

THE BIG IDEAS

The Ultimate War

Is within. Let's win it. Together.

Never Quit

But saying no is always an option.

Faith in People

Is my religion.

Your #1 Bank Account

Is yourself.

What's YOUR Gouge?

Mine? ARETÉ = HEROIC.

The Gouge!

How to Be Smarter Than the Situation You Are In

BY ADMIRAL BOB HARWARD · POST HILL PRESS © 2024 · 176 PAGES

“THE GOUGE!

In US Navy jargon, the Gouge is essential information. When my father showed up on the ship, he got the Gouge from his fellow officers and senior enlisted sailors. They told him what he needed to know and care about and what he didn't. Only worry about the important stuff—the stuff that will keep the ship's crew alive and save lives. The Gouge is the heart of the matter. They had a saying: 'Live by the Gouge or die by the Gouge.' Live by it because it helps you be smarter than any situation you might find yourself in. Without the Gouge, you could die or, even worse, fail your team and the mission. ...

The real Gouge is much deeper and more complicated than these simple derivatives. It was created to do more than help people cut corners or find a simple solution. The Gouge is the contract we all have with humanity—sharing the best of everyone for the collective well-being of all. It was always intended to be information you could believe in, people you could trust, and organizations you could rely on because it came from people who wanted the best for you, and the good for all. It is building people and our communities. We're on Earth for a short time, never more evident than in combat. We've got to take care and look after each other if we're going to make it. As my father always said, at the end of the day, you will be measured more by what you did for others than by what you did for yourself. The Gouge is a testament to this philosophy.”

~ Admiral Bob Harward from *The Gouge!*

*“An ounce of Gouge is worth
a pound of knowledge.”*

~ Admiral Bob Harward

I got this book after my dear friend, Captain Daryle Cardone (the commanding officer of the aircraft carrier the USS RONALD REAGAN) recommended it to me.

Daryle told me that Admiral Bob Harward was one of his mentors and that he is an *extraordinary* human being. He had previously recommended a book by another one of his mentors, [Admiral Mike Manazir](#). I LOVED his book [Learn How to Lead to Win](#), so I immediately got this one. It's FANTASTIC. (Get a copy [here](#).)

Admiral Bob Harward is a retired three-star Admiral and US Navy SEAL. The wisdom he shares in this book is based on the 40 years of highly decorated military service followed by another decade as a top executive in the global defense industry.

After leading invasions of Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003, Harward served on the National Security Council under President George W. Bush, commissioning the National Counterterrorism Center. Before retiring from the military in 2013, Harward was Deputy Commander of US Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia, under [General James Mattis](#).

The book is PACKED with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share some favorites so let's jump straight in!

" If Gouge is about the information that links all of us together, our purpose is the bedrock on which Gouge is built. It determines who you are, reinforces your belief, and ultimately determines your success. In the military, we reinforce that purpose of doing what our nation needs to do to remain a country whose purpose is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is what makes us a great nation, in that we are willing to use our most precious assets—our people—to fight for these same principles anywhere in the world."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

" No one loves you more than you. Do all the things that come with that: take care of yourself, invest in yourself, take the adventures, don't hesitate, and don't overthink it."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

P.S. Another book I got on Daryle's recommendation? [Call Sign Chaos](#) by General Mattis.

P.P.S. Admiral Harward's book reminded me of [Admiral McRaven's](#) autobiography [Sea Stories](#). Check out the Notes on that and all his other books we've featured including: [Make Your Bed](#), [The Hero Code](#), and [The Wisdom of the Bullfrog](#). And, while we're talking about Heroic wisdom from US Navy Admirals, check out our Notes on [Admiral James Stavridis' To Risk It All](#).

THE ULTIMATE WAR

"I have been retired from the military for nearly a decade, and yet I have never been more concerned for our military and what is happening in the ranks due to the ungodly rate of suicides. We have never invested more resources into the training and education of our military forces in our history, and we have the most professional, well-prepared, and capable fighting force in the world. But there's a huge lingering problem.

