

TOUGH ENOUGH

THE WORKBOOK

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Adapted from *Tough Enough: How to Lead a Team to Greatness Without Being a Jerk* by John Baird and Matt Hunter.
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Welcome! Through decades of coaching, conducting in-depth interviews, and studying how the most successful business leaders of our time achieve extraordinary results, we've identified seven habits that define true toughness in leadership. To be Tough Enough, you must do the following:

Habit #1: Live Your Manifesto

Habit #2: Make Your Pursuit Relentless

Habit #3: Assemble a Cult of Incredibles

Habit #4: Harness Emotional Thunder

Habit #5: Fiercely Pursue the Truth

Habit #6: Build Your Accountability Stack

Habit #7: Adopt Warfare Tactics

Our book, *Tough Enough*, offers a framework for becoming the most effective version of yourself and this companion workbook gives you the space and structure to put it into practice.

Keep in mind that toughness isn't just a skill you acquire; it's a system. This workbook is designed to help you master that system, starting with how you lead yourself, and then extending outward to how you lead others. Use the takeaways at the end of each habit to begin taking concrete actions. Identify where you need to strengthen, apply what works for you, and develop the kind of leadership that drives real results.

The journey to becoming Tough Enough won't be easy, but it will be worth it. Let's begin.

—John Baird and Matt Hunter



Habit #1: Live Your Manifesto

Great companies, powerful social movements, and legendary teams often start the same way: with a shared purpose worth fighting for. Their *manifesto* exists to fulfill that purpose. A company's manifesto is the set of guiding principles and rules of engagement: the complete package of its *vision* (where we're going), *mission* (what we're doing, and why it matters), *values* (what we believe), and *standards* (clear expectations). In the Tough Enough Zone, you live and breathe your mission while respecting and caring for those close to you, choose values that are both meaningful and conducive to success, and set high standards and enforce them firmly and respectfully.

Activity #1: Live Your Tough Enough Manifesto

You must be able to share your mission in a compelling way if you want to scale your business. That's where good storytelling comes in. Company culture is a shared story; it's your manifesto embodied at full scale.

Before you begin to craft your own Tough Enough manifesto, reflect on your organization's story: What are you trying to change or accomplish? Why does this matter deeply to you, your current team, and the people you serve?

Now, let's break down the components of the manifesto and build your own.

Step 1: Identify Your Vision

Tough Enough leaders pick one of two main storylines for their vision that reliably mobilize people at scale:

1. Change the world
2. Be the best

If you want to reliably inspire strong fellowship in business, stick to one of these two narrative arcs.

Which vision narrative fits your team best: changing the world, or being the best at what you do?

What future are you trying to create?

What vision do you have for your organization?

Step 2: Identify Your Mission

Your mission names whom you serve, what you will build or do, the outcome you're targeting, and why it matters now. The language should be clear and simple.

Who does your organization serve?

What will your organization build or do?

What outcome is the organization targeting?

Why does what you're doing matter now?

An effective mission not only declares what you do, but also draws the no-go lines. Clearly spell out what you won't do, who you're not, and what isn't up for debate.

Your Mission: i.e. We help [who] by [what you do] so they can [outcome], because [why it matters now].

Step 3: Identify Your Values

Values define who you are, who you intend to be, and what matters most to you. Your core values are the handful of nonnegotiable beliefs you hold. They must inspire specific, observable behaviors that you can hire for, train, promote, and enforce. Choose values that give you the best shot at fulfilling your mission.

While vision and mission come from the leader, values are best developed with your leadership team and other key team members to foster a shared sense of ownership. If possible, answer the following questions with members of your team.

What observable behaviors do we want to hire, train, promote, and reward?

What 3–4 nonnegotiable beliefs give us the best shot at achieving our mission?

What behaviors or attitudes actively destroy trust or standards on our team?

What value are we willing to defend even when it costs us time, money, or comfort?

Define your core values.

