



DRIVING SUCCESS IN CORPORATE AMERICA

Five Important Attributes Military Leaders Bring to Business

by

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In the last two years, some 135,000 U.S. troops have returned home from Iraq and another 35,000 are expected to return from Afghanistan by 2014. They join roughly 2.5 million Gulf War-era II veterans back in the United States as civilians.

As we welcome home these professional and patriotic Americans, we should also welcome these talented men and women into the operational and managerial epicenters of American businesses. Their return is an opportunity for this country to employ proven talent that can lead an economic resurgence.

Our veterans delivered distinguished service on a global stage. They overcame cultural, language, and political barriers in foreign lands around the world. Now, they seek an opportunity to apply those powerful skills to the pursuit of domestic business success. Based upon my 18 years of experience placing military veterans in civilian employment, I like their chances. More importantly, I love their potential for American businesses.

Some companies—like GE, JPMorgan Chase, Coca-Cola, and FedEx—have already made a commitment to providing that opportunity. Additionally, the "VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011" provides notable tax credits for companies hiring military veterans. The private sector is responding.

From small businesses to Fortune 100 giants, U.S. companies are now recognizing what I've known all along. U.S. military veterans have skills that many young professionals lack in today's workforce. They bring intellect, cultural sensitivity, and respect for leadership. They have the fortitude and emotional intelligence to help the U.S. economy improve and thrive from an injection of talent, leadership, work ethic, and achievement. Like those from wars of years past, these returning veterans have literally pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and transition home with the business skills to drive operational and financial success.

I understand. I, too, transitioned. And the path I took is one well-traveled.

I received my B.S. in Chemistry from the U.S. Air Force Academy. After serving as an ICBM Operations and Standardization Evaluation Officer and earning my Masters in Aeronautical Sciences from Embry-Riddle University, I joined Lucas Group in 1994 as an Account Executive in the Military Transition Division. The firm was founded by a veteran in 1970 to help companies find top talent and help military veterans transition to the civilian workforce after honorably completing their military service.

Our work continues today. I've personally placed more than 850 qualified military officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) among the many thousands placed by Lucas Group while working my way up the ranks to Vice President and General Manager of the Military Transition Division.



Their success is my success. Their experience is my experience.

There are countless instances of veterans flourishing in the business world. But after interviewing, placing, and following the careers of many, I can distill their collective talents into five important attributes:

- *Mature Leadership*
- *Adaptable Problem-Solving*
- *Accountable Resourcefulness*
- *Confident Decisiveness*
- *Responsible Discipline*

Some businesspeople may not recognize the transcendent talent that shines through in so many of our veterans. According to a report from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), a New York-based nonprofit association, 61 percent of employers recently surveyed said they don't believe they have "a complete understanding of the qualifications ex-service members offer."

Now is the time for companies to understand and carefully consider these attributes. "Just think about the skills these veterans acquire at a very young age: the leadership they've earned, the technology they've mastered, the ability to adapt to changing circumstance that you can't learn in the classroom," said President Barack Obama. "This is exactly the kind of leadership and responsibility every American business should be competing to attract."

Mature Leadership

There is a leadership and maturity void swiftly and silently hitting our nation's workforce. According to the Pew Research Center, 10,000 baby boomers will retire every day for the next 18 years. For those that remain in the workforce, there may be a tendency to continue doing what has worked well over a long career. But the global economy demands decisive action. Change is a requirement to survival, and U.S. companies need leaders, not just managers, moving forward.

Few, if any, industries compel maturity better than the military. Military leaders learn on day one that they are responsible for their own actions and the actions of each and every colleague. Such demands forge strong ties, and in 2008, *US News & World Report* named U.S. Junior Military Officers as "America's Best Leaders". They did so because military officers and Non-Commissioned Officers lead their troops under often extraordinary circumstances. But they also boast a host of skills, including effective communication, the importance of sound strategy and creative action, and a keen understanding of the consequences of failure. Few jobs require the management of chaos—and leadership through it—more than military action. No matter how they enter service, military leaders emerge as supremely responsible, dedicated, and mature adults.

