**Episode 27 – Active Communication**

**INFORMATION:** Discuss the importance of active communication for both leaders and followers.

**History Segment: Lt. (SEAL) Michael Murphy**

**For actions during Operation Red Wings on Jun. 28, 2005**

On June 28, 2005, deep behind enemy lines east of Asadabad in the Hindu Kush of Afghanistan, a very committed four-man Navy SEAL team was conducting a reconnaissance mission at the unforgiving altitude of approximately 10,000 feet. The SEALs, Lt. Michael Murphy, Gunner’s Mate 2nd Class (SEAL) Danny Dietz, Sonar Technician 2nd Class (SEAL) Matthew Axelson and Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class (SEAL) Marcus Luttrell had a vital task. The four SEALs were scouting Ahmad Shah – a terrorist in his mid-30s who grew up in the adjacent mountains just to the south.

Under the assumed name Muhammad Ismail, Shah led a guerrilla group known to locals as the "Mountain Tigers" that had aligned with the Taliban and other militant groups close to the Pakistani border. The SEAL mission was compromised when the team was spotted by local nationals, who presumably reported its presence and location to the Taliban.

A fierce firefight erupted between the four SEALs and a much larger enemy force of more than 50 anti-coalition militia. The enemy had the SEALs outnumbered. They also had terrain advantage. They launched a well-organized, three-sided attack on the SEALs. The firefight continued relentlessly as the overwhelming militia forced the team deeper into a ravine.

Trying to reach safety, the four men, now each wounded, began bounding down the mountain's steep sides, making leaps of 20 to 30 feet. Approximately 45 minutes into the fight, pinned down by overwhelming forces, Dietz, the communications petty officer, sought open air to place a distress call back to the base. But before he could, he was shot in the hand, the blast shattering his thumb.

Despite the intensity of the firefight and suffering grave gunshot wounds himself, Murphy is credited with risking his own life to save the lives of his teammates. Murphy, intent on making contact with headquarters, but realizing this would be impossible in the extreme terrain where they were fighting, unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own life moved into the open, where he could gain a better position to transmit a call to get help for his men.

Moving away from the protective mountain rocks, he knowingly exposed himself to increased enemy gunfire. This deliberate and heroic act deprived him of cover and made him a target for the enemy. While continuing to be fired upon, Murphy made contact with the SOF Quick Reaction Force at Bagram Air Base and requested assistance. He calmly provided his unit’s location and the size of the enemy force while requesting immediate support for his team. At one point he was shot in the back causing him to drop the transmitter. Murphy picked it back up, completed the call and continued firing at the enemy who was closing in. Severely wounded, Lt. Murphy returned to his cover position with his men and continued the battle.

An MH-47 Chinook helicopter, with eight additional SEALs and eight Army Night Stalkers aboard, was sent is as part of an extraction mission to pull out the four embattled SEALs. The MH-47 was escorted by heavily-armored, Army attack helicopters. Entering a hot combat zone, attack helicopters are used initially to neutralize the enemy and make it safer for the lightly-armored, personnel-transport helicopter to insert.

The heavy weight of the attack helicopters slowed the formation’s advance prompting the MH-47 to outrun their armored escort. They knew the tremendous risk going into an active enemy area in daylight, without their attack support, and without the cover of night. Risk would, of course, be minimized if they put the helicopter down in a safe zone. But knowing that their warrior brothers were shot, surrounded and severely wounded, the rescue team opted to directly enter the oncoming battle in hopes of landing on brutally hazardous terrain.

As the Chinook raced to the battle, a rocket-propelled grenade struck the helicopter, killing all 16 men aboard.

On the ground and nearly out of ammunition, the four SEALs, Murphy, Luttrell, Dietz and Axelson, continued the fight. By the end of the two-hour gunfight that careened through the hills and over cliffs, Murphy, Axelson and Dietz had been killed. An estimated 35 Taliban were also dead.