Step 4: Identify Your Standards

Values name what matters; standards are the explicit rules and thresholds that define what “great” looks like. Standards define where the bar is: the required behaviors, the lines you don’t cross, and the consequences if you do. Tough Enough leaders set high standards and enforce them firmly and respectfully. Without clear standards, teams drift toward confusion, inconsistency, and mediocrity. People cannot consistently meet expectations that have never been clearly defined.

Define any standards you have with respect to your values, be explicit:

Value of Professionalism: What is on time? What is appropriate dress?

Value of High Quality: If quality misses the threshold, what do we do?

Value of Hard Work: What defines hard work? Time, effort, results?

Now let's define more general standards you have.

What behaviors are required from every team member? Complete the following statements:

On this team, we always

On this team, we never

Failure to uphold standards results in

Say your standards

Step 5: Share Your Manifesto With Conviction

Tough Enough leaders act as if the result is inevitable, put skin in the game, and secure consent upfront. They then teach, protect, and enforce the manifesto. Do this consistently, and the mission will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That's how manifestos become movements.

Your finalized manifesto should be printed out and posted on walls, included in job descriptions, onboarding materials, and circulated within teams as a tool for alignment, accountability, and incentivization.

Where are you currently treating your vision, mission, values, and standards as optional?
What would it look like to get more serious about your manifesto?

Tough Enough leaders obtain **consent** before demanding excellence. If expectations aren't clear upfront and teams haven't fully bought into the mission and standards, any push will feel like coercion and is likely to cause burnout. How will you make expectations explicit in your recruiting efforts, employment offers, and onboarding process?

Your manifesto lives vividly in your mind, and of course, in this workbook, a doc, a deck, and posters. But it also doesn't live in your people's minds by default. Your job is to **teach** it clearly, completely, and repeatedly. Show your people what "great" looks like with simple, recitable principles and concrete examples.

How will you actively teach your manifesto so it is understood, remembered, and applied across your organization? Be specific about how you will reinforce it in meetings, onboarding, training, and difficult conversations.

Belief in the manifesto is one of your organization's greatest assets. That means that people who question it should be challenged on the spot. Anything that contradicts your manifesto—whether habitual cynicism, chronic standard-breaking, or persistent mission drift—could weaken or corrupt it.

Describe a time when you did not enforce your standards but should have. What would you do differently now?

What are 2-3 concrete ways you will begin to enforce your manifesto when it is challenged, ignored, or violated?

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #1: Live Your Manifesto

- **Craft a manifesto people can rally around by telling a story worth believing in.** Codify where you're going, why the work matters, the values that drive behavior, and the standards that set the bar. Make the story bold, original, believable, specific, and enforceable so your culture has something real to embrace.
- **Create conviction by speaking and acting as though the future is already determined.** Speak in declaratives, remove hedging, paint vivid pictures of the future, and make visible commitments that cost you, tying your upside to mission outcomes, showing up in the hardest moments, and refusing to quietly derisk. Hold the winning story so firmly that your team begins to see it as destiny.
- **Earn the right to enforce standards by securing consent upfront.** Spell out the mission, pace, and expectations; invite a clear yes or no; and operationalize that clarity in hiring and onboarding. When people opt in with eyes wide open, you can drive accountability without coercion and build a culture that's committed.
- **Embed your manifesto by teaching it on repeat with clarity, respect, and concrete examples.** Translate standards into simple mantras, ritualize stories that demonstrate the values in action, and keep teaching long after you're tired of hearing yourself because that's when the culture finally starts teaching itself.
- **Defend your manifesto by quickly addressing corrosive dissent and enforcing standards the moment they slip.** Draw a sharp line between healthy critique and attacks on the manifesto, address doubt with respectful firmness, and remove those who can't recommit. Protecting belief and acting swiftly when it's threatened are what keep the culture strong and the bar high.
- **Tell a big story about the future but be honest about the present and past.** A manifesto must be welded to truth to succeed. Never let the manifesto outpace integrity. The moment a manifesto is used as an excuse for deception, cruelty, or law breaking, you've crossed into the Danger Zone.

