

LESSONS LEARNED: WHAT MILITARY SERVICE TAUGHT THESE VETERAN BUSINESS OWNERS

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Link to online version of article:

<https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/articles/lessons-learned-military-service-taught-veteran-business-owners/>

While protecting our country and way of life, U.S. military personnel learn key lessons along the way. Thanks to their military training, those veterans who choose to run their own businesses after serving may often have an advantage over the competition.

The lessons [veterans](#) learn while working as cohesive, well-orchestrated teams for the U.S. military help empower them to be effective business leaders. Here 18 [veteran business owners](#) share the lessons they learned in the military that have led to business success.

The Power of Intense Focus

"There are times when a business owner is faced with situations that come with a lot of noise. My military background helps me stay on task and focused on getting from Point A to Point B. The ability to silence distractions is a critical business skill that allows me to quickly assess situations and identify solutions that yield positive outcomes. This ability to keep my bearings allows me as a veteran business owner to focus more on what people are saying rather than on how they say it." —*John O'Hara (U.S. Marine Corps), president of TOP/SF, a division of [The O'Hara Project](#)*

Better Teamwork

"In order to achieve a mission, the military taught me that it takes a team watching each other's backs while doing their individual best. That's why the military has training exercises and holds everyone accountable. At my company, I ensure that we strategically choose team members and fully train them so they can offer their best efforts. Everyone is also held accountable for their work." —*Mike McKim (U.S. Navy), CEO and founder of [Cuvee Coffee](#)*

"Being a Marine Corps fighter pilot taught me that taking care of your people allows them to take care of their work. No one goes it alone in the military and the same holds true for business. Teamwork builds successful companies." —*Ted Fienning (U.S. Marine Corps), co-founder of [Babiators](#)*

"When I served in the U.S. Navy, I learned a lot about team bonding and working together as a cohesive unit. The stakes can be quite high when you're in the military—literally life and death. You depend on one another for support. Fortunately, you don't have to deal with as much potential danger in the business world as a veteran business owner. However, teamwork is still an important part of the process." —*Charles Dugan (U.S. Navy), CEO of [American Image Displays](#)*

"The military produces individuals with uncanny adaptive thinking and a capacity and passion for continuing to learn. This learning environment focuses on personal development, as well as training and developing

subordinates and peers. This acts as a force multiplier when a veteran is added to the staff. He or she ensures that the whole is performing well rather than focusing on the individual. This unwavering commitment to a greater cause becomes an ingrained ethos that can improve the work habits of the entire team." —*Lee Kirby (U.S. Army), president of [Uptime Institute](#) and founder of [Salute Mission Critical](#)*

"Military service has a long, time-honored tradition of shaping individuals into rigorous, fulfilling, and organized team cohorts. The traditions, unification and determination of a solidified unit magnify the accomplishments of a group. If problems arise, they're faced head-on, without reservation, and with the help of those around you." —*Terry Duncan (U.S. Marine Corps), president of [Duncan Management Inc.](#)*

Advanced Leadership Skills

"I learned everything about being a leader from military service, including discipline, consistency, ethics and respect. I also learned how to care for others who were under me in rank. You can learn leadership and management skills anywhere, but the Army gives you the opportunity to learn it when you're younger and carry the lifelong lesson of caring about others." —*Sami Ladeki, (U.S. Army), founder and CEO of [Sammy's Woodfired Pizza & Grill](#)*

"Every day I use skills that I learned in the Navy. One method I learned is 'distributed decision making.' This involves pushing responsibility and accountability as far down in the organization as possible. This requires training and clear accountability. When executed well, this method promotes creativity and autonomy at many levels of the organization, rather than creating a bottleneck at the top ranks." —*Rob Eleveld (U.S. Navy), CEO of [Whitepages Pro](#)*

