

Be the Weight Behind the Spear

Josh McConkey

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Encouraging social cohesion, Be the Weight Behind the Spear is a spirited memoir that models ethical living and leadership among one's peers.

Army veteran and emergency room physician Josh McConkey's memoir *Be the Weight Behind the Spear* reflects on community engagement to motivate Americans to better their country.

In covering McConkey's military service, personal tragedies, and childhood experiences with the contextual benefit of historical and popular culture references, including to military movies, 9/11, and COVID-19, the book focuses on themes of self-improvement. Using his own story as an example, McConkey discusses the moral impetus for, and ethics of, community involvement, personal responsibility, and youth education. He also holds up adherence to the key tenets of one's faith or personal beliefs, even in the face of tragedy or difficult situations, as a virtue.

These discussions are complemented by broader discussions of what the US can do to reshape itself and grow as a nation. Collaboration and mutual support are emphasized as beneficial to all, with people encouraged to work together to support those at the front lines of the US's fights, including those in the armed forces, doctors, and governmental leaders. Stories from McConkey's time in the military and medical service are used to further highlight the moral principles and personal qualities that the book champions: he recalls managing airmen effectively, raising a family, balancing his military and medical careers, and enduring pandemic conditions in several countries, always leading by example.

However, the book devotes an inordinate amount of space to discussing failures and external events to its detriment. For example, a discussion of poor qualities that weaken collaborative support appears alongside a list of contemporary examples in which the nation was weakened. Such work is often done in service of supporting the book's central conceit, which comes to feel belabored. Indeed, considerable time is devoted to naming the components of the metaphorical spear, to cataloging mistakes that reflect the opposite of putting "weight behind the spear," and to listing the personal experiences that shaped McConkey as they relate to the weighted spear image. "Although the spear itself is a great weapon, it's just a useless pointy stick without the training, teamwork, and 'weight' behind it," the book notes.

Most effective in its illustration of a life lived in service, *Be the Weight Behind the Spear* is a spirited memoir that's filled with suggestions for bettering the US and its citizens. It is rousing in encouraging engagement with one's community on behalf of future generations.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September 10, 2024)

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