

The SAS and the Power of Community



This weekend I and other members of the Special Air Service (SAS) association met up for lunch to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Special Air Service. The room was packed full of camaraderie and fellowship. A surviving member of the wartime SAS in attendance, received a standing ovation. The event was held in a location in Wales which is

synonymous with selection for the SAS. At the back of the room was a display with original documents which outlined what SAS staff and instructors should be on the lookout for, in potential members.

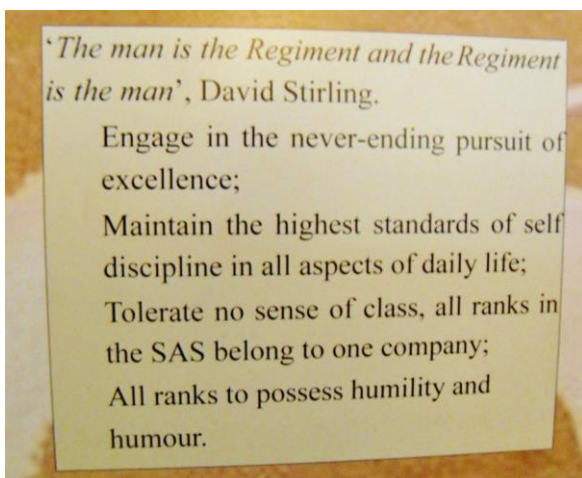
On one of the boards there were old sheets of now yellowed papered instructions. They pointed to the fact that although a recruit might not have all the right technical abilities, nor even the physical stamina required of an SAS soldier, showing ample determination to complete their training was enough to get them to the next level. So the SAS didn't expect to get super soldiers from day one. The selection was actually considered part of the training. It was the determination to succeed and learn that was the major contributor in being selected. The SAS select people for their potential.

All human systems go through a Universal Life Cycle. Potential members of the SAS are no exception. The first phase is competition as everything, be it an idea or business or an SAS recruit has to compete for its place in the Universe. Recruits have to compete against the weather, their own limitations, the terrain and lots more to achieve a place within the regiment. Then humans enter the control/conform stage where, in the SAS case, new members learn a variety

of new skills to conform to the standards required of a 'badged' member of an SAS team.

Mostly this is the phase in organisations in which business and society stop evolving. The Control/Conform stage gives those who have control, the most certainty and status. But that's not what happens in the Special Air Service. Members having reached a certain proficiency then enter the SAS Community.

This is when they join the elite regiment properly and enter the fourth phase which is when they are able to contribute more of their potential. They become part of small units which can operate autonomously and be relied upon to complete their missions. They possess courage, can design and implement bold solutions in the pursuit of daring missions. The motto '*Who Dares Wins*' is a guiding principle. Businesses that possess the same qualities I have found, achieve great things too and they can be trained to do so.



As you see from the display board opposite, founder David Stirling expected SAS soldiers to continually improve, be self-disciplined, be egalitarian and possess humility and humour. The humour is essential for when things go wrong and the universe reminds you, you're still human no matter what the marketing department tells you.

Most of the lessons learnt from elite units like the SAS are transferable. I've developed tools which allow leaders to pass through the control/conform stage and enter the community stage which is when peak performance; 'flow' states are possible. When the full potential of the individual and team can be realised. It's about being able to unleash the purpose, passion and the potential of the organisation. This allows leaders to individuate from the business and it makes work more fulfilling for the team. In a highly competitive,

volatile and complex business environment, individuals and teams who can operate effectively in community are an asset. Perhaps it is time to tap into the power of community for your business, if you want to learn how, get in touch.

When you empower the team you'll find that they will go the extra mile which brings me on to the final board in the display. The excerpt from James Flecker's *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* inscribed on the clock tower of the SAS HQ in Hereford:

We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
Always a little further; it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow
Across that angry or that glimmering sea...