A testament to this is the low casualty rate over twenty years of constant conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other locations. We have lost more than 7,000 service members overseas since September 11, 2001. While each is tragic, it is almost a miracle that the numbers are so low, as at no time in our history of warfare, much less over a twenty-year period, have we had such a low rate of casualties. I mourn each and every life and will always have the families who live with that loss in my heart and thoughts.

But if those numbers are shockingly low, the deaths in our other war are shockingly high. During the same time—2001 to 2021—we have had an unprecedented epidemic of suicides, losing over 38,000 of our military members and other veterans to this tragic and avoidable fate. Regardless of your prioritization—mission first, people always, or vice versa—it is clear we are losing the war for our people. There is no doubt that we have the best trained and most professional military force in our history. But we need to be cognizant of the fact that the personal lives of military members are just as important as their professional lives, and that well could be the more important battle we are fighting.

We must never forget we are in the human development business."

The intro quote at the beginning of this Note is from the first chapter—which is called "An Ounce of Gouge Is Worth a Pound of Knowledge." The passage above is from the second chapter, called "Mission First, People Always."

As I read that, my heart ached for the 7,000 families who lost a loved one in combat over the last 20+ years. I silently said a prayer and recommitted to serving those families and striving to give back in equal measure. As I read about the 38,000 (!) families that lost a loved one from suicide, my heart ached even more. As Admiral Harward says: *"We are losing the war for our people."*

His comment that *"we need to be cognizant of the fact that the personal lives of military members are just as important as their professional lives, and that well could be the more important battle we are fighting"* made me think of the work we have been blessed to do with the U.S. Special Operations Command.

In the talks I have given to their top commanding officers and service members, I *always* emphasize the fact that the ULTIMATE war isn't *out there.* It's within each of our own minds.

And... To be clear: We're not just losing the war with our service members. The number of suicides globally is nothing short of heartbreaking.

In her book *Change Your Diet, Change Your Mind* (Note coming soon!), Harvard-trained nutritional psychiatrist [Dr. Georgia Ede](#) tells us: *"We're in the midst of a global mental health crisis. Nearly one billion people are living with a mental health disorder, including one in five of the world's children and adolescents. Every year, 700,000 people take their own lives, and suicide is now the second leading cause of death among people in their teens and twenties."*

"The training [of Hell Week] is as hard on your body as it is on your mind. But at the end of the day, instructors aren't counting reps or checking times. They are testing one thing—desire. Do you want to be a SEAL? Hell Week will get the answer and if you make it, one thing is certain: you'll never quit."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

Depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy nearly three billion dollars a day. And these numbers don't include the countless people with milder health concerns like brain fog, irritability, and joylessness. Psychiatric problems of all kinds are becoming so commonplace that we are beginning to think of poor mental health as normal and inevitable."

This is all part of a much longer chat, but helping solve this crisis is one of the core aspects of our Mission with Heroic and drives me every day. I don't care what YOU do professionally. From my vantage point, we're ALL in the human development business.

P.S. [Marsha Linehan](#) is THE world's leading suicidal prevention scholar and practitioner. She created Dialectical Behavior Therapy and wrote a memoir called [Building a Live Worth Living](#) in which she shares her experience with conquering her suicidal ideation and behaviors while creating an approach that has helped countless others do the same.

Her #1 tip? She tells us: *"When someone is in distress, the best compassion you can give is to be effective in helping them."*

P.P.S. Check out [Conquering Depression 101](#) and [Conquering Anxiety 101](#) for more on my own story of how I conquered those demons.

NEVER QUIT, BUT SAYING NO IS ALWAYS AN OPTION

"It didn't help I am ODD: organizational defiance disorder."

There isn't a bureaucracy or process I can't hate. It's something children grow out of at six or seven years old. I never grew out of it. Fighting the bureaucracy. Bucking the system. Going my own way was my North Star. It worked out for me for over forty years, but not when I got to flight training in Pensacola. I got through the ground school and completed a half dozen flights before I tapped out. There was no way I would stay in the Navy if I had kept flying. I dropped my request to transfer. 'I don't think this lifestyle is for me,' I told my instructor. ...

