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Tempe creative firm uses Navy SEALs to help train

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The Zion & Zion public relations and advertising agency in Tempe has gone all in with the U.S. Navy SEALs.

Employees and managers aren't required to crawl through mud or swim through frigid waters, but Aric and DuGue Zion's Tempe-based agency has adopted many tenets touted by former SEALs Jocko Willink and Leif Babin in their book, "Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win."

The Zions like the message of communication, collaboration, quick decision making and getting a better understanding of others' motives. That includes employees and clients, Aric Zion said.

Understanding how motives and solutions don't always mesh with others is one of the big takeaways he's gotten from working with Willink and Babin.

"Decisions on the fly, teamwork, coordination, collaboration, awareness of your peers," Aric Zion said. "That's discipline."

Navy SEALs' physical training is extreme with its physical demands, but it also tests resolve. The Tempe firm even had the former SEALs come in and talk to employees in addition to having new and existing staff members read the book.



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Aric and DuGue Zion have incorporated lessons from U.S. Navy SEALs in their public relations and advertising agency.

"They know our organization," Aric Zion said.

Zion & Zion has 40 employees, and its clients have included DMB Associates, the Arizona Center development in

downtown Phoenix, Barro's Pizza and Goodwill Industries.

Aric's wife DuGue Zion said the agency doesn't have the hierarchy seen in other PR, advertising and

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marketing companies. Aric Zion said that makes problem-solving, teamwork and empowerment even more important.

"Our organization is flat. All our competition has hierarchy," he said, stressing that flat structure encourages creativity and innovation. "You can't go run and hide under a manager."

The Zions said they try to set themselves apart from other communications firms by working with experts at Stanford University as well as LunaMetrics, a top Google analytics firm.

The pair say many companies pay lip service to or try to implement cultural changes with limited success and longevity. Sometimes they bring in speakers, hold conferences or training sessions that don't really pay off in the end.

"They're entertaining, but nobody retains anything," Aric Zion said.