Scott Selle, President of Fairchild Controls Corporation, personifies this type of leadership. A Navy veteran, Scott was a nuclear submarine officer in San Diego and Pearl Harbor, achieving the rank of lieutenant. After his sea duty, he became Deputy Director of Tactical Training for cruise missile and submarine warfare on the staff of the Commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet Training Command. His maturity and impressive leadership capabilities allowed him to progress rapidly through the management ranks at AlliedSignal and Honeywell



before ultimately becoming President of Fairchild Controls—a subsidiary of EADS North America and a manufacturer of aerospace and defense systems. Fairchild is a company that demands intelligent leadership. Scott delivers it.

Adaptable Problem-Solving

Like a military operation, business rarely moves in a predictable and steady fashion. As competition becomes global and markets dynamic, business leaders need skills that differ from years past. Strategic planning is important. But dynamic decision-making is now the norm. Experience and longevity can be advantageous, but problem-solving and adaptability are paramount. From my innumerable conversations with executives, it's readily apparent that they're looking for future employees with critical thinking and problem solving skills. Veterans fit that requirement extremely well.

Military conflict and the delivery of humanitarian aid move swiftly. Those leading it must continuously acquire, process, and act upon new information. Decisions often come in minutes, not weeks. Officers and NCOs have extensive leadership and execution skills. They're accustomed to working in a fast-paced environment. They're responsible for mission success and troop training in both military and technical operations. From a highly secretive reconnaissance mission in Yemen to the mobilization of 20,000 U.S. troops to restore Japan from the ravages of the 2011 tsunami, military leaders must know their limits and capabilities, and utilize the resources at hand to accomplish the mission. **Their ability to navigate new or unexpected events is ideal preparation for excelling in the competition of global business.**

Mark Lipscomb appreciates adaptability. After receiving a B.S. from Vanderbilt University, Mark served more than four years in the U.S. Navy as a Surface Warfare Officer before leaving the Navy for the civilian workforce.

In 1998, we placed Mark at Stryker—one of the world's leading medical technology companies—as a Production Supervisor. He was quickly promoted to Business Unit Manager. He showed his talent and adaptability working across a broad spectrum of functional areas, including Operations, Human Resources, and Marketing—and is now serving as Stryker's VP of Human Resources for Global Endoscopy.

His adaptability was put to the test when Mark led the integration of a software company into the Stryker operational fabric. The companies' cultures were exceedingly divergent but Stryker made retaining the technological talent of the acquired company Mark's top priority. Throughout the integration, he drew heavily upon his military experience. He stepped outside of his corporate view and managed the integration from the perspective of the new employees. He appreciated the issues they faced, worked diligently to be responsive to them, listened to their perspectives on the integration, and ultimately retained the vast majority of the talent that Stryker needed to gain a notable edge in the medical imaging marketplace.

Mission accomplished.

Accountable Resourcefulness

Do more with less. It's an almost universal business mantra. Budgets are cut but lofty goals remain, and many executives struggle with how to deal with the former and accomplish the latter. Some make do. Others make excuses. The former survive. The latter move on.

Doing more with less is ingrained in the military. Excess is a luxury in overseas operations. Officers are imbued with resourcefulness, and every soldier is responsible for the lives of their comrades. Whatever they



have is what they'll use to accomplish the mission, whether it's securing a village in Afghanistan or restoring an airport devastated by the Pacific tsunami.

Military officers and NCOs combine resourcefulness, entrepreneurial talent, exceptional teamwork, and the ultimate in accountability into a single package. They make no excuses. They lead.

What they are asked to do, often at a very young age, makes corporate work pale in comparison. They have life and death responsibilities—to themselves and their colleagues. They often work with people with whom they share few cultural norms to accomplish shared goals like infrastructure improvement, transportation assistance, personal protection, and regional safety.

As Joe Klein wrote in a story on Afghan and Iraqi veterans in an August *TIME* magazine story:

“Any given rifle company Captain had to be, in effect, the mayor of a town in Iraq or Afghanistan—and had to develop political skills like the ability to deal with local shuras (councils of elders), the ability to find out from the local population what sort of construction projects they favored, the ability to put people to work on those projects with minimum fuss...as well as the ability to make important decisions under incredible pressure.”

They're responsible for millions of dollars' worth of military equipment and possess stellar technical skills, hands-on experience, and a drive to succeed under any circumstance. While their skills in sales, project management, or technical support may not jump from a resume, military leaders have accomplished globally what few businesspeople have ever been asked to achieve.

