

3 positive approaches to spurring growth throughout your business

We are in the midst of the weakest economic recovery since World War II. And this exceedingly shallow rebound follows the deepest downturn since The Great Depression. Without going into

all the negative statistics and

data, it's clear that legions of workers in the United States — whether they're employed or

unemployed — feel vulnerable, scared and under-valued.

But rather than spend time debating who's at fault, I want to spend time exploring how

leaders of organizations can be catalysts to help us move forward in a much more positive direction.

Organizations that are equipped with what I call "convergent leaders," people who ignite possibility, create alignment and ensure long-term viability, establish the kind of organizational muscle that can withstand these difficult times. These leaders personally build the type of organizational culture required for long-term success.

One of the best examples of convergent leadership is the way that Herb Kelleher set the culture at Southwest Airlines.

Over the years — in both good times and bad times — Kelleher remained steadfastly committed to the belief that people were the most important component of the company. He consistently and personally interacted with his front-line employees, because he viewed them as Southwest's most critical assets. He instilled in his employees a sense of pride in making affordable airline travel accessible to the everyday consumer.

It was a simple, yet elegant, approach.

When talking about why taking care of employees came first, Kelleher once said, "If the employees come first, then they're happy. ... A motivated employee treats the customer well. The customer is happy, so they keep coming back, which pleases the shareholders. It's not one of the enduring green mysteries of all time, it is just the way it works."

This respect and constant care for employees is one of the main reasons that Southwest has achieved consistently high growth, profitability, and customer satisfaction — and consistently low disaffection from its unions.

The most successful convergent leaders make sure their organization's culture is based upon shared responsibility, mutual accountability, and trusted, intimate relationships. This means that people are as invested in each other's success as much as they are in their own; it also means that people start shedding non-useful control, so that everyone feels valued, empowered and fully invested in a common and shared set of priorities.

Based on my experience, convergent leaders behave differently, and they're typically focused on the following three things:

1. Igniting possibility. The leader helps others see and pursue the organization's higher purpose — a commitment to all stakeholders that transcends financial returns.

2. Creating alignment. The leader ensures that clear lines of sight to organizational and individual success are aligned and exist for all employees, in terms of roles, responsibilities and expectations for performance and behavior.

3. Ensuring viability. The leader consistently tends to, and considers, the factors that are required to ensure the current and long-term success of the organization.

We need more convergent leaders and convergent companies in America right now, because they have the proven ability to create lasting value while enduring both hard and soft markets.

In the process, they also connect cadres of productive employees, trusting customers, committed executive teams creating vibrant communities and, ultimately, a stronger, more hopeful nation.

Looking forward, this may be one of the constructive ways that we can help our country regain and restore its much-desired quality of life and prosperity.

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GUEST COLUMN
Lawrence Epps Jr.

Looking for a competitive edge? Hire a soldier.

When the Greatest Generation returned from the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific at the end of World War II, they accomplished a feat nearly as remarkable as freeing the world from tyranny and oppression. They returned home to work on farms, in plants and factories, built



GUEST COLUMN
Gen. Raymond T. Odierno

massive industries and Main Street businesses, and remade America's economy into the largest, most successful in the history of the world.

The Greatest Generation displayed remarkable courage and valor; and continued to provide uncommon leadership, creativity and teamwork — talents as important in commerce as they were in battle. Indeed, while their success can be attributed to many things, it can most certainly be credited in part to the training, values and skills developed in service with the United States military.

Today, a new generation of leaders and teammates is preparing to come home after more than a decade of service to their nation, not only in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in more than 80 nations across the globe and right here at home. As the United States Army adjusts to a post-conflict posture, that means many of those who today wear our uniform will be seeking new challenges and new opportunities. That's a potential boon for American business and industry.

Like those before them, this Next Greatest Generation exhibits remarkable values, training and skills developed and honed in service with the United States Army. Many of these skills are quantifiable. In fact, Congress recently passed, and the president signed into law, the Veteran Skills to Jobs Act. Among its provisions, it allows military service to count toward training or certification required for federal licenses in areas such as aviation, aerospace and communications.

But other skills developed in the Army are no less tangible, and equally valuable to any business or industry.

Hiring a soldier means that you're taking on someone who has already made education, physical fitness, high achievement and service a priority in their life. Everyone in today's Army is a volunteer, many of whom joined or re-enlisted during a time of war. They know what it means to commit to a venture larger than themselves.

Fundamentally, the Army develops leaders. Early in his or her career, a soldier is often a squad leader, in charge of a nine-person team. At the entry-level officer rank of second lieutenant, a soldier may be in charge of as many as 40 others, and millions of dollars worth of equipment. Regardless of age or rank, the Army provides our men and women with the confidence, skills and values to lead when asked to do so.

Depending on their military occupational specialty, soldiers have respectively spent years developing additional experience as teachers, trainers, diplomats, police officers, engineers, nurses, mechanics, construction workers and truck drivers, to name just a few. They've taught Afghan farmers how to improve efficiency and modernize their crop growing. The airlifts they conducted each day were greater than the number of shuttles flown between LaGuardia and Reagan National airports. They drive more miles in a single day than any parcel carrier. In short, the experiences of today's soldiers are as challenging and diverse as in any workforce.

But there's more.

According to Careerbuilder.com, the qualities most sought after by employers include teamwork, creative problem solving, multi-tasking, enthusiasm and initiative. The American soldier has those qualities in abundance.

We ask that you consider the great opportunities in hiring a soldier. You can start by visiting the Heroes to Hire website at h2h.jobs, or learn more by contacting Joining Forces at whitehouse.gov/joiningforces, and through the Commerce Department at commerce.gov/office-secretary/office-business-liaison.

Odierno is the Chief of Staff of the United States Army

