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Military man: Tips from the battlefield

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As a former Colonel in the Royal Marines, I am often asked if my military experience can help in solving some of today's business problems. With increasingly tough pitches and pressures on staff affecting almost every business, there is a lot that business leaders can learn or relearn from the military.

Business Pitches – tailored tactics.

Competition has intensified and pitches are more tightly contested than ever. All too often, however, the same mistakes are made. Whilst you must always be prepared to seize an opportunity on the battlefield, committing yourself too soon could lead to catastrophe. Equally, pouncing at the first sign of a client's interest is generally counterproductive and often leads to objections. Instead listen to what the client wants, and engage in a two-way dialogue to establish rapport.

When developing your selling strategy, it can be dangerous to follow a rigid, set pitch; you must take into account that every prospect is different. If you don't, you'll fall short in addressing their individual requirements and expectations.

Competition – scoping out the enemy

There is an old military saying - "Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted". Electronic surveillance on your competition is a highly effective and inexpensive form of reconnaissance. If you can't find who last supplied a prospect with a service, check whether they have LinkedIn contacts in your industry, which gives you a better idea of who they may be considering.

Leading Your Team

When a leader on the battlefield is confident, shows determination and has a clear vision, this clarity and focus will become contagious and pass down the ranks. Rapport amongst team members creates a positive environment and this will produce encouraging results.

The same is true in business. You must present yourself as a united team. In a business pitch, sellers often fail in doing this and something very important is shown to be lacking. Buyers do not want to see a number of individuals; they want to see a team.

Rallying Your Employees during Tough Times

Business leaders need to drive their business forward during tough times. With economic conditions still likely to be tough over the next few months, it will be increasingly difficult to 'rally your troops' and keep staff on your side.

Training and development can help produce trust in your team and this is vital. One particular commando training exercise that all had to complete was the water tunnel. This was totally submerged and you could not physically resurface without being pulled through. This encouraged teamwork!

You must delegate authority and responsibility; showing staff you trust them will strengthen bonds and create an environment where they want to work cohesively. Always give praise fairly and base rewards on performance. A short email or card of thanks is a nice touch for showing staff you appreciate their efforts.

A good life/work balance is important in retaining staff and in this respect, the military offers additional leave after deployments. You should think along the same lines, not necessarily by giving additional holiday but by acknowledging excessive work pressures in some way. It may well save you recruitment money in the long run.

While the usual business tips must not be forgotten, this year business leaders must look beyond the obvious and tackle their strategy from every possible angle.

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