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

Description

Part II â€“ Auditing skills

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In Part I, I discussed how an interview for a Navy A-6 pilot helped educate a civilian headhunter on how the military develops initiative, marketing, sales, project planning and program management skills. In this part, I discuss the development of auditing skills from the military experience.

I worked for a few months as an executive recruiter. While I was terribly ineffective then, and looked at it as a failed experiment, I essentially paid for an education. I learned several things while there.

I was tasked to find people for the computer center of a firm you may have heard of, Cantor-Fitzgerald. The reason I had sort of an in to work at this was because a few of my professional friends had been Naval Aviators and had had one of their friends hired there. It seemed he was doing so well, they wanted more people like him. This man got in the door because one of his old commanders was now on the board at Cantor-Fitzgerald. This old commander did what you would expect, when this other pilot was being downsized,Â• his old boss went to bat for him and convinced this firm to hire him. The retiring pilot was a â€œrecipientâ€• of the â€œpeace dividendâ€• at the close of the Cold War. He had been an F-14 pilot by trade, with no college level training in either computers or business, but given that he was a bright individual, they took a chance on him.

He was put in charge of the computer center in the World Trade Center office The operation had to run 24/7/365, because they had offices in London and Hong Kong. With in a few days of arriving, he was tasked to audit the operating budget of his center. He announced he had found a few million dollars surplus in the books. The management was amazed, as this man didnâ€™t have a certificate of degree that said he knew anything about this. How did he do this? Simple, the military gave him the skills.

As officers, and sometimes senior enlisted personnel, are called upon on a regular basis to validate the resources entrusted to the people in uniform, for good reason. It helps identify theft and inappropriate use, but also enables tracking of the proper resourcing of different things. The process is pretty direct: What has come in, what has gone out and whatâ€™s still present. Itâ€™s not rocket science. By taking a systems view, you can apply this technique to just about anything where you need to make sure things are being handled properly.

In my career, I counted postal money orders, stamps, gas masks, small arms, ammunition (small to very large), classified documents, communications codes, dollars in various accounts and probably a few other things I lost track of.

The assignment to the process to count what ever needs auditing was usually handed out by the Executive Officer, either via a formal assignment on the collateral duties list, or when you got grabbed to just get it done. I donâ€™t recall any officers I served with being exempted. If you were the custodian of something, you didnâ€™t get a hand in the accounting, other than make sure the auditors had the records and access to the things to be checked, but there was plenty of other stuff you didnâ€™t own, so you would always get a turn eventually.

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Thatâ€™s a long discussion about how leadership positions in the service get their hands dirty with auditing, which is a baseline skill that becomes subconscious, and therefore not mentioned in resumes or interviews (â€œyou mean everyone doesnâ€™t do that?â€• sort of thought). This skill is certainly a â€œforce multiplierâ€•Â• for the potential employer and will be, almost without exception, be a capability the interviewee has.

The sideÂ• moral to the story: A large civilian firm took a chance and found out they got a lot more than they expected, and then asked for more help. As a side note about what happened to this downsized pilot, he was promoted in 5 weeks to managing director of the computer center. Not bad for a stick and rudder guy the taxpayer didnâ€™t want anymore.

Category

1. Leadership
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