All that to say, the SEAL methodology pounds the 'never quit' mantra, but if you follow the Gouge it is going to challenge you to dig deep into what your purpose is and your contract with humanity. It's going to force you to live up to your maximum potential. Not everyone can be a SEAL, pilot, or ship driver. If you quit something, fine, move on to something else. It will just open other doors for you and those doors... are pretty damn good adventures. If I had stayed in aviation or ships, I never would've had the career I had. Quitting doesn't end you. It starts you."

That's from chapter #7: "Never Quit, But Saying No Is Always an Option."

Before we get to work: Gotta love the "ODD" of "organizational defiance disorder." (Hah.)

As I read that, I thought of my own journey as a young man. As we've discussed, I started my career at Arthur Andersen—doing audit and tax work and financial planning and consulting. I think I still hold the record for most service lines in a year: four. I THREW UP driving home from work (on the side of the 405 freeway in Los Angeles) in my first week on the job.

That, clearly, wasn't for me. So, I studied for the LSAT and went to law school—thinking a stamp from a Top 10 school would do the trick. And... I threw up moving into my apartment in Berkeley. Oops. That wasn't it either. After dropping out of law school, I moved back in with mom. The only thing I knew I wanted to do was coach a Little League Baseball team.

Did that. Came up with an idea for my first business (bringing all those sports teams online), won a business plan competition at UCLA, raised \$5 million and built the leading platform in our space before selling that business at 26 and having enough time and money to figure out what I wanted to do when I grew up which, over the last 25 years of NEVER QUITTING (but often pivoting!) on my Mission to serve YOU, led me to typing these words in the 705th Philosopher's Note I've created.

"If the Gouge is a contract with humanity, then that contract extends to every community. Living the Gouge meant finding common ground with all races, creeds, sexes, and classes."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

"Accountability and confrontation are aligned. If you're going to avoid confrontation, you'll never hold anyone accountable, and I see a lot of that in the business world. To really be successful, to reach the gold standard, you need both confrontation and accountability. You need to be able to harness, understand, and leverage confrontation in a constructive, productive manner as part of your accountability."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

But... NONE of that would have happened if I didn't have the courage to "dig deep" into what my purpose was and figure out how I was going to fulfill my "contract with humanity."

That deep digging forces us to live up to our maximum potential. How's yours?

P.S. I also thought of this gem from [Carlos Castaneda](#) (check out the Notes on [The Wheel of Time](#)): "Anything is one of a million paths. Therefore, a warrior must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if he feels that he should not follow it, he must not stay with it under any conditions. His decision to keep on that path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. He must look at every path closely and deliberately. There is a question that a warrior has to ask, mandatorily: 'Does this path have a heart?'"

Note: He follows that up with: "But how will I know for sure whether a path has a heart or not? 'Anybody would know that. The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point very few men can stop to deliberate, and leave the path.'"

P.P.S. Once we get clear on what we're here to do, then we must go ALL IN on fulfilling the Mission. This is when the "never quit" wisdom from the SEALs becomes indispensable.

At the beginning of this chapter, Admiral Harward tells us: "I was taught early on that there was no ringing the bell. No matter how much things sucked, never quit. Never stand up and stagger over to the ship's bell and ring it. In the SEAL community, quitting is a mortal sin.

The training is considered some of the hardest in the world with the highest attrition rates of all military training. The Navy always beats us up about it because we start with a class of 130 or more and by the end, we give the fleet back ninety to a hundred sailors, costly in time and resources as it is repeated every few months.

Before BUD/S, everyone is looking for the best gouge to make it through. But the best advice I got, and give, is don't quit. No matter how hard it is. No matter how much they demand of you. No matter how hypothermic you get. Make it to the end of the evolution. Make it to the next meal. Make it to the end of the day."