Adaptability

"In the military, if something stays the same for too long, it starts to feel strange. You're constantly moving to a new base, changing roles and deploying to different locations. In the private sector, change is also constant, especially in companies that strive to be 'green and growing' and look to improve. Our company has experienced constant change and continuous improvement over the past two years. Our military-like culture has helped us push through the changes quickly." —*Tim Best (U.S. Army), CEO of [Bradley-Morris and RecruitMilitary](#)*

Superior Decision Making Skills

"Leaders would love to make decisions with perfect information, but that never happens. In the military, I learned to trust my ability to make decisions under pressure using what information I had available. For instance, in Afghanistan, while serving as an Army platoon leader, I picked up on the fact that we were about to be ambushed in time to make a decision that prevented casualties. As a veteran business owner, I've successfully used that same ability to make decisions under pressure." —*Mike Kim (U.S. Army), co-founder of [KPOP Foods](#)*

Resourcefulness, Flexibility and Persistence

"Veterans bring a sense of resourcefulness, boldness and leadership not seen in employees with civilian backgrounds. They've been faced with the challenge of getting a job done without access to the resources that would ideally be available. This resourcefulness is a highly desirable employee trait for independent business owners trying to grow with limited resources at hand. Veterans also bring to the table a keen ability to stick through difficult tasks and see them through to completion." —*Patrick J. MacKrell (U.S. Marine Corps), president and CEO of [New York Business Development Corporation](#)*

"A veteran's greatest skill is an uncanny and nearly unparalleled ability to independently solve complex tasks with little to no guidance. Service members are entrusted with missions of the utmost importance to national security and with the lives of their subordinates. They're given tasks and told to 'make it work.' As such, veterans are accustomed to performing independently at the highest levels while under stress."—*Nicolas Campbell (U.S. Army), president of [Stonewall Defense](#)*

"Veterans learn to pivot on a moment's notice from plans that aren't working to plans that are. Many people think military service is all about rigidity and following orders. That's true—in part, but you also need to think and act flexibly. If your battle plan isn't working, you pivot immediately to a plan that does." —*Paul Dillon (U.S. Army), owner of [Dillon Consulting Services LLC](#)*

"Resilience is critical to business and fostered through military service. Nothing ever goes according to plan. Driving on, regardless of the magnitude, discomfort or surprise of the change is the only option." —*Ed Marsh (U.S. Army), owner of [Consilium Global Business Advisors, LLC](#)*

"The military cultivates many traits that serve well in business. It champions collaboration, innovation, being nimble and problem solving. Innovation ends up being perpetuated as a function of people having to think on their feet. You never know what's around the corner or what challenge will arise, but one belief that runs deep in the military is that 'there is always a way.' And when it comes to executing a mission, there's a strong adherence to relying heavily on the collective creativity of the team to get the job done." —*Ed Borromeo, (U.S. Air Force), partner and COO at [Tallwave](#)*

The Ability to Harness Processes and Procedures

"One of the most important things my Air Force training taught me was the importance of procedures and having processes. You don't just hop into a plane and take it off the ground. There are many checks and safety inspections that have to be done, and a responsible pilot has to be accountable for all of it. As a veteran business owner, I take this same approach of rigorous training and safety precautions with my pest control company." —*Donnie Shelton (U.S. Air Force), owner, [Triangle Pest Control](#)*

"My biggest lesson learned from the military that I apply to my business is to focus on the fundamentals. In the military, everything is built on the fundamentals. We would never be able to progress to conducting night live fire exercises if we weren't able to shoot, move and communicate during the day." —*Nolan Martin (U.S. Army), creator of [BudgetChaos.com](#)*

Extreme Discipline

"Starting and running your own business is the most all-consuming thing you can do, and I wouldn't be able to get through it without the discipline the military instilled in me. Running on little sleep, having a no-quit attitude and preserving until the end are all attributes I can trace back to the military." —*Brady Speth (U.S. Air Force), CEO and owner of [Riton USA](#)*