The fourth SEAL, Luttrell, was blasted over a ridge by a rocket propelled grenade and was knocked unconscious. Regaining consciousness some time later, Luttrell managed to escape – badly injured – and slowly crawl away down the side of a cliff. Dehydrated, with a bullet wound to one leg, shrapnel embedded in both legs, three vertebrae cracked; the situation for Luttrell was grim. Rescue helicopters were sent in, but he was too weak and injured to make contact. Traveling seven miles on foot he evaded the enemy for nearly a day. Gratefully, local nationals came to his aid, carrying him to a nearby village where they kept him for three days. The Taliban came to the village several times demanding that Luttrell be turned over to them. The villagers refused. One of the villagers made his way to a Marine outpost with a note from Luttrell, and U.S. forces launched a massive operation that rescued him from enemy territory on July 2.

By his undaunted courage, intrepid fighting spirit and inspirational devotion to his men in the face of certain death, Lt. Murphy was able to relay the position of his unit, an act that ultimately led to the rescue of Luttrell and the recovery of the remains of the three who were killed in the battle.

This was the worst single-day U.S. Forces death toll since Operation Enduring Freedom began nearly six years ago. It was the single largest loss of life for Naval Special Warfare since World War II.

The Naval Special Warfare (NSW) community will forever remember June 28, 2005 and the heroic efforts and sacrifices of our special operators. We hold with reverence the ultimate sacrifice that they made while engaged in that fierce fire fight on the front lines of the global war on terrorism (GWOT).

CITATION:

FOR CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY AND INTREPIDITY AT THE RISK OF HIS LIFE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY AS THE LEADER OF A SPECIAL RECONNAISSANCE ELEMENT WITH NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE TASK UNIT AFGHANISTAN ON 27 AND 28 JUNE 2005. WHILE LEADING A MISSION TO LOCATE A HIGH-LEVEL ANTI-COALITION MILITIA LEADER, LIEUTENANT MURPHY DEMONSTRATED EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN THE FACE OF GRAVE DANGER IN THE VICINITY OF ASADABAD, KONAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN. ON 28 JUNE 2005, OPERATING IN AN EXTREMELY RUGGED ENEMY-CONTROLLED AREA, LIEUTENANT MURPHY’S TEAM WAS DISCOVERED BY ANTI-COALITION MILITIA SYMPATHIZERS, WHO REVEALED THEIR POSITION TO TALIBAN FIGHTERS. AS A RESULT, BETWEEN 30 AND 40 ENEMY FIGHTERS BESIEGED HIS FOUR-MEMBER TEAM. DEMONSTRATING EXCEPTIONAL RESOLVE, LIEUTENANT MURPHY VALIANTLY LED HIS MEN IN ENGAGING THE LARGE ENEMY FORCE. THE ENSUING FIERCE FIREFIGHT RESULTED IN NUMEROUS ENEMY CASUALTIES, AS WELL AS THE WOUNDING OF ALL FOUR MEMBERS OF THE TEAM. IGNORING HIS OWN WOUNDS AND DEMONSTRATING EXCEPTIONAL COMPOSURE, LIEUTENANT MURPHY CONTINUED TO LEAD AND ENCOURAGE HIS MEN. WHEN THE PRIMARY COMMUNICATOR FELL MORTALLY WOUNDED, LIEUTENANT MURPHY REPEATEDLY ATTEMPTED TO CALL FOR ASSISTANCE FOR HIS BELEAGUERED TEAMMATES. REALIZING THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATING IN THE EXTREME TERRAIN, AND IN THE FACE OF ALMOST CERTAIN DEATH, HE FOUGHT HIS WAY INTO OPEN TERRAIN TO GAIN A BETTER POSITION TO TRANSMIT A CALL. THIS DELIBERATE, HEROIC ACT DEPRIVED HIM OF COVER, EXPOSING HIM TO DIRECT ENEMY FIRE. FINALLY ACHIEVING CONTACT WITH HIS HEADQUARTERS, LIEUTENANT MURPHY MAINTAINED HIS EXPOSED POSITION WHILE HE PROVIDED HIS LOCATION AND REQUESTED IMMEDIATE SUPPORT FOR HIS TEAM. IN HIS FINAL ACT OF BRAVERY, HE CONTINUED TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY UNTIL HE WAS MORTALLY WOUNDED, GALLANTLY GIVING HIS LIFE FOR HIS COUNTRY AND FOR THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. BY HIS SELFLESS LEADERSHIP, COURAGEOUS ACTIONS, AND EXTRAORDINARY DEVOTION TO DUTY, LIEUTENANT MURPHY REFLECTED GREAT CREDIT UPON HIMSELF AND UPHELD THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL SERVICE.