Habit #2: Make Your Pursuit Relentless

There are no two ways about it: If you want to build something meaningful, you have to pursue it relentlessly. In the Tough Enough Zone, the pursuit is fierce and obsessive, yet sustained and calibrated. You work harder and longer than most people, but in a way that you can keep up for years, not just months.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #2: Make Your Pursuit Relentless

- **Drive relentlessly toward your mission and manage your energy like a pro.** Push harder and longer than most, expect seasons of deep imbalance, and build recovery into the system so you can sustain high output without sacrificing your body or your relationships.
- **Turn your dark side into fuel by owning it, naming it, and aiming it.** Notice the impulses that drive you, separate the ferocity from the compulsion, and channel that intensity into disciplined action instead of damage. Use tools such as RAIN, the Five-Minute Wait Rule, therapy, and coaching to refine your drive without dulling it.
- **Channel obsession into mastery by immersing yourself in your craft while installing guardrails that keep you sane.** Study your craft on a deep level, then apply deliberate restoration so you can sustain that obsession for the long haul.
- **Create sustainable urgency by pulling deadlines forward, cutting distractions, and resolving gridlock fast.** Use speed to sharpen focus, ship sooner, and learn faster.
- **Build momentum by making bold moves daily.** Ask for what others won't, take risks that feel uncomfortable, and create opportunities through decisive action. Boldness compounds. If you make enough gutsy moves, breakthroughs become inevitable.
- **Build resilience by reframing pain.** Treat stress and setbacks as training stimuli. Use the hardiness model: commitment, control, growth. Turn a no into an opportunity for capacity building and forging your competitive advantage.
- **Go hard, but go smart.** Take care of your energy: Push, rest, adjust, repeat. Tough Enough leaders focus on endurance, finding the highest intensity they can sustain for years. Set your RPE at a level that stretches you, build a resourcing system that keeps you upright, and avoid crossing from relentless to ruined.
- **Lead meetings with full attention by eliminating distractions.** No phones, no multitasking, no half presence. Set the standard in every room: When you're here, you're fully present. Presence builds trust, accelerates decisions, and signals what truly matters.
- **Use compartmentalization strategically:** Separate competing emotions from the task at hand, and revisit your feelings later. Structured focus beats emotional reactivity every time.
- **Strengthen your ego so it fuels conviction, not self-destruction.** Build earned confidence through reps, manage your inner critic so it sharpens rather than shreds you, and use therapy or inner work to stay resilient without dimming your ambition. A healthy ego and a healthy mind are powerful allies when you're leading relentlessly and trying to endure.

Habit #3: Assemble a Cult of Incredibles

What we call a “cult of incredibles” is a team of wildly talented mission converts. These “incredibles” are top-of-their-game performers who bring complementary skill sets to the table but align on toughness, standards, a willingness to go all in, and a belief that the work matters. Tough Enough leaders create *healthy business cults*: rallying and deliberately indoctrinating team members into an explicit, inspiring manifesto and way of working.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #3: Assemble a Cult of Incredibles

- **Form a healthy business cult.** Anchor everyone in a clear manifesto, indoctrinate through an intentional onboarding process, rigorously enforce performance and belief, engineer belonging, elevate the mission above any ego, institutionalize truth telling, sustain visible momentum, and guard against overreach. By doing this, you build a team that self-selects for greatness.
- **Map everyone’s zone of genius and develop a roster where strengths interlock, weaknesses are offset, and perspectives vary enough to spark creative friction.** Ensure uniformity in work ethic and toughness, along with diversity in thinking and skill sets: That’s how you assemble a winning team.
- **Recruit on offense by going directly to the source of top talent and building relationships with the gatekeepers who know the standouts.** If you want exceptional people, you must pursue them relentlessly rather than wait for them to apply.
- **Design a rigorous, transparent hiring system that screens for values, mission conversion, toughness level, and the unique profile that wins in your culture.** Blend structured tools (Topgrading, simulations, Bar Raisers) with gut level pattern recognition to distinguish true incredibles from talkers.
- **Retain your incredibles by offering them growth opportunities, genuine ownership, protection from mediocrity, and a mission worth sacrificing for.** High performers stay only when they’re stretched, recognized, rewarded, and surrounded by other high performers.
- **Practice warrior care because the mission demands it.** Hold each other to high standards, notice when someone’s off, support them in meaningful ways, and make the tough calls when performance slips. Tough Enough leaders also care for their families, friends, and communities.
- **Continually rebuild teams by opportunistically upgrading talent.** Fire with respect and dignity, refuse to settle for mediocre performance, and don’t repurpose poor performance to other areas of the company.

