

# From officer material to office material

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Former Australian Army captain Miles Jakeman had been an officer for 13 years when he left the army in 1998. The army was the only professional life he had known. “I really didn’t know what was out there,” he recalls. He soon found that it was a successful career as an entrepreneur and adviser to business.

The former intelligence officer is the founder and managing director of the Canberra-based Citadel Group of consulting businesses, which has thrice appeared on the *BRW* Fast 100 list of Australia’s fastest-growing companies.

Jakeman entered Duntroon military college as a 17-year-old and by the time he was 19 was in charge of 60 people, providing him with enduring leadership skills, including the ability to lead and motivate teams.

“The military certainly gives you some good skills that help set people up for success, but from my experience, the quality and attributes of the person are more important than just the military background per se,” he says.

Still, combine the right person with a background as a military officer, and that’s likely to be someone who will be in high demand as a corporate executive.

Headhunter Nick Waterworth says some clients specifically ask for candidates who have served as military officers because of their proven leadership and people-management skills. In fact, he wishes he had more executives with such backgrounds on his books.

“It’s a relatively small pool, but those who are on our radar are absolutely outstanding individuals,” says Waterworth, managing partner of Watermark Search International in Sydney.

Waterworth says officers who leave the military after 10 years of service generally possess a greater level of maturity and diversity of experience than most 30-year-old candidates he would see in his office.

“They understand leading from the front and they tend to be good on their feet,” he says. “They’re well rounded, have worked with all sorts of people in all sorts of situations in different countries, and possibly they’ve seen some unpleasant things in their lives, which might explain why very often they possess a degree of humility.”

The vice-president of global enterprise for Australia and New Zealand at Vodafone, Peter Kendall, entered the New Zealand Army fully aware that his military experience would be attractive to employers.

Unusually, Kendall already had a university commerce degree – and a career plan – when he joined the army.

“I joined the army with a view to acquiring management and leadership experience. I planned to do three years,” he explains. But there was a hitch that placed his grand plan on hold. “I found that I really enjoyed the army and I was in no hurry to leave.”

Finally, after nine years as an officer, he retired with the rank of captain. He put his plan back on track by undertaking an MBA at the Australian Graduate School of Management and went on to hold positions as an account director, head of product marketing and, since 2010, a vice-president with Vodafone based in Sydney.

Kendall says his experience with the military was invaluable, providing him with leadership, decision-making, team building and communication skills that continue to serve him well as a senior executive.

“There’s a lot of focus on delivery in the military, a very strong focus on outcomes and problem-solving – having a plan and being able to execute that plan through people,” he says.

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