines have relied on to build a reputation of excellence throughout the world—a band of warriors.
 - How does your command emphasize Core Values?
 - Which Core Value do consider he most important?

Prepared by:
LtCol. James Van Zummeren, USMC (Ret)
LLI Deputy Director