Habit #4: Harness Emotional Thunder

Great leaders use emotional thunder to effect change, reinforce standards, rally teams, and drive breakthroughs. In the Tough Enough Zone, leaders channel thunder that is respectful, well-timed, and focused on the work, not the person. It's grounded in facts, in service of the mission, and accompanied by clear requests. The ability to perceive and share emotions constructively, especially "negative" ones, is a core aspect of being Tough Enough.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #4: Harness Emotional Thunder

- **Intentionally harness emotion.** Use well-timed, mission-driven thunder to shift behavior without resorting to fear or abuse.
- **Anchor emotional expression within a simple framework of NVC.** Use Nonviolent Communication to say the hard thing clearly. State the fact, name the feeling, share your unmet need, and make the request.
- **Create productive tension with an NVC statement, then hold firm on your emotion until the work catches up.** Use tension deliberately to drive higher performance and foster breakthroughs.
- **Calibrate your thunder.** It should be rare, intentional, and aimed at the work. Thunder should be used like a scalpel, not like a sledgehammer. Learn when to nudge, when to jolt, and when to unleash the storm.
- **Use vulnerability strategically.** Share mistakes that build trust and reinforce standards, never doubts that drain conviction or destabilize the manifesto. The right vulnerability makes you relatable and strengthens your authority; the wrong kind broadcasts insecurity and erodes belief.
- **Praise excellence with real energy.** Ensuring your people feel it when things go right builds the trust that makes accountability effective when things go wrong. Genuine positive emotion energizes teams.
- **Balance the fear levels.** Excessive fear shuts people down; too little breeds complacency. Let fear arise naturally from devotion to the manifesto, not from intimidation. The Tough Enough path strikes a balance: enough fear to fuel urgency and motivation but never so much as to corrode the culture.
- **Choose the right medium for your message.** When emotions rise or the stakes are high, escalate to a live conversation. The tougher the message, the higher the communication channel. Emotional intensity gets distorted in writing. Leaders who know when to switch from typing to talking end cycles of misunderstanding.
- **Use somatic awareness to skillfully express your emotions.** Do this by noticing sensations, naming the emotion, and feeling it. If you can't share right away, first process your emotions, then speak live. Never let text convey your hardest messages. Deliver difficult news live, with clarity and respect.

Habit #5: Fiercely Pursue the Truth

Most leaders can't endure the strain and discomfort involved in excavating and working through the truth of a situation. The Tough Enough Zone calibrates candor to enable good decision-making and better performance. Conversations can be hard and debates are passionate, yet they stay focused on the work. Healthy dissent is welcomed, you prioritize facts over feelings, and you deliver feedback with full honesty.

Activity #2: How To Give and Receive Robust Feedback (Tough Enough Style)

Giving Feedback

Sharing feedback is among the most important and energy-intensive acts of leadership, requiring you to hold truth and care in the same hand. Many leaders either avoid feedback or weaponize it, but those who are able to master the art of giving feedback earn both results and loyalty.

The equation is simple: Every meaningful exchange must include Facts (what happened), Impact (why it matters to results, customers, or culture, and how you feel), Request (the clear action or behavior change you want), and Commitment (a mutual agreement on what will happen and by when). The other parts of the model, called amplifiers, sharpen these core elements. If you consistently execute those four main components, you'll be delivering feedback in a way that creates lasting performance gains without eroding respect.

Think of a current situation where feedback is required. Think through the core elements of effective feedback to reflect on how you will soon approach it. In practice, it's very helpful to have your main points bulleted out. A short draft before a meeting ensures precision on Facts, Impact, Request, and Commitment. Let's draft a sample script.

