

PERSONAL JOURNAL: MANAGEMENT

B-Schools Lure Former Military Officers

By BETH GARDINER

With leadership skills honed in battle and experience shouldering far more responsibility than their civilian peers, many former military officers are enrolling in M.B.A. programs to get one of the key attributes they lack—knowledge of the business world.

As militaries including U.S. forces begin to downsize, many departing officers are heading to business schools, hoping the experience will help them make a smooth transition to business careers. Others remain in the forces while they earn a business degree, aiming to acquire management skills they can use as they climb the military chain of command.

The learning goes both ways. While current and former service members immerse themselves in the details of finance, accounting and other business basics, their schools and classmates gain a lot by having them on campus, administrators say.

Students from military backgrounds often become leaders of the small study groups that are a key part of the B-school classroom, they tend to be very active in campus life, and their well-developed abilities to head teams and work effectively make them natural role models for fellow students.

At a very young age, military officers “are commanding a platoon of 80 to 100 people and taking on a \$10 million budget, and that doesn’t even include being in a war, life and death situations,” said Greg Eisenbarth, executive director of Military M.B.A., a group that matches U.S. military students with B-schools. “They just walk a different path, and they experience leadership because they’re put in that environment earlier than anyone else.”

Military M.B.A. provides a small number of \$15,000 merit scholarships for veterans heading to business school, but Mr. Eisenbarth said that money was needed less now that the 2008 law known as the Post 9/11 GI Bill helps fund many American veterans’ studies.

London Business School, which works with Mr. Eisenbarth’s group, encourages applications from the military, said David Simpson, associate director of degree programs. About 30 of the program’s 700 to 800 current students came straight from the military, and numbers are rising, he said. Others, from countries with mandatory national service, spent time in the forces earlier in their



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careers, he added.

“Our employers love them, and we think they make fantastic students,” Mr. Simpson said.

Once, admission officers had to wait for an American service member to return from a submarine mission for an interview, and another U.S. officer is currently applying from Afghanistan, where recent instability may mean he does a preliminary interview by teleconference rather than in person, Mr. Simpson said.

One former student rose to the top of the Italian navy after earning his M.B.A., captaining a frigate and an aircraft carrier, Mr. Simpson said.

“It would be very hard to come across a career sector that tests team skills and leadership skills more than the military. They have outstanding exposure to being put under pressure too. Organizational and planning skills, all have great drive and ambition,” he said. “They’re the kind of characteristics that employers are looking for, people who can weigh up the environment and then make a de-

cision and run with it.”

Bernard Garrette, associate dean for the M.B.A. at HEC Paris business school, said modern militaries also provide skills needed by companies that are under pressure to grow and want employees who can be bold about developing products and jumping into new markets. “This spirit of conquest, hunger for new things, creating new businesses, new teams” jibes well with military skills “that are based on courage, doing new things,” he said.

HEC tries to imbue that spirit even in non-veteran students by requiring all M.B.A.s to attend a two-day training session at the French military academy Saint-Cyr, where teams of students are assigned tasks like building bridges as a way of developing teamwork and leadership skills, supervised by an organizational-behavior professor.

In Canada, McGill University’s Desautels Faculty of Management also brings lessons from the military into its teaching. Retired Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire addressed

students on leading under difficult circumstances, drawing on his experience heading the United Nations’ assistance mission in Rwanda during that country’s mid-1990s genocide.

For all their experience, though, most military students have very little exposure to the business world, and they realize they need to learn fast and build networks they can tap later in their careers, Mr. Garrette said. They also must adjust to working in environments that are far less structured and hierarchical than they are used to, and with people from diverse backgrounds, said Mr. Simpson.

Sean Park, 31, now earning an M.B.A. at the China Europe International Business School in Shanghai, spent two years as an English-Korean translator in the South Korean army before becoming a researcher and analyst in a finance company.

At CEIBS, the teamwork skills he learned in the military are a big help, he said. “When other team members are demotivated,

we need to motivate them and work together,” he said. “It’s all about leadership and coordinating and then allocating the work.”

Sandy Arbuthnott, 31, who spent seven years as a pilot-in-training and flight instructor for Britain’s Royal Navy, says he hopes the experience he is now getting at London Business School will help him move swiftly to a new career, perhaps in consulting. “The management, the finance, the accounting is all new for me,” he said.

More familiar, he said, “is that intensity, the constant pressure to perform, the constant being under the spotlight,” he said. “When I was teaching, if I approved someone’s flight plan and then they flew into a hill, the buck would have stopped with me.”

In the classroom, that experience makes a difference, he said.

“I can’t be the guy who sits in the corner and churns out Excel spreadsheets, but perhaps a military guy does bring the ability to include everybody” and direct a team, he said.

Tips to Understanding the Social Media Marketing Revolution

By JOHN BUSSEY

A new book describes the marketing revolution fired by social media—how to make a buck off it, how to avoid getting bamboozled by it.

THE BUSINESS

In researching a column on the U.S. beef industry’s travails, I asked an Internet expert if he could see who was driving the controversy online. At the top of his list was an otherwise unknown blogger in Texas. Far down in sixth place was big media (in this case ABC News).

Welcome to the “citizen influencer.”

Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have created a raft of new influencers, independent of institution or celebrity. They have also spawned an industry that measures this influence and tells companies whom to seek out in a given topic area to generate buzz about their product.

Companies such as Klout, Peer-Index, Appinions and PeopleBrowsr, the creator of Kred, have over the past few years developed algorithms that measure the billions of times we tweet, post or act online; the reactions we generate; and the influence we therefore have on the Web. Importantly—and controversially—they

can give each of us a score.

More than 5,000 companies—from Disney, to Audi, to Turner Broadcasting—have already tapped market-leader Klout to identify influencers. The goal: to find the equivalent of the blogger in Texas, get her engaged, and push a product pitch across the Web. “This is an entirely new marketing channel, and when’s the last time we’ve had one of those,” Mark Schaefer, an academic at Rutgers and a noted blogger on social media, said in a phone conversation. “Done well, it can be enormously effective because you’re getting this advocacy organically.”

Mr. Schaefer’s new book, “Return on Influence: The Revolutionary Power of Klout, Social Scoring, and Influence Marketing,” is a highly readable primer on this brave new world. Here, Turner Broadcasting uses influence marketing to boost viewership of its program “Falling Skies.” Burson-Marsteller uses influence scores to decide whether to react to a blogger’s attack on a client. And Audi finds the right bloggers to boost its image in the U.S. market.

In addition to demonstrating how the new tools are already reshaping marketing, Mr. Schaefer offers some warnings about the limitations of social scoring.

He describes how the technology, still in relative infancy, gets gamed. He untangles why Justin Bieber gets a higher influence score than Barack Obama (Mr. Bieber, according to the stats, drives more action in his zone of influence online). And he details the backlash against the fact that influence scores are accessible to anyone who searches online.

There’s also the sticky matter of companies offering perks to woo big influencers. Legions of bloggers and tweeters now check their Klout standing daily. To feed this fixation, “Return on Influence” also gives tips on how to boost a score.