P.P.P.S. Another great example of a quit-pivot-DON'T QUIT is [Mark Divine](#). He pivot-quit his successful career as a CPA on Wall Street to become the Honor Man of his SEAL class. Check out our Notes on [The Way of the SEAL](#), [Unbeatable Mind](#), [Uncommon](#), and [Staring Down the Wolf](#).

FAITH IN PEOPLE IS MY RELIGION

"That faith is integral for the Gouge to work. You must trust and believe in one another. It's different than what most people think of faith. This isn't religious faith because that is predicated on trusting the unprovable. This faith is placed in the bond between two people, casting your lot with your fellow man in hopes of achieving a common goal.

Faith was something I learned through the Gouge. My family didn't really go to church. The Gouge kind of became my religion, but that doesn't mean I didn't have faith. Growing up in a Muslim country, I learned faith through the eyes of Muhammad's followers. The morning call to prayer. The hustle and bustle of the mosque on Fridays. There is no escaping God in the Middle East, especially among the Muslims who are fond of blaming everything from a late bus to war on God's will. *Inshallah*. God willing, something will happen.

I believe there's someone, but I don't really believe in a religion of one over the other. If you want to be a Buddhist, I'll tell you, more power to you. If you want to be a Catholic, more power to you. If you want to be a Muslim, more power to you. That's all fine. But every now and then, I did get proof of the faith of a bigger kind, of not the people on this planet, but whoever God or Allah or Buddha, whoever that is, I've gotten proof of that. I'm the goddamn luckiest person in the world, or someone's helping me along the way. And everyone I know has told me they don't

"It's not the change that makes it hard for service members to take off the uniform-hell, we're used to deploying and changing jobs frequently-it's the change in purpose. Purpose is the engine that drives you."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

"For the Gouge to work, you need a little faith. This isn't faith in something unseen. It's taking stock of the man or woman next to you and having faith that they are going to do what needs to be done for the common good. I've always had faith in the chain that connects society. That human need for community. It is a building block of the Gouge, but more than that, it is essential because if you don't have faith in one another, there is no trust, no passing of information or guidance, and the whole system breaks down."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

know anyone who's got more holly up their ass than me. I think it comes from how I treat people and the things I do.

I grew up with more faith in people than religion. Every good deed I did for someone they returned in kind. Anything people did for me, I tried to do good for them as opposed to religion, which was nebulous. I never could really touch or get proof of a higher power. My faith in people has proven correct, that is the proof I needed in a higher power. If I went into every relationship believing that we're all trying to do our best, then I got better results than if I went in skeptical or cynical. Trust but verify, but, you know, trust. With most people, verification comes naturally.

Remember, they're all sharing their experiences to help each other be smarter than the situation they're in. That could be in warfighting or just everyday life. But that sharing of the Gouge is that contract we all have with one another. Earth is really no different than a destroyer floating alone in the sea. We're all in this together."

That's from chapter #6 called "Faith in People Is My Religion."

Admiral Harward grew up in Iran where his dad (a former Navy captain) advised the Iranian Navy from 1968 to 1979. He shares some incredible stories from his childhood that shaped his perspective on the world.

He also shares some incredible stories of Marine Corps [General Jim Mattis](#) (with whom he worked extensively) and points to him as a model of exemplary leadership. As Harward says: "He operated at a completely different level. Mattis focused on people with passion and purpose. He was the kind of guy who could stop and talk to people and the person would walk away thinking he was Mattis's best friend, and not because he got played but because at the moment Mattis was his best friend."

One of the stories Harward tells to make his point? When Mattis was the commander of U.S. Central Command, he went to work on Christmas Day. He was a bachelor and his mom and brothers were on the other side of the country so he had nowhere else he needed to be. A young airman was on desk duty at headquarters. Mattis sent him home and took over his duties.

Harward says: "Who does that kind of stuff? Only someone who believes people are just as important—even more important—than the mission. That airman went home to his family feeling important. He knew his commander cared about his well-being and in doing so, he reaffirmed their purpose to take care of one another and complete the mission."

