



# LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND

The only survivor of the helicopter crash that inspired the movie “Black Hawk Down” explains that for a business to excel, all employees must be successful.

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



**T**he phrase “battle hardened” could have been invented for Michael Durant.

Durant was the lone survivor of the Battle of Mogadishu during which his helicopter crashed and he became a prisoner of Somalis. His story was retold in the 2001 movie “Black Hawk Down”.

Durant was in Somalia during October 1993 as part of Operation Restore Hope, a United Nations effort to restore order to a country ravaged by civil war and famine.

While on a mission in Mogadishu, a helicopter went down, killing the two pilots but sparing the five men in the back of the vehicle. Durant piloted one of the Black Hawk helicopters that responded to the crash. Unfortunately, Durant says, there was no good solution to address that type of problem.

“The commander is forced to do the wrong thing,” Durant says. “He sends another helicopter in.”

Durant and his team were flying in the area while a third hovering helicopter

put on the ground. That helicopter is hit by rocket-propelled grenade, and though damaged it is able to finish delivering its crew and head back to base.

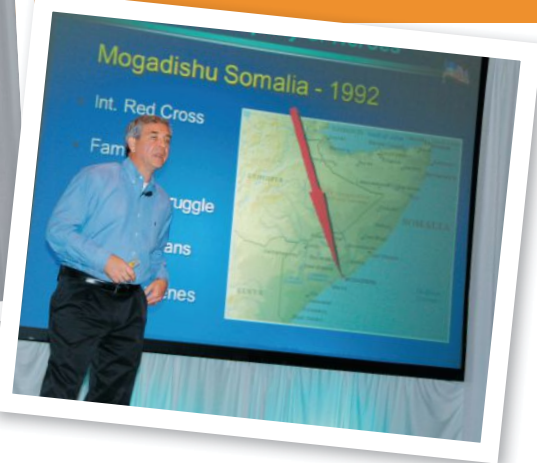
“The commander wants me to orbit the target, fly around it so that I can use our mini-guns, the guns on the side of the aircraft to support the troops on the ground,” Durant says. “We made it around about three times.” At that point Durant’s MH-60L Black Hawk helicopter, dubbed Super Six Four, is hit by its own rocket-propelled grenade and goes down.

“We came down so fast, spinning so violently I couldn’t see anything,” Durant recalls. “I could see brown earth, blue sky, the horizon line. I was doing everything I could to keep the thing upright. We impacted on the wheels. That’s the only reason I’m still with you here, today.

“We hit so hard that my right femur breaks off on the edge of the seat and my spine is crushed — not the disks — the bones actually crash into each other, and one of them crush 30%.”

Remarkably every one of the crewmembers of his helicopter survived the crash.

“However, we are in a very desperate situation,” Durant recalls. “We’re



Durant addressed an audience of RISE (Responsible Industry for Sound Environment) attendees in September in Sarasota, Florida.

eye socket. They throw dirt in my face, wrap a rag around my head, pick me up and start carrying me through the streets and take me into captivity.”

Durant was released after 11 days of captivity, but not before he was subsequently shot and forced to make a video confession, both of which are against all International protocols for treating prisoners of war.

Durant retold his story at last month’s RISE (Responsible Industry for Sound Environment) annual conference at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Sarasota, FL. It was a long way from his time as a prisoner of rebels in Mogadishu, Somalia.

injured badly, we’re isolated and we’re surrounded. It’s a matter of minutes before we’re overrun.”

Two Delta Force snipers riding in a helicopter circling overhead saw that Durant and possibly the others were alive and radioed operations headquarters asking permission to “go in.”

Durant explains operations initial reaction.

“Back at operations, they look at the situation and they basically reach the conclusion that this is not a survivable situation. We’re not going to allow them in.”

The soldiers repeat the request to go in to attempt a rescue and are again denied. As the two men see Somali forces closing in on the downed helicopter and their comrades, they make a third appeal, and the commander back at the operations center finally gives them permission. They’re dropped off and make their way alongside the helicopter.

“The first time I see them, they’re standing next to me at the crash site,” Durant says. “I think it’s over. There’s a reaction force that’s here, they’re going to load us up on vehicles, get us home, patch us up and we’ll be flying again in a few months. What I didn’t realize was there was only two of them.

“It took the Somalis about 15 minutes to overrun the site, even with the (two Delta Force soldiers, Durant and the surviving crew members) “doing what we could to hold them off.”

The brief battle continues until the Americans run out of ammunition. At that point only Durant is still alive. And the Somalis take over the site.

“I was absolutely convinced I was going to die,” Durant says. “I essentially played possum. Whatever they wanted to do, I let them do. They tried to rip my gear off; they were pulling my boots off. As some point the femur goes outside the back of my leg. They break my cheekbone, my nose, my

## LESSONS LEARNED

Durant’s story isn’t just riveting (to watch a video of him telling the story go to: [www.landscapemanagement.net/durant](http://www.landscapemanagement.net/durant)). The story is also illustrative of what can go wrong when leadership fails.

“There is only one item I would say is not an A-plus on this mission: strategic resources,” Durant says. “And just that one item causes this thing to unravel.”

The commanders on the ground in Somalia had requested tanks to support the various missions, but had been denied by those focusing more on budgets than battles. They simply were not as familiar with the operation.

“So, when you think about leadership and you think about responsibility, you think about teamwork and you think about the people behind the scenes — the ones who don’t have the glamour jobs, it has to include all of that. Everybody has to be successful for the overall organization to be successful. Everybody’s got to pull his weight. If decisions are made incorrectly at any point within the organization, yeah, you might get by for a while, but sooner or later, you will fail. Hopefully the results won’t be on the scale they were in Somalia.” **LM**

## DURANT’S “KEYS TO MISSION SUCCESS”

### 1 LEADERSHIP

### 2 RESOURCES

- Personal
- Organizational
- Strategic

### 3 TACTICS

- Military
- Political

### 4 TRAINING

- Flight
- Physical
- Soldier
- Cultural

### 5 PLANNING

- Detailed planning at all levels
- Continuous reassessment