1. Facts

Describe specific, observable behaviors or events anchored in time (including dates, times, and verbatim quotes). Imagine recounting what happened, as if a video camera had filmed it: no opinions, no interpretations, no labels, no judgements.

(Ex. On the call, you spoke over Dana twice and committed to delivering the dashboard by Friday without checking with engineering.)

2. Impact

Link the behavior to concrete consequences (results, customers, trust, risk, rework) and name your emotion(s) (likely a combination of disappointment, concern, and frustration) to convey appropriate weight. Your tone here is what creates tension.

(Ex. When we talk over our clients, they feel unheard; I was embarrassed. Also, the unvetted Friday commitment creates delivery risk and undermines credibility. I'm concerned because we've missed deadlines before when we committed without alignment.)

3. Request

Specify the behavior change you want and include a clear owner and due date.

(Ex. Please message Acme today to reset expectations, and share with me a prep checklist for future calls by Thursday at 4:00 p.m.)

4. Commitment

Confirm who is doing what by when. This will always include a specific person responsible for the work, a behavior or action, a deadline, and an agreed-upon time to check back in on progress. Then write it down somewhere shared (ideally an email, calendar invite, or project management software).

(Ex. You will reset expectations with Acme by EOD today and send me the call-prep checklist by Thursday at 4:00 p.m. Let's do a ten-minute review on Friday to go over everything.)

The following amplifier components can be used before, during, or after the core elements. When the feedback is especially challenging, use these amplifiers to help you deliver your message clearly and in a way that lands. Use most or all of this framework for especially challenging situations.

1. Permission and Context (Before)

Start by asking if it's a good time to talk about a specific situation. This helps establish the context for the conversation and ensures the other person is ready to engage.

(Ex. Alex, do you have five minutes to review feedback from yesterday's Acme call?)

2. Facts

Describe specific, observable behaviors or events anchored in time (including dates, times, and verbatim quotes). Imagine recounting what happened, as if a video camera had filmed it: no opinions, no interpretations, no labels, no judgements.

(Ex. On the call, you spoke over Dana twice and committed to delivering the dashboard by Friday without checking with engineering.)

3. Impact

Link the behavior to concrete consequences (results, customers, trust, risk, rework) and name your emotion(s) (likely a combination of disappointment, concern, and frustration) to convey appropriate weight. Your tone here is what creates tension.

(Ex. When we talk over clients, they feel unheard; I was embarrassed. Also, the unvetted Friday commitment creates delivery risk and undermines credibility. I'm concerned because we've missed deadlines before when we committed without alignment.)

4. Own Your Part (During)

Clearly state your contribution to the issue without hedging. This models accountability and reduces defensiveness.

(Ex. I approved the agenda late. That helped create the conditions for you to jump in and commit early. I'll fix that by holding a ten-minute alignment huddle before external meetings going forward.)

5. Manifesto Anchor (During)

Tie the feedback to what you're building together and your vision, mission, values, and standards to underscore the importance and reason for sharing it.

(Ex. Our standard is "listen first, promise second"—that's how we become the most trusted partner in our space.)

6. Request

Specify the behavior change you want and include a clear owner and due date.

(Ex. Please message Acme today to reset expectations, and share with me a prep checklist for future calls by Thursday at 4:00 p.m.)

7. Shared Reality (After)

Ask the receiver to briefly reflect back what they heard to ensure you're on the same page. This is an important step. Without a shared reality, it's hard to effectively solve problems.

(Ex. Does this make sense from your side? Could you reflect back what you're hearing so we're on the same page?)

8. Enablement (After)

Identify what they need to execute (time, information, people, templates) and clarify the support you will or will not provide.

(Ex. What do you need to make this happen?)

9. Belief (After)

Express confidence in their ability to meet the bar, anchored in specific strengths or prior wins. Avoid empty cheerleading.

(Ex. You're strong with clients and you course correct fast. I trust that you can turn this into a win.)

10. Commitment

Confirm who is doing what by when. This will always include a specific person responsible for the work, a behavior or action, a deadline, and an agreed-upon time to check back in on progress. Then write it down somewhere shared (ideally an email, calendar invite, or project management software).

