

with the personal discipline required of soldiers. Military training—from the strictly physical to the highly technical—teaches future business leaders the importance of continuing education. In the uniformed services, troops learn the value of teamwork, a lesson required for any commercial enterprise. Of critical importance for business managers is the ability to make strategic decisions and to accept accountability for those decisions; both are skills that can come out of years in the service. Last on Elmore's list is mission accomplishment: Establishing a goal and focusing on the route to achieve it are basic points in a standard business plan.

Elmore speaks from experience. A Vietnam War-era Air Force vet himself, he came home to build his own business before joining the SBA. His office helps vets navigate the often-complex rules and regulations en route from an SBA application to obtaining a federal small-business loan.

In addition to the SBA, many other organizations exist to help teach vets the ins and outs of not just starting a business, but also keeping one going and making it thrive. And vets are eligible for help starting and buying businesses that is not available to their civilian competitors. One of those opportunities is the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans With Disabilities, which started at Syracuse University and has expanded to half a dozen other universities around the country. Funded in large part by the SBA,



the boot camps teach vets with business ideas how to hone their business models, launch a business, and market their products.

"The finest entrepreneurial training anywhere in the world" is how Elmore characterizes the

Above: Bootcamp Class of 2007. Below and previous spread: Department of Labor Job Fair for Veterans at U.S.S. *Intrepid*, September 2009

experience vets get at the boot camps. "We believe they've earned that opportunity," he says. In addition, Elmore figures that supporting vets in the business community is a good return on the investment America already made in training them as soldiers. "We've invested billions of dollars in recruiting, training, deploying, and, in some instances, injuring these men and women. The idea of accelerating their ability to achieve economic success when they come home is not only good for them and their families; it's good for our communities and our country." It makes sense, he says, to invest in them one more time, especially because they are so motivated to succeed.

Hundreds of vets have profited from the boot-camp program since it started in 2007, and their testimonials are poignant examples of the arduous route—as the Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management calls it—"from boots to business suits."

"Being an entrepreneur," says boot-camp graduate Chris Cancialosi, in a quote on the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) website, "means that I have an opportunity to control my destiny, to make a difference in the world my own way."

In another testimony on the site, graduate Brian Iglesias says, "Entrepreneurship is what makes America great. Having the freedom and opportunity to follow a dream is why we serve our country."

The boot camps are only one of a packed menu of SBA programs designed specifically to help returning veterans, and veterans already are a significant factor in business: Government figures report that more than 12 million vets are in the overall U.S. labor force, and almost a third of those working vets own small businesses or are self-employed—quite a sizable percentage that seems to reinforce the idea that vets are well-suited to entrepreneurship.

Those numbers do not surprise Elmore. As he explains, "Veterans have been exposed to things that others have not. They are trained with certain skills that others may not have. They've been deployed around the world, so they've seen the real world. They understand how fortunate we are as Americans."

The boot camps are open to all post-September 11 vets with a service-related disability; no college experience is required. Vets accepted into the program receive an all-expenses-paid education, including travel to the school where they'll study, as well as room and board.

Further details and an application form can be found at Whitman.syr.edu/ebv, and much more information and assistance is available from the Office of Veterans Business Development at the Small Business Administration at SBA.gov/About-Offices-Content/1/2985.

TIP OF THE ARROW

ALTHOUGH THE NATIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HAS BEEN SLOWLY FALLING, newly demobilized Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are still facing hard times. In fact, there are as many jobless young veterans as there are troops currently deployed in the Middle East—veterans in their early twenties face an unemployment rate of up to 27 percent—and their job searches are often as challenging as their deployments had been. That's where Tip of the Arrow comes in.

Founded by Carl Blum, who has 32 years of experience running an employment agency, and Bob Deissig, a highly decorated Vietnam vet, Tip of the Arrow offers free one-on-one job assistance to returning troops, especially our "citizen soldiers"—members of the National Guard and Army Reserves. "Those soldiers face multiple tours, and that ends up destroying their families, destroying their lives, and making employment difficult," Blum explains. "Employers use many tricks to avoid hiring these men and women—even though it's against the law—because they know they're going to get called up."

Blum was inspired to start the organization after reading about a soldier who'd re-enlisted after having no luck finding work as a civilian, only to be killed serving overseas. "The military pays better than a civilian job would, especially for a high school-educated person, and the bulk of the military is made up of such men and women," Blum says. "Particularly in the National Guard and Reserves, soldiers re-up because they can't afford to feed their families otherwise."

