



From Submarine Officer to CEO: Leadership Lessons Under Extreme Pressure

Imagine you're 3,500 feet below the ocean's surface. No sunlight. No margin for error. One mistake could end hundreds of lives.

That's where Camilo Rueda first learned how to lead.

Today, Camilo is the CEO of **Aeropost**, a logistics tech leader powering cross-border e-commerce across Latin America and the Caribbean. But long before he stepped into the boardroom, he was a young officer in the U.S. Navy submarine force, facing life-or-death decisions deep underwater.

Recently, Camilo joined host **Ben Fanning** on *Lead the Team* — a podcast ranked in the **Top 2% globally**. [On the show](#), Camilo revealed the leadership tools forged in nuclear submarines and refined at McKinsey that continue to shape how he runs organizations today.

Here are the most powerful stories and lessons from that conversation.

The Mistake That Almost Ended His Career

Camilo recalls one of the darkest days of his Navy career.

As a junior engineering officer on a nuclear submarine, he trusted a technician who suggested skipping procedure on a maintenance task. “Just trust me, we don’t need all the paperwork,” the sailor said.

Camilo gave the green light.

Minutes later, disaster struck. A valve was opened that should never have been touched. It was a critical error in a nuclear environment where standards are absolute.

“At that moment,” Camilo admits, “I thought my career was over.”

He faced a choice:

- **Bury the mistake** and hope it never surfaced
- **Raise his hand** and admit the error

He chose integrity. He went straight to the captain.

The fallout was painful: he was removed from his position, forced to re-qualify, and endured an earful of reprimand. But ultimately, he regained the captain’s trust — and the experience became one of his defining leadership lessons.

“Integrity means doing what’s hard, not what’s easy. Easy would have been hiding it. But ownership built trust I carried into every role since.”

Lesson for Leaders: Leaders don’t earn trust by being flawless. They earn it by taking ownership — especially when it hurts.

Why “Don’t Bring Me Problems” Is Terrible Leadership Advice

One of Camilo’s strongest opinions is against a phrase many executives still use:

“Don’t bring me problems, bring me solutions.”

He believes this is one of the **most dangerous cultural messages** leaders can send.

Why? Because it encourages employees to hide issues rather than surface them.

“In the submarine world, hiding problems could be catastrophic,” he said. “In business, it may not sink the ship, but it can still derail entire teams and strategies.”

Instead, Camilo champions a different mantra:

👉 *“Bring me the problems, and let’s solve them together.”*

By normalizing vulnerability and transparency, leaders create a culture where people escalate issues early — before they spiral into crises.

Lesson for Leaders: Don’t make your team fear raising their hand. Make it clear that surfacing problems is an act of ownership, not weakness.

The Submarine Calm That Every CEO Needs

When the stakes are high, panic spreads fast.

Camilo has built a reputation as a **calm, steady leader** — a trait forged underwater where cool heads meant survival.

On the podcast, he explained:

“Perspective is everything. In business, most situations are not life or death. Once you start from that truth, you lead with clarity, not fear.”

During the pandemic, he modeled this mindset by hosting daily “coffee chats” with his entire organization. Even without all the answers, he communicated openly, gave context, and projected steadiness.

The result? His teams stayed focused and resilient during uncertainty.

Lesson for Leaders: Your calm is contagious. In a crisis, communicate often, share your thinking process, and remind your team that setbacks are learning opportunities, not existential threats.

The McKinsey Muscle: Defining the Real Problem

After leaving the Navy, Camilo joined McKinsey, where he sharpened a skill every CEO must master: **problem definition**.

At McKinsey, no project began without answering: “*What is the real problem we’re solving?*”

Companies don’t call in consultants until they’ve identified a challenge critical to their survival or growth. Camilo learned to use frameworks to dissect issues — whether it was supply chain redesign, cultural change, or growth strategy.

Today as CEO, he applies those same frameworks:

- **Change Management Model:** Train, role model, create mechanisms, and build conviction.
- **Growth Flywheel:** Build virtuous cycles where momentum compounds.
- **Hedgehog Concept:** Focus only where you can be the best.

Lesson for Leaderss: Success isn’t about solving problems faster — it’s about making sure you’re solving the *right* problems.

The Power of the First Six Months

One of Camilo’s strongest beliefs is that an organization is always a reflection of its senior leadership team.

That’s why, when he steps into a new CEO role, his **first six months** are laser-focused on aligning his top team.

“I spend disproportionate time with my senior leaders. If they’re not aligned, the rest of the organization can’t be.”

He ensures incentives are aligned, tough conversations happen early, and role modeling is visible.

Lesson for Leaderss: If you want to change the culture, start at the top. A misaligned leadership team will sabotage any strategy.

The Secret Ingredient: Growth Mindset

Camilo attributes much of his leadership resilience to embracing a growth mindset.

“Every challenge is a chance to grow,” he says. “Even when things go wrong, you stack learning on top of learning. That’s how leaders get stronger.”

He even keeps a notebook where, alongside his daily tasks, he writes positive reminders to himself about the bigger leadership journey.

This habit grounds him in perspective and keeps setbacks in context.

Lesson for Leaders: Cultivate habits that remind you of the long game. Short-term failures often contain the seeds of your future strength.

Key Takeaways from Camilo Rueda’s Leadership Playbook

1. **Own mistakes early** — Integrity builds trust faster than perfection.
 2. **Ban the phrase “don’t bring me problems”** — Encourage transparency, not concealment.
 3. **Stay calm under pressure** — Perspective and communication stabilize teams.
 4. **Define the real problem first** — Frameworks prevent wasted effort.
 5. **Start with your leadership team** — Culture cascades from the top down.
 6. **Adopt a growth mindset** — View setbacks as stepping stones.
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Closing Thought

Camilo Rueda’s journey from submarine depths to the CEO chair is more than a remarkable career path. It’s a reminder that the most powerful leadership tools are forged in moments of pressure, tested by integrity, and refined through continuous learning.

As he told Ben Fanning on *Lead the Team*:

“Real ownership is raising problems and solving them together. That’s what builds trust, and that’s what makes organizations thrive.”

For Leaders in uncertain times, that’s a leadership playbook worth studying.