(Ex. You will reset expectations with Acme by EOD today and send me the call-prep checklist

If this seems like a lengthy conversation, know that by being thorough at the outset, you're saving time down the road. Five minutes in real time or during your next one-on-one to close the loop is all it takes.

Receiving Feedback

The true measure of being in the Tough Enough Zone is how quickly you can metabolize challenging feedback for you into a visible course correction without drama or delay.

Be honest with yourself, how well do you think you receive feedback?

Most leaders say they want candor, but teammates who speak up about a leader's mistakes often pay a steep price. Tough Enough leaders create the opposite environment. As a leader, you must understand that how you receive feedback sets the tone for your entire culture. Make it easy for customers and teammates to share the hard stuff with you and have the courage to apply that information—it will strengthen your leadership, product, and company.

Have you ever been side-swiped by a triggering piece of feedback? How did you react?

The solution when you get hijacked by difficult feedback is to turn to the Five-Minute Wait Rule: simply say, "Thank you, let me take that away and get back to you," and then either leave the room to take some time to cool down or move on to something else if you can. If you can hang in the conversation, use those five minutes to ask clarifying questions. Once you've digested the feedback and feel grounded again, come back to share what you heard and what you'd like to change.

Tough Enough leaders ensure that feedback reaches them by actively seeking it out. Make it a habit of consistently asking for it by conducting a monthly feedback check with each direct report by asking three questions: What's working? What's not working? What's one thing I could do better as your manager? Beyond this process, you can ask targeted questions: "Does anything feel confusing about my plan?" "Where did I slow us down last week?"

What is one question you can commit to asking your teammates during monthly feedback checks?

If you consistently execute the four core components of sharing feedback and make pursuing the truth safe for your team, you'll be giving and receiving feedback in a way that creates lasting performance gains without eroding respect.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #5: Fiercely Pursue the Truth

- **Make truth telling nonnegotiable so your team can make more accurate decisions and perform better.** Choose truth even when it stings; discomfort is the price of better decisions and a culture that wins.
- **Create a culture where candor is expected and safe by encouraging people to speak up and not punishing them when they do.** Nail this, and the truth can surface early, often, and unapologetically. Make truth telling a habit, not a heroic act.
- **Stand in the fire by choosing discomfort over dysfunction.** Hard conversations often feel awkward, scary, and high stakes. The way through is to notice the fear, name it, and speak anyway. With practice, you build evidence that candor works and that you can handle the heat.
- **Encourage, healthy passionate debate that leads to reality, and reality is how you win.** Teams make better decisions when ideas collide, not when they tiptoe around one another. To foster this, establish ground rules, designate a constructive dissenter, and encourage people to argue about the work, not attack the person.
- **Fight hard within your team for the best idea, then move forward as one.** Disagree and Commit means you debate fiercely, make the call, and then own it as if it were your idea.
- **Pair intensity with disciplined listening.** When emotions run hot, use a protocol like NVIDIA's Listen, Understand, Answer approach, restating what you heard before responding, to slow the moment down just enough for genuine understanding.
- **Close every conflict with repair.** Tough Enough teams don't let interpersonal residue linger; instead, they validate each other's experiences and take responsibility for their part.
- **Turn on feedback by taking the time to learn how to do it well.** Deliver Tough Enough feedback with the structure of Facts » Impact » Request » Commitment. Then reinforce it with amplifiers such as Context and Permission, Owning Your Part, a Manifest Anchor, Shared Reality, Enablement, and Belief. Don't be lazy, talk about the work rather than the person, be precise with your praise, name all relevant emotions, share your private judgments, incorporate consequences, and skillfully intervene in public. Your team deserves it.
- **Seek out and reward incoming feedback.** Uncover the truth from your team members and customers. Lower the cost of sharing healthy dissent by thanking people for voicing difficult information and by doing the inner work to receive feedback well.