Tip of the Arrow attempts to keep soldiers from re-enlisting out of desperation, and tries to show them there's more they can do if they know how to network and sell themselves. Justin Tressler, for example, who returned from a yearlong deployment in 2009, says learning how to market himself to potential employers was the most beneficial part of working with Tip of the Arrow.

"I learned to list the aspects of my job that people don't necessarily associate with being in the infantry," Tressler states. "I did security for our company command while

overseas, so personal-security experience is there. I have a high attention to detail, willingness to work odd hours. These are the kinds of things people would probably overlook unless told to look for them."

Tressler's problem is common among veterans looking to return to the civilian job force. In addition to having been away for months on end, many soldiers are not sure how to translate their military experience into terms their potential employers can easily understand. "Much of the military talks in acronyms," Deissig says. "You have to get the soldiers away from that and make them explain what things mean."

But it's not just the technical jargon that causes communication problems, as Blum explains. "We're working with a sniper now who's been applying for police jobs," Blum says, "and part of the interview process includes a psychological evaluation. When he was asked what his job was while serving in Iraq, he told the psychologist that he was supposed to 'terminate the enemy.' It cost him the job. We had to teach him that he'd done more than fight. We had to point out that he'd been there to gather intelligence and build a relationship with the community, too. Combat was only a small part of his job."

"The civilian population doesn't understand what soldiers are capable of," agrees Matt Selvage, a veteran from the Army National Guard. "Without a little bit of practice and maybe some guidance, soldiers aren't very good at communicating what they can do. And for the most part, they can do anything they put their minds to. But that experience doesn't translate without practice."

Some companies, however, have learned the value of having veterans on staff. Jeff



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McFeeley, a regional manager for Comcast, has hired nearly 30 candidates sent to him by Tip of the Arrow. "Military folks have some natural skill sets that we look for at Comcast," McFeeley explains. "They all come with some technical training, whether it be specifically in electronics or any number of other fields. In addition, they come with some great intangible skill sets. They're extremely dependable, they're hardworking, and they're motivated."

But being a veteran can be a double-edged sword during the job hunt, Iraq veteran Paul Peng says. "On paper, employers should favor them because of their experience and discipline, but when they have combat experience, it carries certain negative stereotypes as well."

McFeeley says that these are not valid concerns. "First and foremost, hiring veterans is the right thing to do," he says. "These are folks who are overseas defending the United States, and when they come back and are looking for employment, it's only proper that we consider them for openings."

For many soldiers, the problem doesn't always seem to be caused by a lack of available resources, but by their own absence. "It's easy to forget about people when they're not right in front of you," Tressler says. "I don't want to say our country forgets about the vets, but [people] don't necessarily go out of their way to help them, either, and coming back can be a daunting task." What soldiers need, he says, is someone to guide and encourage them, especially because it takes so much for the average soldier to ask for help.

It's common, Selvage agrees, for soldiers to put off asking for help, particularly during

the job hunt. They feel, he says, that as grown men and women they should be able to handle such a task on their own. He admits that he was once skeptical of asking for help himself, and that it wasn't until he found out a soldier he'd deployed with was working with Tip of the Arrow that he decided to give it a try. "Now, my first piece of advice to the guys in my unit is, 'Here's Carl Blum's number. Here's his email address. Contact him. He will help you,'" Selvage says. (See info below.)

The assistance Tip of the Arrow offers benefits not just the soldiers, but the companies they partner with as well. For McFeeley and Comcast, the work Tip of the Arrow puts in with the soldiers helps them fill more positions with veterans, something they're committed to throughout all levels of the corporation. "We give them feedback on where folks fall short and what they need to work on, and they take it back to the troops to help them improve, and it's worked really well," McFeeley says. "Their candidates are coming to us highly prepared for the interview, professional, with well-written résumés, and they're ready to work."

Blum and Deissig's dedication hasn't gone unnoticed by the men and women who come to them seeking job assistance, either. "They're probably the most enthusiastic people I've ever run into outside of high school cheerleaders," says Tressler. "They'll put a stool under your ass whenever you're feeling kicked to the ground, they'll pick you up, dust you off, and set you back on your course. And they will help you." —Jennifer Peters

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