

Mission Ready

Volume 6, Issue 1

January, 2004

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Military Experience Means Business

Does former military experience, within a large, societal model, translate into business success for that nation? Well, if Israel is considered, the answer is a resounding 'Yes!'

Israel's national defense strategy is one of 'total defense.' With very few exceptions, every Israeli young man and woman must enter the military at the age of eighteen, for a minimum period of three years for males, and two years for females. After the mandatory active service, Israeli men must remain in the reserves until age forty five, if in a combat unit, or age fifty five, if in a specialist's unit. "Reserve duty" very likely means, in today's political situation, one month of every year on patrol in the West Bank.

It is noteworthy that, for all practical purposes, one's military obligation cannot be postponed; instead college and career is postponed, until the young Israeli man turns about twenty one, and the Israeli lady twenty. That suggests that Israeli youth may be, in some sense, like the tortoise in its race against the hare. While American kids, for example, are allowed a three year "head start," Israeli kids must put the pursuit of their professional lives on hold.

Of course, there is another way to look at this tortoise-hare race: while American kids are prolonging their adolescence, partying with their friends for the first two or three years at college, before they take graduation seriously, Israeli kids are making life and death decisions on the urban battlefield of the West Bank. One youth enters college at eighteen; the other young man enters a crucible of leadership. Today's Israeli generation is much like the American "drafted" generations of WW II and Vietnam, which began their college education a few years late—as mature adults, very often with combat experience.

How does this leadership training pay off in the business world? Well, to continue with the Israeli

example, very well indeed. Consider Israel's predicament. In the year 2000, the Israeli economy was at its peak; the nation was a world economic power. Today, its economy has been under constant assault for the last three years; hundreds of terrorist attacks have decimated the tourist industry, which affects, in turn, the economy as a whole. Yet no hotels have closed. Some, at 25% occupancy, are turning a profit, while it has been "common knowledge" in the hotel industry, worldwide, that at least a 60% occupancy rate was required just to break even.

Restaurants that have been bombed, reopen within weeks, and are filled with customers who refuse to let terror change their lives. Israeli companies, which are "single source providers" to major American aerospace and processor corporations, have never missed a delivery, even though terrorists try repeatedly to sabotage their efforts. Israel has more companies trading on the NASDAQ than any other country except for the United States. And, it can be argued that Israeli high tech companies fared much better during the collapse of the "dot.com" market, by adapting quickly to the situation (finding new markets) instead of closing their doors. Even with nearly 10% unemployment, brought about by the intifada, violent crime is almost unheard of.

We believe military training has contributed much to the character of this resilient nation, in good times, and bad.