

Building synergy between Military Resources and Human Resources

By Donna Hansen, CHRP, Director of Human Resources, Commissionaires Ottawa



Whether you are a Human Resources professional who manages employees with a military history or whether you once served and then transitioned to a second career in Human Resources, one thing is clear: Once former members of the Canadian Forces transition to second careers, there is no question how much their unique background, rigorous training and first-hand experiences will continue to distinguish them in terms of character and conduct.

I have had the pleasure of serving both worlds. For almost twenty years, I served in the Regular Force and the Reserves as a logistics and personnel manager. Today I serve as a Director of Human Resources for a not-for-profit, private security organization whose mandate includes a commitment to hire former military personnel.

On a personal level, it was satisfying to transition to a work culture that was so ingrained with military principles, a passion to serve others and a steadfast dedication to support its people. For fourteen years now, I have worked side by side with people who have *been there* – women and men who value discipline, integrity, consistency and loyalty.

On a professional level, it was important for me to join an organization that truly respected and supported the contributions of its Human Resources team - not to mention the “H” in HR. Managing

the Human Resources function in a people services organization with a not-for profit status and an employee-centric mandate is truly a dream job for any human resources professional. Over the years, it has been rewarding and empowering to know that attracting top quality employees and promoting a top quality work environment have been at the heart of every business decision. When an organization is mandated to negotiate the highest wages, the best benefits and best training for its people - and in fact achieves and maintains these priorities over and above its competitors - contributing to this success as an HR professional is indeed a source of pride.

Although hiring from the military community remains a focus, our mandate also includes a commitment to provide employment for RCMP veterans and security-conscious civilians who have proven skills and a passion to protect the safety and well-being of their fellow Canadians. While there were some initial concerns about cultural integration issues, they were quickly put to rest. By fostering a common focus on service, we have brought out the best in both our “veterans” and “civvies”, with both groups contributing valuable insights and experience.

This synergy has actually helped us to adapt to the changes and growth that has been our reality in recent years. Because we are in the private security industry, our people and the

communities we serve constantly face escalating security threats. We have expanded our services and recruited new security professionals in direct response to client needs and demands. We have accommodated new laws and standards. We have kept stride with today’s technological advances. Through all this, our employees deserve our assurance that all these changes will not distract us from our commitment to take care of our own - as has always been our culture and tradition.

To lead and support a hybrid workforce such as ours, we need uniquely qualified people. One of those people is Jim Britton. Jim is a key member of the HR department, focusing on employee relations issues. He serves as a liaison between management and employees, addressing personnel issues, enforcing employment standards, supporting training programs, managing the honours and awards approval processes, and overseeing our internal competition processes. In addition, he advises our Business Operations Managers and follows through on any complaints received by employees.

Jim is also a retired Master Warrant Officer with 26 years in the Canadian Forces. There he served in many areas, with a particular focus on training and operations. He devoted over two years as a Career Manager. This is where his interest in Human Resources took hold, and so he pursued a college program in HR

at Algonquin College to round out his professional experience. Then he came to us.

Jim says, "I know that for some who have left the military, finding a stable source of income with minimal stress and good benefits is exactly what they need. We can offer that. For others, the challenge of building a second career - one that taps into their skills, offers opportunities for advancement and continues to fuel their passion to make a difference - is far more fulfilling to them. We can offer that too."

Just as important as having a solid Human Resources team is the need to ensure that those who provide leadership to our employees in the field also understand and follow through on our core values. On the operations side, John Peters is a shining example. Posted at Canada's National Defence Headquarters, John has consistently proven his ability to work closely with the Military Police while managing an ever-expanding scope of security-sensitive responsibilities. He also organizes and directs hundreds of our employees - all of whom are cleared to the Secret level or higher and nearly all of whom, quite appropriately, have military and/or RCMP backgrounds.

John explains, "Whatever it takes, we recruit, screen and train our employees to know what to do, how to do it and when to do it. There is a zero tolerance for mediocrity here. I am grateful for my team's valuable contributions and their ongoing dedication to this contract."

John's focus on people is unquestionable. For one, he is reluctant to accept full credit for anything he does, preferring to praise his deputies, administrators, supervisors, as well as the hundreds of employees he oversees. John understands

John Peters (left) with CEO Paul A. Guindon (right). John supervises hundreds of Commissionaires Ottawa employees with military or RCMP backgrounds who provide support to the Military Police at National Defence Headquarters.



the importance of teamwork and the need to trust his people. And, he is the first to set an example by adhering to the highest levels of expertise, attentiveness and dedication. Our client recently recommended him for a promotion, and John Peters is now our highest ranking employee in the field.

Whether it's the strategic direction of an organization, day-to-day management or leadership in the field, Human Resources remains a priority rather than an afterthought. When an organization recognizes this priority - then actively recruits and successfully retains employees who embrace this priority - it increases job satisfaction all around. For us, integrating and honouring a military culture has been as much of a contributing factor to our success as it has been a fitting salute to those who live to serve. 🚩

Donna Hansen is the Director of Human Resources for Commissionaires Ottawa - a private, not-for-profit organization that employs more than 3,200 security professionals to protect and serve over 200 client sites in the National Capital Region and Northern Ontario. The organization's social mandate is to promote the cause of commissionaires by the creation of meaningful employment opportunities for former members of the Canadian Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and others who wish to contribute to the security and well-being of Canadians. Today, the company has the most stable workforce in the private security industry and is ranked among the top three largest private sector employers in the National Capital Region. For more information, please visit www.commissionaires-ottawa.on.ca.

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