

How Recruiters Can Leverage Military Experience – Lessons from Walt Disney World

This past week the New York Times ran a detailed story on a new attraction at Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL. The new Disney Operational Command Center is everything that it sounds like. A state-of-the-art, technology driven command center in a central, protected location that supervises everything in Disney World to ensure that theme parks guests, employee, and services run smoothly, effectively, and on time. To a recruiter that has worked with military veterans, the news story about an Operations Center (OPCEN) could appear to be a “no-brainer.” However, a recruiter without a great deal of military exposure, would be amazed to learn that there are several hundred military OPCEN’s operating globally, 24-7, and under combat conditions. The fact that Walt Disney World now has an Operations Center presents a great example of the value of military experience to corporations and a great example how recruiters can help veterans translate their skills to businesses.

The Walt Disney Operational Command Center is news because it is a clear, understandable, and relevant adaptation of military concepts to civilian organizations. Today, Gulf War II veterans (primarily Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans) are less than 0.5% of the US population. The US public knows very little of what the day-to-day military does; let alone how to adapt military skills and methods to their organizations. The lack of public knowledge concerning the benefit military methods can and do bring to Disney and countless other organizations are a great advantage point for veterans in their career search and career advancement. A June 2010 Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) study identified the failure of veterans to translate their skills into language and concepts that business can understand and use as the primary item veterans needed to improve.

The essential point for a veteran and a recruiter is that they have to weave the application of military skills into the organization’s culture and work processes. The Walt Disney culture is all about teamwork, positive customer experience, authenticity of performers (workers) to their roles, safety, and efficiency in the face of growing crowds. Knowing this, the Disney Operational Command Center was not seen as a top down command and control center. Rather, it was a place to monitor ride line length, safe operating conditions, and to mitigate other potential effects of customer dissatisfaction. The Disney OPCEN supported the company culture and existing work practices. In this way, the weaving of a military process, the OPCEN, in support of Disney culture of customer satisfaction and customer experience was perfect.

As the recruiter looks out over the landscape of potential employer’s and the candidates career progression, it is vital that the candidate understand the problems of their company, the company’s operational culture, and how the military skill set will be a solution to the organization.

Here are three ideas how recruiters can help military veterans add value to organizations:

1. **Leverage Your Military Experience to Your Company and Job.** Veterans need to translate their military skills to their businesses and organizations in a fashion that supports the culture and work practices of their company. First, sit down and describe one accomplishment that you performed in the military, the problem that it solved, and why it was successful. Second, list the skills that you used to accomplish the military task successfully. Third, list problems within the company that could be solved by using some or all of these skills. For example, maybe you started a regular meeting of tribal elder’s or shopkeepers in your AO in Afghanistan to discuss problems and look for solutions. These meetings produced military skills sets of coordination,

negotiation, planning, and leadership. Could you set up a series of meetings with your company's customers to generate ideas and discussion on what your company could provide in the future?

2. **Mentor an Individual or Group.** Mentoring or coaching is a fantastic skill to help build talent, commitment, and initiative in an organization. In the military, performance counseling sessions was a way to identify the standard of the organization, how a soldier performed to that standard, and what step (s) would be taken to improve the soldier's performance. This mentoring is invaluable in organizations to help new employees or employees with high potential develop. Ken Hicks, an Army veteran and the CEO of Foot Locker, stated, "So I learned that you're very dependent on your people to be their best. You train and develop and motivate them."

3. **Further Your Education One Class At a Time.** Community colleges offer good overview business classes to improve your baseline knowledge of business in such vital areas as Accounting, Finance, Statistics, or Applied Mathematics. If possible, take them in person because fellow students, professors, and college staff are great resources for networking and are available if you need help. Veterans can immensely in business education classes because it is an additional tool to help them translate their military experience to a business.