

My crucible experience occurred during my one year of separation from the Army. During that year I learned what mattered the most to me. I learned through that experience the importance of relationships, organizational culture, and the effectiveness of negotiations. Those three topics have provided me with a perspective on leadership that I would not have received if I had not chosen to separate from the military.

In June of 2001, I separated from the Army after my initial commitment of 4 years of service. I honestly never had plans to stay in the Army and had utilized my ROTC scholarship as a means to attend college. I felt that my military experience and master's degree, which I had recently acquired, provided me an edge over my civilian peers. My paradigm at the time was that making more money would provide better job satisfaction and a better life. Why should I stay, if I wanted to get rich and succeed in life? I interviewed with many pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies. The military recruiters had promised me that those positions had the greatest chance of making big money quickly.

I was hired as a sales manager for IDEXX Laboratories. IDEXX Laboratories was the premiere producer of diagnostic medical equipment for veterinary medicine. I had little to no education or interest in chemistry or biology and did not even have a pet, but the salary, benefits, and responsibility hooked me. I was given responsibility for all sales within Oklahoma, North Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, and Eastern New Mexico. I worked the job for a little under a year. I brought the territory to number 5 from number 50, out of the 50 sales territories the company had, and earned a seat in the exclusive "President's Club"; the top 10% of the sales force. I had tripled the salary I had made as a newly promoted Captain, been given a large expense account, and earned a week long, no expense trip, to the Bahamas. You would think that I had it all going for me.

I had learned that my paradigm on money was wrong. More money did not equate to job satisfaction or a better life. Two influential events happened in my life during my tenure as a

salesman. My father past away from a battle with colon cancer and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred. Both of these events forced me to question who I was and what mattered most to me. I established a new paradigm. Service to humanity and contributing to society meant more to me than money. A profession that focused on public service provided better job satisfaction and a better life. I aggressively sought to return to the Army and was provided the opportunity to return in May of 2002.

My time in the civilian sector taught me many leadership lessons, which I have taken with me to the Army. The first one being; relationships matter. As I watched my peers and competitors, I learned that they were not working as hard as me and were being just as successful. I was working long hours six days a week. As a newcomer to the territory and field, I started with zero relationships. I had no ties to any of the veterinary hospitals, doctors, competitors, or distributors. In order to succeed and cover the large territory I was assigned, I was going to have to multiply my efforts and rely on other people to do my selling for me. I had to establish relationships with the distributors that had been working in the same area for years, in some cases decades. These distributors had established relationships with all of the veterinary clinics, hospitals, and doctors in my territory. I had to influence them to sell my product. For the first time, I was operating in a position where I did not have positional power over the people that I needed to influence to succeed at my job. I had to use personal power and apply rational and soft techniques to gain commitment from the distributors operating in my territory. I learned the importance of emotional intelligence. In order to ensure that I was applying the appropriate technique to influence the distributors I would have to learn to identify, assess, and manage not only my emotions, but also theirs.

The second leadership lesson, I took with me was the importance of organizational culture and climate. I operated within a culture that was very foreign to me. I started to recognize it when I submitted my first expense report. I had come in way under budget, because I was staying in economy motels, and eating at low expense restaurants. Instead of

getting praise from the district sales manager for reducing costs, I drew criticism and ridicule. She expected me to stay in the equivalent to an Embassy Suites or Hyatt and dine at higher-class restaurants. In addition to the stigma of living the high life during the workweek, our quarterly sales meetings were held in resorts. Dinners were hosted by the district managers that cost \$100 a plate. Money and status were usually the topics of casual conversation at these events. Image was very important to the sales force. I, along with all of the other salesmen, was required to wear a business suit during all office calls. This always seemed odd to me, as our primary customers were usually dressed in blue jeans or scrubs. All of these artifacts of the sales culture eventually made sense to me. The sales force considered themselves the most essential component of the company. It deserved an elite status. By challenging these artifacts, it should have appeared obvious to my sales manager that I did not understand the sales culture. Instead of ridicule, I should have received an explanation. As an organizational leader it is extremely important to be aware of one's culture and its associated artifacts which can lead your organization to interpret its true values. These values could be misunderstood and lead to basic underlying assumptions about your organization that are false.

The final leadership lesson, I took with me was the effectiveness of negotiations. As a salesman, I had to influence outside my organization on a daily basis. I knew that the last person a doctor or a distributor wanted to see was another medical salesman. My biggest challenge was finding a collective interest that would give me their attention. By understanding a distributor's or doctor's interests, I could usually develop a sales strategy. This strategy would enable me to generate a belief in the distributor or doctor, that my products were essential to their success. As a salesman you have a marketing department that gives you tools and training that give you the argument for selling the product. The marketing department does not provide you with a collective interest with each distributor or doctor.

As an organizational leader I will be judged and valued on my abilities to influence individuals outside my command. Negotiations must be deliberate. Proper planning prior to the

actual negotiation will ensure success. If I have the ability to recognize a collective interest and the bottom line of the individual I am negotiating with, I should be successful in negotiating an outcome that favors my interests.

I have eaten my share of humble pie and dealt with plenty of criticism from my peers due to my separation from the service. I am convinced that I am a better military officer, having experienced a civilian career in business. I know that I am a better person for choosing a profession that serves humanity as opposed to serving myself. As I leave ILE and embark on a future of organizational-level leadership assignments, I will always reflect back to my experience as a salesman. By truly understanding the importance of relationships, organizational culture, and effective negotiations I will be able to contribute significantly in my next assignment.