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT BANK ACCOUNT IS YOURSELF

"And a day without exercise is wasted in my mind. In my former profession, they gave me two hours a day to work out, and I've always maintained that. I still do two hours of strenuous exercise a day, like clockwork, as hard as I can go. I love the physical adrenaline rush. I love how good it makes me feel. I love competition, so I leveraged that into a career. Every day, I also check my weight. I check my resting pulse, and I check my blood pressure. I keep honing my instrument so that when I need it, it responds.

Shit breaks. I've been shot, I've been stabbed, I have been knocked out on recurring occasions. They found a hole in my heart. I've detached biceps. I've torn Achilles. But I'm sixty-seven and I'm still physically smoking most of the SEALs I know.

I treat my body like the most important asset and investment I have, and I religiously take care of it. I invest all I can into it, planning for a lifetime of dividends. ... Investing in yourself is the single most important bank account you have."

That's from chapter #9: "Your Most Important Bank Account Is Yourself" in which, among other things, Admiral Harward tells us about his incredibly inspiring, history-making parachute-landing on Mount Everest. He was 63 when he made that jump.

" We fail to balance professional training with the same kind of personal training. And that's some of why the Gouge is so important. We're focusing on that personal attention. Those are tools and processes that help you balance that professional training with those personal skills you need to take care of your family, to take care of yourself, and to understand what you're going to do with your money so that when you do leave the service, you're in a position where you have choices."

~ Admiral Bob Harward

Here's a funny line from the story: A friend asked him: "Do you want to go on an adventure with us?" He says: "That question is like catnip for me. Was there any doubt about what I was going to say? My mindset is always all the reasons why and none of the reasons why not. I didn't hesitate to say yes."

The great Heroic mythologist [Joseph Campbell](#) came to mind as I typed that. In [A Joseph Campbell Companion](#), he says: "The warrior's approach is to say 'yes' to life: 'yea' to it all."

Are YOU saying YES to life? And are YOU investing in your mind and body and Soul Force like it's the single most important bank account you have? Fantastic. Carry on.

P.S. [Byron Katie](#) echoes this wisdom in [Loving What Is](#) where she tells us: "The greatest stock market you can invest in is yourself. Finding this truth is better than finding a gold mine."

WHAT'S YOUR GOUGE?

"My purpose with the time left in this world is to help others make the Gouge part of their lives. But the Gouge is personal. This book spells out how I used it—to great success—and it might not be exactly how you use it. But that is what makes it powerful.

The Gouge is very simple. It is information used to create a better outcome for all. It is a mindset that starts with finding that one thing that gets you excited and using that as fuel to help others find that spark. It is owning your actions and keeping others accountable for their actions. It is about banding together and taking on the bigger world, be it a massive ocean or that tricky relationship with a co-worker.

Life sometimes feels insurmountable and isolating. It is all about perspective. At the end of the day, the Gouge helps manage life and in doing so creates a better world. My method on how to do that is in these pages. Go find yours."

Those are the final words of the book.

As I typed that, I thought about the Gouge I am committed to embodying and sharing. I don't have to look far for the answer. On my left forearm, in one-inch tall letters, I see HEROIC tattooed to my body. On the right forearm, I see the one-inch tall ARETÉ.

My Gouge is simple. I believe EVERY (!) SINGLE (!!) ONE (!!!) of us is called to activate our Heroic potential—to forge the strength to give the world all we've got. And, I believe the way we do that is to close the gap between who we're *capable* of being and who we're *actually* being moment to moment to moment. When we live with ARETÉ we are HEROIC.

What's YOUR Gouge? And how can YOU live in integrity with that a little more TODAY?

It's Day 1. We're ALL IN. Let's go!!!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Co-Founder + CEO of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation and the author of [Areté: Activate Your Heroic Potential](#). He's 50% Philosopher and 50% CEO and 101% committed to helping create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by the year 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](#).

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