Habit #6: Build Your Accountability Stack

Accountability is the heartbeat of every high-performing culture. The accountability stack is a framework for building your unique system of layered, reinforcing mechanisms that make performance nonnegotiable. This system always includes clear goals, a single owner for each goal, progress tracking, a steady operating cadence, positive and negative consequences, and inspecting and escalating underperformance. The Tough Enough Zone strikes a sound balance between pressure and compassion. Goals are ambitious yet achievable and established collaboratively. Accountability is consistent, humane, and data driven.

Activity #3: Build Your Accountability Stack

The right accountability stack for you depends on your company, stage, leadership style, and the culture you want to create. What matters is that it's intentional and consistent, not improvised.

Step 1: Start with Clear Goals

Instead of a balanced scorecard, you want to build an *imbalanced* one with a monomaniacal focus on the most essential metrics. Toughness here means choosing the few goals that matter and saying no to everything else.

What does success really look like at the company, team, and individual level?

Step 2: Define Ownership

Once you've set clear goals, assign direct ownership. For every initiative, designate a single-threaded owner or directly responsible individual (DRI).

Does your team have any goals right now that are not assigned an owner? Identify these goals and choose an owner for each.

Step 3: Track Your Progress

Most leaders lack the discipline and toughness to sustain long-term, continuous tracking. Tough Enough leaders track both inputs (the work being done) and outputs (the results being achieved). Building an effective scorekeeping system based on these metrics takes time.

What is one tangible next step you can take toward improving your scorekeeping?

How will you commit to establishing a clear line of sight between action and result? Draft a project tracker listing each initiative alongside a single name and deadline. Schedule check-ins with employees to assign projects.

Step 4: Establish Your Operating Cadence

Your operating cadence is the rhythm by which your team or company runs its core activities. The tempo is set by how often you meet, check in, get updated, plan, review, and adjust course to keep moving toward what matters most.

Your operating cadence will typically include the following:

- Daily or Weekly Stand-Ups (ten to fifteen minutes): Short, high-frequency syncs to share progress, flag blockers, and keep execution tight.
- Weekly Tactical Meetings (sixty to ninety minutes): Focused on operational issues, solving problems, reviewing leading metrics, and making fast, unblocked decisions.
- Monthly or Quarterly Business Reviews (two to three hours): Holistic reviews of performance against goals, used to surface what's working, what's offtrack, and where to shift resources.
- Quarterly Planning Sessions (half-day to full day): Bigger-picture sessions to align on company strategy and priorities, set new goals, and break them down into team objectives.

- Performance Reviews: (biannual or annual) (forty-five to sixty minutes): Formal one-on-ones to assess results against role expectations and values and agree on a concrete development (and, when applicable, compensation/role) plan.
- Retrospectives or Postmortems (sixty to ninety minutes): Used to extract insights from wins and failures alike.
- War Rooms (as long as needed, typically days): Small, ad hoc groups assembled temporarily to tackle urgent, high-stakes problems with speed.

Which of these meetings does your organization not use that you'd like to deploy?

What aspects of your current operating cadence need to change? Why?

Step 5: Use Positive and Negative Consequences

Consequences that people value or want to avoid raise the stakes of the work and have been proven to boost motivation. Tough Enough leaders must be willing to enforce two kinds of consequences:

1. The consequence of doing great work
2. The consequence of falling short

How do you reward and amplify excellence within your organization?

What happens when someone in the organization continues to miss expectations, or a team can't deliver on its core responsibility? Are you clear, fair, and consistent with your negative consequences?

How long do you tolerate underperformance before it triggers a feedback conversation, an inspection, an ultimatum, or a firing?

Moving forward, what needs to change with how you deploy negative consequences?

Step 6: Inspect Problems and Escalate

Tough leaders are masters of courageous intervention. They know how to step in, identify the problem, narrow the focus, and increase intensity.

What is a real, identifiable problem within your organization right now that needs an intervention?

If that problem doesn't get resolved, how do you plan to enact your established negative consequences?

