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Governor Jesse Ventura

You send a boy off to the Navy when he's 18 and he's going to come back a changed man. I sure did.

Between the ages of 18 and 23 are probably your most impressionable years of your life. That's when you become an adult, and the military makes you grow up very quickly.

It's the responsibility. The military doesn't accept excuses--when they tell you to get the job done, you're expected to go out and get it done, even if it means putting your life on the line.

The military isn't for everyone. You need the right mindset. That means you have to have courage and you have to learn to accept that you will take orders from a chain of command. Once you've accepted that, you'll do fine. They're going to break you down and rebuild you. That's what they did to me, and I've been enjoying the results ever since.

One of those results is my work ethic. You can't go through the Navy without a positive work ethic, and that's where I got mine. You learn to get the job done for the satisfaction of doing it, certainly not for the money. (Everyone knows you're not going to get rich by joining the military). With that work ethic, I learned the importance of personal values and personal integrity.

The Navy molded me from the first day of boot camp. Boot camp scares the pants off you when you're 18, but my drill instructor knew I intended to be a SEAL, so he took it easy on me. "There's nothing I can do to you here that will even compare to what those guys'll do to you," he said. And he was right. Boot camp wasn't bad, but I knew I'd pay later, and I did.

How does my Navy experience come into play in my current role, as governor of Minnesota?

For starters, as much fun as this job is, I do face unpleasant situations from time to time. But no matter how tough it seems, I'll think, "this is nothin' compared to BUD/S training." And nothing ever *is* as tough as what I went through to become a SEAL. An awful lot of those jobs are unpleasant, but you realized that the job had to get done, and someone had to do it. So with that in mind, whatever task I'm facing here in St. Paul seems a lot easier.

It also might have something to do with the fact that in the SEALS, every day, there's a chance that you'll have to defy death. I know it took me a little while to re-adjust to life after having been in that position. It's definitely an adjustment the average person doesn't have to go through, but once you've done it, having a pressure-packed job like governor doesn't seem so difficult.

Life becomes more precious as you get older, and I think back to my Navy experiences and appreciate having defied death. And I still have to do it every so often, just to keep that adrenaline going. I have to go out and get the pucker factor—defying death helps me enjoy life, and makes it that much more satisfying.

People will say, “how do you put up with some of the stuff that comes with being governor?” I’ll tell them that while the decisions I make can affect millions of people, I’m still not holding their lives in my hand. There’s pressure, but it’s certainly a different kind of pressure than what I felt in the military.

Every time I make a decision, my Navy experience is having an effect. The military taught me not to second guess my decisions. Sure I’ll re-evaluate them if something’s not working, but I’m not going to look back on a decision I made and kick myself over it. You second guess yourself in the SEALs and it’s all over.

The decision to join the Navy changed my life forever. When it comes to forming who I am today, that experience had as much influence on me as my mother and father did.

