

Agent Recruiting

Looking for disciplined, driven agents? Try hiring former soldiers

Not surprisingly, Robb Spearman hears some grumbling when he asks agents to perform distasteful tasks such as cold calling and door knocking.

But half a dozen of Spearman's 90 agents at RE/MAX Real Estate Concepts in Des Moines, IA, don't balk at such assignments. They simply do as they're instructed.

The six agents have something in common — they're all veterans. A growing number of brokers are making a point of hiring former soldiers, and they say these recruits bring an impressive degree of determination, initiative, and polish to an industry known for its freewheeling and sometimes sloppy culture.

"They have great discipline, really good work ethic," Spearman says. "They just go, go, go."

Spearman is one of dozens of brokers participating in Operation RE/MAX, a RE/MAX International program that offers veterans an opportunity to launch real estate careers.

One of Spearman's competitors, Iowa Realty, is also targeting soldiers. That company recently launched a program it dubs Veterans to Realtors.

Create a package of benefits

In the first few weeks after Iowa Realty announced the program, six veterans had enrolled in the company's real estate school. Iowa Realty offers plenty of help to ease

agents into a new career. The HomeServices of America company offers to waive veterans' desk fees for six months. It's also covering the costs of real estate examinations, licensing fees, errors and omissions insurance, and dues. In all, the package is worth about \$2,700, says Tim Meline, director of training at Iowa Realty.

Iowa Realty has also created a support group for veterans. Meline says soldiers offer a lot in return for that investment.

"They're trained. They're disciplined," he says. "Most of them are familiar with today's technology."

The military demands discipline, punctuality, and a willingness to tackle difficult tasks. All of those lessons are useful for former soldiers who launch real estate careers.

Consider more structure

Scott Weaver started Urban Leasing & Realty of Houston after a military career that included a tour as an intelligence officer in Iraq. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Weaver has found that the army instilled a drive that has helped him succeed in real estate.

"The hardest part was adjusting to the absence of a hierarchy," Weaver says. "There was a lot more structure in the military."

In the service, that structure includes customs for dealing with interpersonal

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relationships and responding quickly to phone calls. Weaver says clients are often surprised that he returns phone calls so quickly.

Perhaps most importantly, the military teaches soldiers to eschew excuses and to take responsibility for their actions.

“The military brings to the table this sense of personal accountability,” Weaver says. “The military really breeds that into people.”

Weaver, 31, acknowledges that his military background makes him an atypical member of Generation Y, a group not known for a grueling work ethic or steely self-discipline.

“Next to my peers, I’m an old-fashioned person,” Weaver says.

Real estate traditionalists might find it easy to dismiss former soldiers as stodgy automatons who only know how to follow orders. Soldiers do follow orders, but they’re also trained to make decisions on the fly and to adapt to their surroundings.

“Today’s army is different,” Meline says. “The mindset is that they’re more creative.”

Indeed, the army’s approach to leadership has carved out its own corner on the management bookshelf. Books such as *The Ranger Way* detail the army’s emphasis not on following orders but on thinking for oneself.

Al Romaszewski of RE/MAX of Eagle River in Eagle River, AK, left the military in 1977, but he says the service gets a bad rap

Not your grandfather’s army

Contrary to the stereotype, the U.S. Army doesn’t want its soldiers to simply follow orders. Instead, they’re expected to think on their feet and make quick but responsible decisions — much like real estate brokers and agents.

A few rules of thumb for soldiers and officers from the *Ranger Handbook*:

- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.
- Exercise initiative.
- Demonstrate resourcefulness.
- Accept fair criticism.
- Take corrective actions for your mistakes.
- Set high but attainable standards.
- Be willing to do what you require of your Rangers.
- Ensure the Rangers understand the task; supervise them and ensure they accomplish it.

for training officers to do nothing more than follow orders.

He recalls learning to manage a budget during his time in the service.

“When you’re in the military, you have to think for yourself,” he says. “I had to make decisions, I had to manage money.”

That experience led Romaszewski to value veterans as agents. He recently hired two former agents to work for his small firm. *Contacts: Robb Spearman, RE/MAX Real Estate Concepts, 515-276-2872; Tim Meline, Iowa Realty, 515-453-6223; Scott Weaver, Urban Leasing & Realty, 832-356-8847; Al Romaszewski, RE/MAX of Eagle River, 907-594-4200.* 