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

Description

Part VIII â€“ Communications in the Workplace

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Communications in the Workplace is the topic of this post. The military engenders a different sort of work communications ethic. In any service, in any place, there is an undercurrent, unspoken, yet allowed for, that at any moment, any one may not be there to pull their share of the work load. Most people will not leave a unit due to a medical casualty, but they all will leave. Whether it is at the end of active obligated service (EAOS), or to transfer to another unit, people will come and go. The reason this work ethic is different, is the essential need for the unit to continue its mission with greatest efficiency, regardless of who is there, or not.

Side note: At one level, itâ€™s a pretty interesting system that can plan out a year or so in advance, as to who will be where, what training they may receive (or not) enroute to join a unit, and also, a similar time out, who is being replaced. More often than not, this is the normal cycle of events.

Subconsciously for many units, but most importantly the ones directly linked to potential combat service, the loss of a person, whether a leader or a junior team member, there is the understanding the change may take place in the blink of an eye. The people one step up and one step down from that person need to be able to fill the gap and make things happen.

What this does is give service members a work ethic of keeping things organized, and keeping the people around them Ã¢â‚¬Å“briefed inÃ¢â‚¬Â• as to what they do, where the files are, who to call in this and that situation, etc, etc, etc. This mindset, is very necessary for the survival of the unit. It differs from the civilian workplace. It keeps a unit up to speed, which translates into efficiency in pretty much anything they do.

But.it exposes to the people around you how you get the job done. In the outside world, this mode of operation seems that is a scary thing. If you let someone around you know the real detail of your job on the Ã¢â‚¬Å“outside,Ã¢â‚¬Â• you take the risk of them being able to show they can perform your job, and therefore, make a pitch to management to move you along the path, which may take you to the door. Personally, I donâ€™t think that ends up being as fun in execution, as it sounds. You send a knowledgeable person packing, and guess who gets to take up the slack?

While your ex-military people may seem like they want to find out too much, its merely that defensive mechanism showing up, that allowed units to be so successful. Keeping your staff â€œbriefed inâ€•Â• on the business of the business makes them more efficient.

The lessons of this was taught to me most clearly when I worked for Captain Pete Bulkeley. Pete was the son of Admiral Bulkeley, who, as a young Lieutenant, took General MacArthur out of the Philippines on his PT boat in 1942. His nickname was the Sea Wolf. Quite a man, who served the Navy for many years, even after retirement, but thatâ€™s another story for another post.

Anyhow, I was assigned to a mobile training team unit, and well we were pretty well staffed, and on shore duty, I might add, we mostly all lived out of a suitcase, traveling the east coast almost weekly to train the surface ships. It wasnâ€™t unusual for one of the administrative staff to come down the hall, and say â€œThe Captain is having a meetingâ€• several times a week. I â€œdislikedâ€•Â• those meeting, when we sat around the table, the senior representative from each department and heâ€™d ask each one of us: â€œWhatâ€™s going on?â€•Â• Weâ€™d layout what our department was up to and heâ€™d go to the next person. At the end, he might issue a few directions, but generally, that was all we did. Iâ€™d be happy to get back to the work at hand, but it wasnâ€™t until after he transferred, and the new officer-in-charge came, that I captured the meaning of his many times a week interruption to our busy days, when we managed to get to the office. The next OIC wasnâ€™t as communicative, but we still kept the organization going.

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What Peteâ€™s meetings did for us was to allow us to get on the phone, responding to a call from our â€œcustomersâ€•Â• (read ship commanding officers, department heads, and senior enlisted in most cases, or the staff personnel from the head of the surface forces for the Atlantic Fleet, whom we did our training and inspections for), and we could pretty well coherently answer their questions of scheduling and training initiatives in the works, because Pete had made us sit around the table and communicate that information to each other, when I assumed it was for him. It certainly was, but it had a broader audience.

That is a snap shot of what is bred into all levels of the chain of command, to one degree or another. I always despised the voice at the other end of the phone telling me â€œThey arenâ€™t here right now, but theyâ€™ll be back next week.â€• We didnâ€™t try to assume the authority of the other departments, but since most of us were in and out, we certainly could represent them at a moderate level of detail, and then we could determine how important it may be that we tracked them down, if something was that important. I have come to gauge the organizational skills of a company by how well they can handle a call, when the specific person isnâ€™t around to help you, viewed through the filter of the discussion above.

Category

1. Leadership
2. Military

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