

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "The Harder I Fall, The Higher I Bounce"

Max James, Issaquah, Washington: Made For Success Publishing (2021)

Review By: Kurt Wendt

Think you have what it takes to achieve immediate success as an entrepreneur in the business world? Think again, at least according to highly successful entrepreneur, veteran combat pilot, philanthropist, and author Max James. In his book, *The Harder I Fall, The Higher I Bounce* James lays out his own long and winding road to success, emphasizing character and leadership, and asserting—as the title implies—there are likely to be many failures along the way.

James' book may be primarily intended for hopeful entrepreneurs, but really has something for everyone as he chronicles his life's journey from modest beginnings growing up on a farm in West Tennessee, to graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, serving as an Air Force rescue pilot in Vietnam, and ultimately venturing into the civilian sector and business world. Max James does an exceptional job telling his story, resulting in a book that is not only educational, but entertaining as well. Some of his best life lessons are found in the most humorous and even self-deprecating moments.

Besides being interesting and applicable to a wide audience, what sets James' writing apart are the themes of character and leadership which are woven throughout. He describes learning honesty and values from his father, growing up on the farm. He recounts the painful lessons of accountability as a leader at the Air Force Academy, being relieved from a cadet command position for the actions of one individual subordinate to him, learning that you can delegate authority but you cannot delegate responsibility. And, ultimately, he applies those lessons of leadership and character to become a decorated combat pilot, and eventually build and lead a billion-dollar business.

In one particularly poignant example, James recounts his first combat rescue mission in Vietnam. After locating a downed pilot in the jungle and establishing radio contact, James and his helicopter crew make multiple attempts to pick up the pilot. But each time, despite friendly air support and their own heroic efforts, heavy enemy fire thwarts their attempts and the

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helicopter crew must depart, knowing the pilot will either be killed or captured. In spite of this crushing blow, James manages to bounce back, ultimately saving 10 downed pilots during his tour in Vietnam—the epitome of living honorably, lifting others and elevating performance.

Not satisfied with simply being a successful military aviator and entrepreneur, James goes on to describe the great joy of his philanthropic efforts, particularly focusing on character and leadership programs at the Air Force Academy. He offers that you should “put your money where your heart is,” and he has certainly put that advice into practice. One cannot help but feel his passion for developing young men and women as leaders of character, ultimately translating that drive into a

design, fundraising, and construction effort resulting in the iconic Polaris Hall that the Air Force Academy’s Center for Character and Leadership Development now calls home.

JCLD readers will also want to continue to the Appendix, where an interview with Max James from a previous issue of the *JCLD* further delves into his passion for character and leadership development. Overall, James’ book is part wild ride, part heart-warming story, and all about character and leadership. Whether you are an aspiring entrepreneur, a future military leader, or simply interested in developing leaders of character, *The Harder I Fall, The Higher I Bounce* is definitely worth the read.