



Retired Marine: Overcoming the Agony of War

By Nancy Capistran, PCC, CPC

I was asked to address a group of CEOs about the importance of business culture. After my presentation, I had the pleasure of talking with several of the attendees. One of the participants pulled me aside to ask if I would be willing to help him on a “special project” that was near and dear to his heart. He innately knew that he needed direction from a strategic planning and implementation standpoint, but he knew that he needed to get me to “buy in” if he were to propel his “project” forward. He used his storytelling expertise to share information with me about his background. He explained that he had been raised by a single mom in a financially strapped household. He was able to survive his inner-city neighborhood because he possessed savvy street smarts. As soon as he was old enough to enlist, he was off to Vietnam. He witnessed unimaginable death and destruction due to the daily onslaught of fierce weapon fire. Day after day, he lived a nightmare by filling green body bags with bodies of his fellow Marines who had been ripped apart by projectiles and weaponry. The survivor’s guilt and emotional turmoil haunted him for years because he had received the “gift of life” unlike many of his fellow Marines. Those coming home in body bags had paid the greatest price – their lives. When he had completed his tour of duty, he was adamant that he would find a way to make a difference; to never forget those who had paid that final price. His passion was to improve the quality of life for children, especially those who came from tough, underprivileged backgrounds like he had.

His thirst for knowledge spurred him to acquire a Doctorate in Philosophy from a prestigious university. He received a host of awards but it still wasn’t enough for him; he was preoccupied with stretching his skills to make an even bigger impact. This former Marine was passionate about creating sustainable models of school success that would improve administrator and teacher effectiveness as evidenced by measurable student achievement goals. Additionally, he wanted to assist with the creation of school communities to support a climate and culture that would promote peace and economic prosperity throughout the world.

He started his own consulting practice, but, without a blueprint to guide him, he didn’t know how to move the process forward. This is where I came in. I helped him to clarify his vision and create action steps towards achieving his objectives. He realized that if he truly wanted more, he had to stretch outside of himself and ask for help. He understood that change required change, and that if he really was interested in advancing his objectives to achieve more impactful results, he needed to learn a myriad of new skills. He did not know if there was a prospect of success, but he continued to persevere. He had learned early on to utilize tough times as a springboard to transform his experiences to reach new heights. Every uphill battle he experienced allowed him to assimilate more skills to be added to his ongoing achievements. His innate ability to turn problems into interesting opportunities supported him as he continued to evolve.

Nurturing and gaining resilience to bounce back from the hardships in our day is key. Innovation requires the courage to take calculated risks. Failure is often a necessary step on the path to greatness. Expect failure, remain committed to your values and beliefs, stay focused, and persevere. The most effective leaders gain insight even when they stumble. Overcoming the agony of defeat makes us more purposeful. Take strides to advance your path forward. To expand your reach, you will need to be brave, curious, and adaptable. Give yourself permission to do something new and different by stretching outside of your comfort zone.



About the Author: Nancy Capistran is a best-selling author, an award-winning, internationally certified executive coach, motivational speaker, and trusted advisor. She is Principal of [Capistran Leadership, LLC](#), and [Crisis Interception, LLC](#). Nancy's best-selling international leadership book: [Open Your Eyes and LEAD](#) shows readers how to become a positive force in the world and how to balance and manage omnipresent tensions while striving for leadership excellence. Capistran shares inspirational stories and advice from her 30+ year career to help both seasoned and emerging leaders develop intentionality while maintaining their core values and beliefs even when life's pressures dictate otherwise.