The Value of the Military Skill Set â€“ Part I

Description

Part I â€“ Initiative, marketing, sales, project planning and program management skills

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I had the occasion to sit in on a pre-job interview between a professional recruiter (â€œheadhunterâ€•Â•) and a Navy pilot about to leave the service. I had worked a few doors down from the headhunter for a few months and the Lieutenant had worked for me for six months before I left the Navy, so I knew both of these people at a professional level. The headhunter was a very successful recruiter in the sales and marketing fields. He had grown up in a mostly Navy town, his father having been a labor lawyer. The pilot was an ROTC graduate, who flew A-6 Intruders and wore a Silver Star from the first Gulf War. He had attended a local college with a long and outstanding history, earning an Executive MBA during his off hours.

I had mentioned to the recruiter that one of my associates was leaving the service and would be looking for a job, and he agreed to look at the pilotÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s resume. I had him send it over and a few weeks later, the headhunter told me the Lieutenant was coming over for a pre-interview that afternoon and invited me to sit in. I joked, having no clue as to what I was really saying, that I could be the translator. I ended up doing exactly that, but what struck me was the inability of two very capable and intelligent people to communicate, as they had both lived very different lives.

The pilot arrived and the recruiter got down to business. The first few questions about qualifications and some information on the client and position he was being looked at for, as well as a overview of the companyâ€™s product line went easily. One of the first questions was â€œHow can you explain to a small, innovative company that you will be able to help them, since you have worked for a large monolithic organization?â€•Â• That rocked me back on my heels. I know the recruiter didnâ€™t think he was being offensive, but it quickly came to me he had little clue, despite living in one of the largest ports

that Navy has for all his life, except a few years being away at college.

The pilot seemed to have a little problem getting out of the starting blocks, not because he was unintelligent, but his life experience kept him from easily discerning the recruiterâ€™s lack of understanding of the military. After a few moments of silence, I asked the pilot to explain how he had been given the task to figure out just how the navy would use modeling and simulation to approve testing requirements for major systems procurement. He then told the story of how someone, armed with only a modicum of detailed technical understanding of computer simulation capabilities did the homework to find out what could be done and how, drafted the concept, briefed it to three levels of leadership, got it approved and wrote the instruction. The recruiter seemed to have a new appreciation for what â€œjunior officersâ€•Â• got to do and I made it a point to let the recruiter know this was common.

The result of that conversation allowed me to realize myself, and then communicate an inherently understood situation. Hereâ€™s how I summarized it to them: If a successful senior enlisted person or officer is sitting in front of you, it is almost a certainty that person has done the following: 1) Come up with and idea (innovation) 2) Communicated that idea to their boss (marketing) 3) Figure out how to implement it (program development) and, as a result of opening their mouths in the first place, been assigned to make it happen (program management).

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Many people with military experience just take all of this for granted, never realizing they have practiced all of those skills, as well as an entire gamut of supporting skills, such as budgeting and Ã¢â‚¬Å“human resources,Ã¢â‚¬Â• along the way. I sealed the deal when I asked the recruiter if those skills would be valuable to a small, innovative company and he quickly agreed thatâ€™s what this company was looking for.

There were other questions, but one led me to ask the pilot to describe his first job. He had been assigned as the Line Division Officer. He had 90 people working for him as a Ã¢â‚¬Å“nuggetÃ¢â‚¬Â• in a medium bomber equipped squadron. He was the only officer, and only had a single E-7 to help out at the khaki level. That got the recruiterâ€™s attention as well. The discussion came to issues of monetary dealings. I asked the pilot how much his OPTAR was as a 23 year old division officer. â€œAbout $1Mâ€•Â• he said. I took over and explained to the recruiter that that meant the pilot was responsible for managing the expenditure of that money in a single fiscal year. In addition he had had to plan the next yearâ€™s budget by estimating the resources needed, then at the end of the year, reconcile the end of year accounting for the Supply Department. This allowed the recruiter to see an entirely different picture of the professional experience of the man who sat across the table from him. If you think about it, unless the interviewer has some understanding of the military leadership requirements, none of this is a factor in their hiring decision making, and, from the other side, â€œweâ€•Â• forget that things like this are top level jobs on the outside (project manager, marketing, sales, etc), so we donâ€™t even try to weave them into the conversation or resume. Additionally, they are such secondary skills to us, we just think of them as inherent tasks required to get things done.

So much for a world view of â€œa big, monolithic organizationâ€•Â• (implied: inflexible, employing a bunch of automatons). More to come..stay tuned for Part II!

Category

1. Leadership
2. Military

Date Created
February 26, 2005
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