**OPERATION REDWING KIAs -**

On June 28, 2005, three of four SEALS on the ground (Murphy, Dietz, Axelson) were killed during combat operations in support of Operation Red Wing. ON the same day, a QRF of eight Navy SEALs and 8 Army Night Stalkers were also killed when the MH-47 helicopter that they were aboard was shot down by enemy fire in the vicinity of Asadabad, Afghanistan in Kumar Province.

**Navy SEALs**

**SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.**

1. Lt. (SEAL) Michael P. Murphy, 29, of Patchogue, N.Y.
2. Sonar Technician (Surface) 2nd Class (SEAL) Matthew G. Axelson, 29, of Cupertino, Calif.
3. Machinist Mate 2nd Class (SEAL) Eric S. Patton, 22, of Boulder City, Nev.
4. Senior Chief Information Systems Technician (SEAL) Daniel R. Healy, 36, of Exeter, N.H.
5. Quartermaster 2nd Class (SEAL) James Suh, 28, of Deerfield Beach, Fla.

**SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 2, Virginia Beach, Va.**

1. Gunner’s Mate 2nd Class (SEAL) Danny P. Dietz, 25, of Littleton, Colo.

**SEAL Team 10, Virginia Beach, Va.**

1. Chief Fire Controlman (SEAL) Jacques J. Fontan, 36, of New Orleans, La.
2. Lt. Cmdr. (SEAL) Erik S. Kristensen, 33, of San Diego, Calif.
3. Electronics Technician 1st Class (SEAL) Jeffery A. Lucas, 33, of Corbett, Ore.
4. Lt. (SEAL) Michael M. McGreevy Jr., 30, of Portville, N.Y.
5. Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (SEAL) Jeffrey S. Taylor, 30, of Midway, W.Va.

**Army Night Stalkers**

1. 3rd Battalion, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), Hunter Army Air Field, Ga.
2. Staff Sgt. Shamus O. Goare, 29, of Danville, Ohio.
3. Chief Warrant Officer Corey J. Goodnature, 35, of Clarks Grove, Minn.
4. Sgt. Kip A. Jacoby, 21, of Pompano Beach, Fla.
5. Sgt. 1st Class Marcus V. Muralles, 33, of Shelbyville, Ind.
6. Maj. Stephen C. Reich, 34, of Washington Depot, Conn.
7. Sgt. 1st Class Michael L. Russell, 31, of Stafford, Va.
8. Chief Warrant Officer Chris J. Scherkenbach, 40, of Jacksonville, Fla.
9. HQ Company, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne), Fort Campbell, Ky.
10. Master Sgt. James W. Ponder III, 36, of Franklin, Tenn.

**I. Introduction**

 A. Attention (Everyone sucks at communication. Communication is the root of all leadership problems.)

 B. Motivation (Junior Sailors should understand what active communication is and the different ways it affects their relationships with leaders and followers in order to leverage this tremendous tool.)

