

Last fall, I lived and worked on a cattle ranch in the Las Pampas region of Argentina on the Río Paraná. My friend, who I worked with, and I would wake up at six every morning, scarf down a couple crackers, and immediately saddle our horses and ride out to the fields. We spent our days tackling and tagging calves, chasing rogue bulls, and roping cows to bring them to market. The work was invigorating and I will remember it for the rest of my life. However, what I will remember most are the things I learned from an old ranch hand named Manuel Valbuena, or as we called him, simply Valbuena. Valbuena taught me all the basic skills of a ranch hand, from how to saddle my horse to the best way to put a five-month old calf on the ground. Valbuena is your classic grizzled cowboy. Forty years of ranch work have given him long, sinewy muscles like knotted rope, skin like leather, and a few wispy white hairs that hang down above a grinning smile containing a grand total of three teeth. Trying to understand his accent is like a native Spanish speaker going down to the bayou in Louisiana and attempting to understand an old alligator hunter. Despite his age, Valbuena can rope a running cow at a full gallop, start a fire in any weather conditions, and is a magician with any sharp object, be it a knife or a machete. At seventy years old, he is a complete cowboy and one of the most capable men I know. In Pasquaney terms, he is the Argentine version of Dave Ryder, just with less hair and teeth. I want to talk about Valbuena because he taught me the importance of taking pride in the little things that we accomplish each day. As a rancher, Valbuena must hold the small details of his job in the highest regard in order to protect his livelihood. Incorrectly shoeing a horse could lead to a punctured hoof out on the trail. Leaving a gate slightly ajar could lead to two hundred escaped

cows and calves. For a small ranch trying to support itself, such a loss could spell disaster. Valbuena was a good rancher because he gave these small details the utmost respect. He was meticulous, and he took pride in his work.

Every morning, Valbuena would make his bed so that it lay completely flat. He didn't eat breakfast, but always made sure his room and kitchen were in order before leaving for work. After working until five, Valbuena would begin the evening routine. Evenings consisted of a short nap followed by dinner, which was usually a stew of sheep or goat. He always ended dinner with a cup of red wine and seltzer water on the porch to watch in the encroaching darkness. Before bedtime, Valbuena washed the dishes and swept the floor clean. He would finish the night by inspecting and arranging the framed pictures of his family that sat on top of his mantel. The daily grind of the ranch schedule permitted Valbuena to see his family only on the weekends, and I could tell it took a toll on him. By making sure their pictures were clean and organized, Valbuena reminded himself of how important his family was to him and why he continued to sacrifice so much for them. With all the details taken care of, Valbuena would fall into bed, ready to rise again the next morning at five thirty and make his bed perfectly, just like he had for forty years.

With this bucolic picture in your head, I am going to take you to a place that might as well be another world, yet ascribes to the same values as Valbuena on that Argentine ranch. This place is the office of Admiral William McRaven, who is currently the head of US Special Operations Command and one of the most experienced leaders in the US Military. He has commanded at every level within the special operations community, including posts at SEAL Team 3, Special Operations

Command Europe and SEAL Team 6. In 2011, he planned and executed the killing of Osama Bin Laden. In short, he is one of the most competent, organized, and effective leaders in the country, coordinating massive amounts of money, equipment, and manpower. This past spring, Admiral McRaven delivered the commencement address at his alma mater, The University of Texas at Austin. In his speech, he gave the graduates some interesting advice. Here is an excerpt:

Every morning in basic SEAL training, my instructors would show up in my barracks room and the first thing they would inspect was your bed. [Making your bed] was a simple task—mundane at best. But every morning we were required to make our bed to perfection. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, particularly in light of the fact that we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough, battle hardened SEALs... If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.

Those are powerful words coming from a man of his caliber. What struck me upon hearing those words were the similarities in the philosophies of Valbuena and Admiral McRaven. One is a grizzled, mostly uneducated rancher from Argentina who lives in a one-room house during the week and spends his days roping calves. He has little contact with the world outside of his own, and knows very little of current events. The other is a commander of one of the most elite fighting forces in the world and a major mover and shaker in the world of international politics. Despite the significant differences in their cultures and lifestyles, both these men know that paying attention to the little things is vital to the success of their larger endeavors. Valbuena knows that to successfully run a ranch, everything must be in its place. The horses must be cleaned and fed, the fences inspected for holes, the cows checked for health, and the equipment cleaned and put away. This commitment to

detail also shows in his dedication to making sure his kitchen is clean, his family's photos are in good shape, and his bed is made every morning. On the other end of the spectrum, Admiral McRaven uses the same strategy to coordinate and direct the efforts of four entire branches of US Special Operations Forces. The lives of thousands of soldiers depend on his attention to detail. The soldier's families trust Admiral McRaven to make the necessary preparations to ensure that their husbands and fathers come home safely. Finally, the entire nation trusts that he has taken every detail into account when making a decision that affects public safety. The respective responsibilities of Valbuena and Admiral McRaven could not be more different, yet each man knows he must give the utmost respect to the little things in order to be successful. It is especially interesting that both men emphasize the importance of a bed made with pride. Both the ranch hand and the Special Operations Commander know that this small task, once completed, will set them up for success through the rest of the day, no matter what it holds.

Right now, none of us are on an Argentine cattle ranch or a US aircraft carrier. We are at a summer camp. But we are at a summer camp that ascribes to the same principles as Valbuena and McRaven. Our attention to detail is apparent throughout the day, but to me, it is especially obvious in the morning. You know the routine. The process of prayers, cold showers, and handshakes are all very much engrained in our minds. While it will not be the sole force behind our accomplishments this summer, I am positive that having a crisp morning routine is a large factor in our success. When we go to breakfast feeling organized, clean, and ready, we know that we have taken care of the little things and are ready to tackle

the larger challenges of the day. These challenges range from making sure every Expedition returns home safely to ensuring the success of the maelstrom that is Watersports Weekend. On a more intangible level, we need to pay attention to the details like comforting a homesick boy, encouraging tired friends on a hike, or showing true sportsmanship on Hobbs Field. Focusing on these details puts us in a position to realize our bigger goals. At camp, these bigger goals come in the form of the friendships we make, the kindness with which we treat each other, and the strength of the community we build.

While our morning routine is second nature for us here at camp, it might not come so naturally when we return home. Even if you don't listen to a bugle call and take a cold shower every morning like Mr. Vinnie, you can still take pride in the small things. Your bed is a great place to start. As Admiral McRaven told us, "If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed." When we make our bed and start the day off in a goal-oriented, productive fashion, there is no end to what we can accomplish.

As of today we have less than two weeks left in the season. Let's wake up tomorrow morning, shake Mr. Vinnie's hand, and make our bunks with a little extra care. Let's take pride in the small things. Let's do this every day, and the rest of the summer will take care of itself. Personally, I think it's a very attainable goal.