Consider a resourceful veteran like Doug Roberts. Doug enlisted in the Navy in 1978 and was “Sailor of the Year” for Atlantic Fleet in 1982. Leveraging his military benefits and available education programs, Doug earned an Engineering degree in 1990 and was commissioned an Ensign.

Following his retirement in 1998, Doug joined John Deere as a Maintenance Manager and was soon promoted to Business Unit Leader. Doug served brief stints running business units at the John Deere De Moines Works before being promoted to Factory Manager for a John Deere manufacturing facility in the Netherlands.

Doug's resourcefulness was renowned within the organization. He managed Deere's Country Operations in China before returning to Moline as the Global Director of the Combine (a machine designed to harvest certain crops) product line with direct responsibility for 10 combine locations globally.

That's resourcefulness.

Confident Decisiveness

There's something about Hollywood's portrayal of combat that continues to engage generation after generation. Perhaps the most compelling element is the depiction of soldiers and their leaders overcoming enormous odds. From “The Bridge on the River Kwai” to “Saving Private Ryan”, their successful missions keep us glued to the screen and resonate emotionally in our hearts. The ability of military leaders to overcome, move onward, and accomplish the seemingly impossible is what makes them heroic on screen...and in real life. They don't hold back in battle or business. Confidence is imperative in both.

There may be no workforce in the world more decisive or confident than military officers. Their extensive training and experience foster a mindset that persists through mission completion. The difficulty of a challenge doesn't diminish their confidence because they've existed in a culture that demands a winning approach. This



winning psychology readily translates to the business world—from a sales rep's cold calls to a plant manager's crisis response. That confidence helps companies achieve admirable goals.

Mark Lipscomb is decisive. When Stryker initiated a “coordinated decentralization” process, Mark was a key player. The goal was to streamline decision-making, pushing it down into the organization to increase responsiveness, confidence, and decisiveness. Mark ensured its success. He emphasized action items after every meeting and continually pushed for decisions, not future planning sessions. He held himself and his teams accountable for smart decisions and the entire company benefitted.

Mark, other military leaders within Stryker (we've placed more than 250 veterans there since 1996), and the company culture were key factors in Stryker being selected for “Great by Choice: Uncertainty Chaos and Luck — Why Some Thrive Despite Them All”, a new book by business expert Jim Collins. In it, he recognizes Stryker as a company that beat their industry performance indices by a factor of 10 over a 15 year period despite unfavorable market conditions and uncertainty.

Decisiveness makes a difference.

Responsible Discipline

Everyone in the military is responsible for some aspect of the mission. Preparation for it and detailed reviews upon its completion ensure that decisions are analyzed and accountability mandated. Mistakes are quickly corrected, solid decisions are lauded, and continuous learning is mandatory. **Military leaders have responsibility ingrained and are supremely capable of exercising intelligent and ethical leadership in any area of business.**

Contrast that with the current state of American business. Wall Street's practices are drawing SEC scrutiny and Main Street criticism. Whether or not laws were violated, the taint is strong and the mores taught in American business schools are under fire.

By contrast, the Air Force Academy taught my classmates and me about ethics and collective responsibility. We had high standards for academic coursework, athletic competition, military studies, and preparation. **We also followed a strict Honor Code guided by these words: “We Will Not Lie, Steal or Cheat, Nor Tolerate Among Us Anyone Who Does”.** That Code captures the essence of discipline and responsibility at the USAF Academy and throughout the military.

Those words remain core imperatives long after the Academy. I lived by them then and I live by them now.

There are no shortcuts to success.

Today's military veterans are among the most talented, skilled, and seasoned professionals in the business market.

Mark, Doug, and Scott are impressive examples of that talent. They bring proficient, globally competitive experience to their new civilian missions.

They are impressive but not unique.

American businesses continue to seek qualified, capable and ethical executives, from mid-management to the C-Suite. They can find the talent they need in the board room, on the shop floor, and throughout the organization in our veterans coming home from far-off lands.



Business leaders simply need to probe a little deeper. Encourage military veterans to explain what they did, how they did it, and how they can put those skills and experiences to work for you. **Carefully consider how their experience can achieve your business objectives.**

It will be a smart investment of time and resources.

The benefits they bring to business are not hard to imagine. Our military veterans reflect what makes America proud; America great; and America a shining leader for the entire world. They're coming home now.

Welcome them back with pride and an opportunity.

It's in your best interest.