 C. Overview (Somehow I was allowed to get away with not doing an episode on communication. The insanity of that is because COMMUNICATION IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL IN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP. I can’t even begin to properly express it’s importance but also the ridiculous amount of time I have spent honing this skill. And I still suck at it. I have literally sat through meetings that were only happening due to poor comms. Hours lost. You take your eye off the mission. You fumble the goals. You neglect your development and that of your subordinates. You stunt organizational growth. It’s an extremely grey, layered concept that you will never fully master but must ALWAYS be consistently improving. You’re never “THERE”.)

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**II. Body**

 A. Main Point 1 (What is Active Communication?) – So I used the word “active” partially because it’s common terminology but also because “active” implies action. You should be engaged. Taking ACTION to ensure your communication is effective and that you are always getting better at it.

 1. Sub-point (Definition)  a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. Simply the transfer of information from on place to another. It gets complicated because really, it’s from ONE PERSON to ANOTHER PERSON. People are complicated.

 B. Main Point 2 (The Process) – The basic process of communication starts with a sender and a receiver. You, as a sender decide where you want your message to go – the receiver. The receiver can be an individual or a group. Once you decide where to send it, you need to decide HOW to send it. That’s your medium. A medium can be many different things, email, phone, text, fliers, announcements, meetings, etc. But it’s a very important choice, which I’ll elaborate on. Once you choose your medium you send your message! Easy right? Wrong. When YOU, as an individual, send your message your do what’s called “encoding”. Which means when the receiver gets it, they have to “decode” your message in order to receive it. You can imagine the types of issues that can happen there, in addition to barriers thrown up to your message even BEING RECEIVED so that it can then hopefully be successfully decoded! Hot mess, but let me elaborate on some of these points.

 1. Sub-point (Sender/Receiver) – Sender is you. Always you. The fun part is you’re always sending, which is something lost on most. It’s simple to understand that when you CHOOSE to send a message that you are, in fact, a sender. However, the very definition of leading by example is that they are always watching you. Which means, whether you like it or not, your appearance, attitude, tone, words and overall behavior are ALWAYS SENDING A MESSAGE. It’s incredibly important that you are aware of this message and that you are constantly crafting it. Because in addition, you and them and all of us are ALWAYS RECEIVING. Always.

 2. Sub-point (Mediums) – So I mentioned some earlier, but there are a limitless number of mediums in which you can craft and send a message. It’s very important that you first think of what you’re trying to accomplish. Identifying this, how can you best get your message across? Who is your audience? What medium do they best receive? Understand how that medium will effect your message. It factors into your encoding and their decoding. Understand that ahead of it and you will increase your chance of effectively getting your message across.

 3. Sub-point (Encoding) – So I keep saying it, but what the hell is “encoding”. It’s you. It’s your context. You background. Your accent. Your chosen words, tone and body language. It all figures in. It’s how you choose to frame your message and the medium in which you decide to communicate it. You medium will encode a message for that medium, not all mediums. Encoding gets further complicated because of the layers. There are layers. What you words literally translate to, what you imply with your tone (purposeful or not), what you add in with your facial expression, body language, etc. The “read between the lines” crap. We do that. Sometimes on purpose and sometimes accidentally, but we’re doing it. Be aware of it and use it to your advantage. DENYING IT SIMPLY MEANS YOUR MESSAGE GETS DECODED INCORRECTLY AND NOT RECEIVED.

 C. Main Point 3 (Barriers) – Probably the most complex piece. There are so many barriers to effective communication. Every previously mentioned step of communication, if used improperly, can become barriers to communication. If that’s not bad enough, there are many others that you need to be aware of

