

Ready-trained, untapped source of skilled talent - courtesy Canadian Forces

Contributed by Laurie Blake

Much has been made of the "entitled" attitude of young so-called millennials entering the workforce. They have been derided as selfish, disloyal, and unrealistic by many employers. Their work ethic and dedication have been questioned. Yet, there is a substantial group within the millennials that you would be hard-pressed to characterize with any of the epithets usually associated with their generation. This group is composed of Canadian Forces reservists. It's a little known fact that 40 per cent of all Canadian Forces reservists, around 10,000 young people, are college and university educated, and have extensive on-the-job training.

These young reservists are some of the same people you see on television everyday defending the right to freedom for Afghani civilians. They are the same young people that you see honouring our war dead at Cenotaphs across our country. They are the same young people who, when called upon to render assistance to civil powers, dutifully drop their personal lives to help out where the need is greatest.

Now there is a new online recruitment site - civiside.com - focused on matching up reservists with reserve-friendly employers. Launched in April 2008 by Kenneth Seville, himself a reservist with a Hamilton, ON, unit.

"I started civiside.com because I was seeing fellow reservists leaving the service due to working for employers who couldn't give time off for military training," Seville says. "These reservists were having to give up their annual vacation and were burning out. I started asking around how common this was and I found that it was almost universal.

"It occurred to me that if we connected our young reservists graduating from college and university with employers who were willing to accommodate training we could largely eliminate our attrition problems inside of five years." he says.

Seville notes that reservists are team-oriented, hard working, and ambitious. They are accustomed to working within organizational processes, in a multi-generational, gender-neutral, ethnically diverse workplace. They have been screened by the military for security clearance, drug use, and undesirable associations. In addition, they have gained teambuilding and leadership skills, as well as specialized training such first aid, harassment prevention, safety management, media awareness, and ethics.

And yet, many of these young men and women are hard-pressed to find jobs with employers sympathetic to their training and their requirements. Frankly, he says, most employers don't realize the commitment that reservists are making to ensure the defence of Canada largely occurs on their own time. Most of their training occurs on evenings and weekends, times that their peers are kicking back to relax. Instead, reservists sacrifice their family and personal time in the defence of others.

For most reservists, their military career is their formative work experience. Through this experience they gain a healthy respect for hierarchy, an above average work-ethic, ability to work with any group of people to which they are assigned, and personal pride in the work they do. They are also reliable and know the value of dressing professionally.

Of course, Seville notes, there is the big counter-argument to hiring reservists. Many employers, while supportive of the theoretical concept of being reserve-friendly, feel that their company simply cannot afford to accommodate the training requirements of a Canadian Forces reservist. This fear usually turns out to be unfounded; as reservists typically only request two-weeks' annual training accommodation. On the plus side, reservists working for a reserve-friendly employer are given an additional non-monetary incentive to stay with the supportive employer for the long term.

Given the notoriously transitory loyalty of millennials, and the comprehensive costs associated with replacing an employee, isn't accommodating a reservist really a cost efficient incentive to retain your best employees?

"The service is really in it's infancy, but so far the response has been positive from both reservists and employers," Seville says. "Reservists see the value of finding a reserve-friendly employer right out of the starting gate, and employers like the idea of young graduates who are hardworking team-players."

Seville notes that Xerox Canada in particular is very interested in hiring reservists b/c they have a formal sales training program that many young people coming out of school don't acclimate well to. Reservists have proven that they can fit into a process drive, hierarchical organization, with established training parameters.

For more on the site, or to register, visit www.civiside.com.