

'Apprentice' educates civilians about military

Perdew uses fame to tackle myth of rigidity

By Debra Williams

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When Kelly Perdew heard the words "you're hired" from Donald Trump on the finale of the second season of "The Apprentice," he didn't just land himself a great job. He also helped undo some prejudices and stereotypes that make it difficult for ex-military to enter the business world.

The former Army military intelligence officer hopes to use his post-"Apprentice" fame to dispel some of those. He's featured in new recruiting commercials that show the entrepreneur tackling common Army challenges. At the end of the spots, Perdew is dressed in a business suit telling Trump that he's ready.

Perdew, 38, said he hopes the commercials and an upcoming book are effective in reaching two very different audiences.

"I do hope that it inspires service members and veterans, but I also hope that it educates the civilian world about what's learned in the military," Perdew said, speaking from his New York City office.

Whether it's due to media images, past experiences or simple ignorance, civilians sometimes view the military as rigid, narrow-minded, inflexible and overly aggressive.

Perdew said he faced these stereotypes when he moved into the Trump Towers apartment that houses contestants who competed for a one-year contract worth \$250,000 with the Trump organization. He said he knew he was cast as "the military guy" and indeed found many of the contestants expecting him to live up to the stereotypes.

It was after the show was over, though, when he realized how deep stereotypes run and perhaps how little the civilian world knows about the military.

"I kept getting asked, 'Do you think your military experience helped you on 'The Apprentice?'"

"Initially, my reaction was, 'Yes, and here are the reasons.' Then, I became frustrated and thought, 'Why doesn't everybody know this?'"

Perdew hopes his TV appearance showed how military experience directly relates to the world of business.

"Veterans are impressive, because what they have done at their age is usually five or 10 years ahead of civilian peers in terms of leadership and responsibility," Perdew said. "And it's done in a significantly more stressful environment than what their civilian colleagues face."

Unfortunately, many employers still

need to hear that message. While most recognize the tremendous value a veteran brings to the workforce, a few still view time in the military only as time spent taking and giving orders.

Perdew said he thinks that one of the biggest misconceptions is that veterans lack creativity.

"In an operations order, a commander or a squad leader gets a general mission of defending a bridge or taking a hill," he said. "They have to figure out how to do it, and that takes creativity."

In the civilian world, creativity means problem-solving skills — something vital in the day-to-day operation of businesses of all sizes. To show you have that skill, Perdew advises veterans to be ready to talk about or to show problem-solving abilities in job interviews.

Once on the job, you can overcome any prejudices by making sure you listen to the feedback of your co-workers. Most prejudices are rooted in media images of veterans as take-charge, stand-alone leaders. Strip that away by being an inclusive leader.

"Draw people into every equation, and show them that you value their input," Perdew said. "You'll get a good response."

He said some veterans could even disarm prejudices during interviews just by offering a fresh, organized look at business problems.

For example, if you've been in logistics, share how your unit overcame problems common to the same field in business. Did you develop a new way to make sure parts arrived on time? Did you save

money by implementing a new process of doing routine motor-pool tasks? And could those same approaches save a potential civilian employer money?

Perdew does have one warning when it comes to overcoming military prejudices. If you're having to work too hard, maybe you're at the wrong company.

"Look to see if a company has an experience where someone with a military background has risen up," he said. "That's a good sign that you are going to be accepted."

Perdew is an executive vice president of Trump Ice and is working to take the bottled water nationally. He also is involved in a commercial real estate development, 40 Wall St., in Manhattan and in the development of Trump Towers Tampa, a residential complex in Tampa, Fla.

Perdew's contract with Donald Trump will end in December. □



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