 1. Sub-point (Know your audience) – I’m going to lump a lot of common barriers into this because I feel like if you know your audience – “know your people”, you will instinctively address these. But you have to KNOW THEM WELL. We’ve talked about this previously but you can’t frame your message the way YOU LIKE IT. Who cares what you like. If you’re trying to inspire a group to follow, you need to speak to them on their wavelength. What do THEY CARE ABOUT? What do THEY WANT MOST? Do you have any language barriers (English as a second language?)? English, with all it’s slang and ridiculous metaphors and alternate meanings can be incredibly confusing to someone that’s just learning it. Make sure they understand! Even if it takes you spending a little extra time after ensuring they got the message. Understand your borders. Politics, religion, ideology, etc. has no place in the work place. It will instantly shut someone down if you attack his or her belief system. DO NOT GO THERE, even jokingly. Cursing is another. I struggled a lot with this as an instructor and still do. I let them fly, it’s just how I grew up and if I wasn’t in the position I am in I wouldn’t really care. I’m fine with it. But not EVERYONE is, which can create barriers. That’s why I don’t curse on this podcast. I want to achieve the furthest reach possible. I want this message to be universal and help as many young Sailors and leaders that it is capable of. So why would I insert that barrier? Some other barriers can be loud noise, distracting images or props, cell phone usage, poor body language or eye contact, etc. The list is endless.

 2. Sub-point (Feedback) – The way you get around these obstacles is FEEDBACK. After doing the research, and understanding barriers and how they can hinder effective comms you then solicit and accept ALL OF THE FEEDBACK. Get as much as you possibly can from your audience and critics. Ask people. I LOVE asking my junior guys to criticize me. TRY THAT. It’s really eye opening. Not everyone with just lace you with the hard truths but some will give you a little nugget that will melt your brain. Ask your superiors! They are NOT SCARED. I ask other Chiefs and my COB, Department Head and CO. People who’s opinion’s I value. Not always fun, sometimes your pride will take a hit, but WHO CARES! You come out better than you were. That stuff is leadership development GOLD. Another one that I mentioned in a previous podcast is VIDEO! I got this from being an instructor, but VIDEO YOURSELF SPEAKING. Even if you do it in the comfort of your own home, alone, it will be very, very constructive. You will catch those mannerisms, the unconscious filler words, the ridiculous ticks and poor body language. THE VAST MAJORITY OF YOU DON’T EVEN KNOW YOU’RE DOING. You can fix SO MUCH accidental mis-coding of your message by understanding the unspoken communications that are making it through. They’re a HUGE PART of what is “heard”, or “decoded” on the receiver side of communications.

 D. Main Point 4 (Why is communication so important?): It’s how human relationships form. It’s how we inspire a group of people to do a thing. It’s how we translate ideas and share stories. It’s how we learn. It’s the most important leadership principle there is. It’s a skill. Some have a flare for it, are natural communicators. But you still need to work at it. The great ones are always the hardest workers. When you understand that this is as critical to your success as it is, work on it. And not just your success, but your TEAM’s success. None of it works without strong communication up and down the chain of command and within your team.

**III. Conclusion**

 A. Summary (We talked about…)

 1. What communication is…

 2. The process of communication and the barriers to it…

 3. And why YOU SHOULD CARE about effective leadership communication…

 B. Re-motivation (Junior Sailors should understand what active communication is and the different ways it affects their relationships with leaders and followers in order to leverage this tremendous tool.)

 C. Closing – Active communication is listed on every command climate survey EVER. SERIOUSLY. It’s an issue everywhere. It’s an issue at EVERY LEVEL of every team based organization EVER. You can be GOOD or BAD at this, but you’ll never be PERFECT and as a result it will be a weak area in your organization. Because a Sailor with ALWAYS FEEL SLIGHTED, MIS-INFORMED OR OUT OF THE LOOP. And that’s your fault. That’s OUR fault. The HAVOC, the absolute path of destruction left behind by poor communication, by neglecting or not understanding how this works and why it’s important is evident in what we’re seeing unfold in our Navy. We see it on the cover of the Navy Times and we see it in our day to day interactions. We feel it in our frustrations and displeasure with what’s happening in our organizations and units. It can make you feel hopeless and helpless. So we learn. We under stand. We contribute based on that knowledge to the solution. We do that by effectively communicating.

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