

KIM: Navy SEAL offers graduates timeless advice

Mickey Kim
May 20, 2017



Mickey Kim

Admiral William H. McRaven (Retired) was a Navy SEAL, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command and architect of Operation Neptune Spear, the 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. He graduated from the University of Texas (UT) in 1977 (Bachelor of Journalism) and is now Chancellor of the UT System.

In 2014 he delivered the commencement address at UT, which offered 10 lessons on “If You Want to Change the World,” which went viral <https://news.utexas.edu/2014/05/16/mcraven-urges-graduates-to-find-courage-to-change-the-world> and spawned his 2017 book, [Make Your Bed—Little Things That Can Change Your Life...and Maybe the World.](#)

Basic SEAL training left an indelible mark. As a warrior-in-training, it seemed silly the first challenge each morning was a meticulous inspection of his bed. But the wisdom of this simple act would be proven many times over.

He said, “If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed.”

“Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. ***If you can’t do the little things right, you will never do the big things right.*** If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.”

No matter how much effort he put into pressing his uniform and polishing his belt buckle, instructors would invariably find a flaw. The punishment for failing inspection was running fully clothed into the surf and rolling around on the beach until you were a sand-covered “sugar cookie” all day.

He said, “Sometimes no matter how well you prepare or how well you perform, you still end up as a sugar cookie. It’s just the way life is sometimes. If you want to change the world, get over being a sugar cookie and keep moving forward.”

Each day was filled with physical challenges. The penalty for failing to meet performance standards was a 2-hour “circus” of additional physical activity designed to wear you down and break your spirit. Every class member endured the circus, but only those who found inner strength survived.

He said, “Life is full of circuses. You will likely fail often. It will be painful. At times it will test you to your very core. But if you want to change the world, don’t be afraid of the circuses.”

Finally, he said in SEAL training there is a brass bell hanging in the center of the compound. All you had to do to quit and make the physical and mental hardships stop was ring the bell. He said, “If you want to change the world, don’t ever ring the bell.”

In closing, “Start each day with a task completed. Find someone to help you through life. Respect everyone. Know that life is not fair and that you will fail often, but if you take some risks, step up when times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden and never, ever give up—if you do these things then the next generation and the generations that follow will live in a world far better than the one we have today.”

The opinions expressed in these articles are those of the author as of the date the article was published. These opinions have not been updated or supplemented and may not reflect the author’s views today. The information provided in these articles does not provide information reasonably sufficient upon which to base an investment decision and should not be considered a recommendation to purchase or sell any particular stock or other investment.