Building your own accountability stack begins by asking yourself a simple question: *What kind of leader do I want to be?* Prioritize what you value—whether it's innovation, craftsmanship, or customer obsession—and engineer your stack to reinforce it. Being Tough Enough requires structure, and Tough Enough leaders build their stacks with intention.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #6: Build Your Accountability Stack

- **Create a shared reality through measurement.** This is the bedrock of good management. Course corrections, good decisions, robust feedback, and personnel choices all count on accurate scorekeeping. Accountability and measurement must be structural, not personal. You do this by building your accountability stack.
- **Setting goals is the starting line of performance.** Define exactly what success looks like at the company, team, and individual levels, then translate those outcomes into one to three SMART goals for each person. Be precise with dates, numbers, and owners to eliminate ambiguity.
- **Keep ownership singular, not shared.** Assign a DRI for every initiative to prevent accountability from diffusing into the group.
- **Make progress visible to manage it.** Make your scoreboard a simple traffic light dashboard that stays current. Assign a DRI to update inputs and outputs before every review meeting. Cocreate the targets with your people, and track effort and results side by side.
- **Generate momentum by adopting a steady operating cadence.** Establish a consistent rhythm of stand-ups, tacticals, reviews, and planning sessions, and maintain it even when it gets hard. Start every meeting with a clear intention and a review of the metrics to ground the team in reality.
- **Set consequences to establish stakes that will increase motivation.** Define rewards and penalties up front so people know exactly how the game works. Recognize great work and reward it; when expectations aren't met, follow through with fair and consistent consequences.
- **When performance slips, dig for the truth.** Ask targeted questions to uncover the root cause, challenge recurring stories, and anchor the conversation using data. Once the real issue is clear, set a specific correction plan ("who does what by when") and track it relentlessly. If progress stalls, escalate with tighter focus, higher frequency, and stronger consequences.
- **Build an accountability stack that reflects your deepest priorities.** Bezos engineered a data-driven stack, Musk built one around pressure, Xu used speed as his organizing principle, Mrs. B used simplicity and low cost, and Oppenheimer relied on values as the backbone. Choose the one or two variables that matter most, then build rituals, metrics, and consequences that reinforce them daily.
- **Model your misses with your team so they see what it looks like to own underperformance without blame or deflection.** Name it, own your part, commit to a concrete correction, and move forward. They will follow suit.

Habit #7: Adopt Warfare Tactics

Applying proven warfare tactics will help you run your company more effectively in high-stakes moments. The Tough Enough approach applies these tactics with discipline and ethics, providing a playbook for critical moments where speed, clarity, and coordinated execution determine outcomes. Leaders in the Tough Enough Zone deploy war tactics with the right intensity for the moment. A war room, for example, is a high-pressure, disciplined sprint conducted to solve an important problem or meet a key benchmark right away.

Tough Enough Takeaways for Habit #7: Adopt Warfare Tactics

- **When the moment is mission critical, use warfare tactics.** Tough Enough leaders borrow the best moves and deploy them when the stakes demand it.
- **Establish war rooms to transform urgent problems into breakthroughs.** Assemble a small, cross functional squad with one goal and one DRI, and clearly communicate the stakes and urgency. Have clear decision rights, a single live dashboard, a frequent cadence, and dated commitments. Disband once the exit criteria are met.
- **Enact secrecy selectively by locking down projects susceptible to imitation, shrinking the circle of access, running tests in private, and making confidentiality integral to the craft.** Done right, secrecy can build hype, camaraderie, and perceived importance while protecting your special sauce.
- **Choose a common enemy by fostering good spirited competition against a foe larger than you.** This can sharpen focus and rally your team in a way the status quo can't.
- **Set a disciplined launch cadence to build momentum and compound innovation.** Whether annual, biannual, or every few months, a predictable rhythm compels teams to deliver visible, meaningful progress on a schedule. Launch events leverage public accountability and rally your company to regularly ship high-quality products.
- **Make bold, scrappy guerrilla moves by picking a small arena and establishing a strong, concentrated presence until momentum snowballs.** Go hard without crossing ethical or legal boundaries.

Adapted from *Tough Enough: How to Lead a Team to Greatness Without Being a Jerk* by John Baird and Matt Hunter.
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