A Veteran Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility

In the world of corporate social responsibility (CSR), it's easy to become distracted by the tyranny of the urgent. Employees have close and personal relationships with not-for-profits and want to share their passion for those organizations. Corporations don't lack in wonderful charities to choose from, but they do run the very real risk of spreading their resources too thinly. I have watched the scattershot approach...doling out a few dollars to dozens, if not hundreds, of organizations based on who happens to ask first.

How Does an Organization Do Right by Employees, Customers, and the Community?

It's a mix of **relationship**, **intentionality**, and **weight class** (ability to make a significant impact).

Since 2013, SAIC has partnered with Building Homes for Heroes (BHFH), which gifts mortgage-free homes to wounded veterans and offers services for their families. Serving as SAIC’s liaison to the not-for-profit, I have had a front row seat in all of our fundraising and engagement initiatives. This year, we engaged thousands of our employees, increased giving by 43%, set company social media records, and even caught the attention of the director of operations for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Our BHFH relationship paid dividends for wounded veterans, the not-for-profit, SAIC employees, and the company. As BHFH says, they don’t build homes, they “help our severely wounded and disabled veterans and their families rebuild their lives.”
Relationship

We selected BHFH for several reasons, all of which hinge on relationship:

1. **BHFH puts a face on our donations.** We are partnered with wounded veterans, who we often get to meet in person. Our employee volunteers enjoy personal correspondence with several of the heroes we’ve supported since 2013. Our CEO likes to say that we adopt them into the SAIC family.

2. **We value veterans.** At SAIC, more than one in four employees served in uniform, and our entire workforce takes pride in improving the health and safety of active duty military and veterans through our contracts and through volunteering.

3. **We matter to BHFH.** Their largest partners have workforces more than ten times bigger than ours, but I can always count on someone returning my phone call!

4. **We trush them.** We conducted our due diligence in selecting BHFH. They earned a 98.23 out of 100 on Charitynavigator.org—a four-star rating. Their operating costs are razor thin, and their CEO even donates his salary back into the organization. We have met with the CEO and president to make sure our values and objectives align.

Intentionality

Make a plan. I’m busy, you’re busy, we’re all busy! It’s so much easier to simply write a check for charity than to actually consider how to make the most of that resource. In addition, without a plan, you risk having a strong personality steer the organization into causes that don’t resonate with the vast majority of the company’s population. In 2018, we took that to heart and talked to BHFH early in the year to create a plan to best work for BHFH and our employees. Our goal was to align our efforts with heroes receiving homes in areas where our employees live and work, giving us the opportunity to do more than just fundraise. The BHFH response was overwhelming.

Not only were we partnered with two amazing heroes in Florida, but BHFH also asked if we’d like to help surprise these families with the news that they had been selected to receive a mortgage-free home! They even worked with us to coordinate the announcements around SAIC events. The Gonzalez family was surprised on the show floor at GEOINT 2018 in the SAIC booth with a guest appearance from Major General Urrutia-Varhall, while the Howard family was told during SAIC’s employee picnic in front of more than 500 people! Both events were successful thanks to the close coordination and relationship enjoyed by SAIC and BHFH. These ceremonies, posted to social media channels, have garnered thousands of views.

Weight Class (Ability to Make a Significant Impact)

In traditional sponsorships, the logo of a 200,000-person company is normally bigger and more prominent than that of a company the size of SAIC, so we wanted to find a way to conduct CSR that didn’t rely on scale. Thanks to the relationship we share with BHFH, we were
able to go beyond traditional sponsorship opportunities like signage and logo placement. For example, building on the passion of a very engaged workforce, we created an entire event and BHFH fundraising activity around the Army Ten-Miler. We sponsored employee runners, hosted a pre-race dinner, and invited BHFH to attend. Chris Claude (our 2016 hero) joined in the fun as a racer, and the Howard family (our 2018 hero) traveled from Florida to cheer on our runners.

We made our resources go farther. For less than the cost of one logo placement at a sporting event (which is static and can’t interact with people), we were able to:

- Engage employees and their networks (our runners posted on social media to fundraise)
- Enable employees to participate outside of a traditional fundraiser setting
- Deepen our bonds with BHFH
- Enjoy a great experience with a few or our adopted heroes

Outside the Box

Many of us have seen those sponsorship forms with a few pre-designed promotion options and associated price tags. We dared to think outside of those checkboxes and truly partner with BHFH. We sought, and found, a true partner that wanted to work with us on finding ways to enrich the lives of wounded vets that didn’t rely on a prescribed sponsor role. The result was a fuller, richer, and much more successful CSR experience for us, them, our employees, and our adopted wounded veterans. When considering your next CSR investment, think outside the box, and stretch beyond traditional sponsorships.

BY JAKE WEYANT

I serve as the communications lead for SAIC’s National Security Group. I have a special interest in organizational culture, and hold a master’s degree in professional writing. A member of the Public Relations Society of America, I have been with SAIC (via a few legacy companies) since 2003.
Transitioning Military: Ethically Engaged

Asked about the transition from military to the world of government contracting, some of SAIC’s talented veterans weighed in on their experiences. Boasting an employee base that is more than one quarter veterans, we know about attracting, retaining, and celebrating our men and women in uniform. We love giving them a channel to share their voice and some great insights for transitioning military. Following is an installment from our PWW Team in Annapolis Junction, Maryland.

Bottom Line, Up-Front (BLUF)

There are so many options in the civilian world… where to go, who to work for, even what benefits to seek. Take advantage of others who have gone before you to narrow the choices. Also, take advantage of the insight and industry knowledge of your recruiter on how best to achieve your desired role.

What’s Different About the Contracting World? Options!!!

For years, everything was fairly standard issue. You go where you’re told, do what you have to, and take what the military gives you. I knew that the civilian world was considerably different, but the first time I had to sit down and decide on a benefits package, I was a little taken aback because there were so many options to choose from.

In regards to the mission, I find that I’m able to focus more attention on the mission without the responsibilities of being
a military leader, or the constant distractions of military duties (endless training requirements, planning meetings, paperwork, etc.), which has really allowed for my talents to shine.

How to Narrow the Field? Ethics

I wanted a company that shared my values and actually lived them. I had been researching companies for a few months via glassdoor.com and a few other sites, but when my former Sailor told me that working for SAIC made her think of me, I decided to take a look.

What I Wish I’d Known: Treat Job Searches as a PCS

Treat your move into civilian life as a permanent change of station (PCS)… that’s the military term for an official relocation… and your recruiters are the detailers. I wish I had listened to the good advice of my recruiter at the beginning of my transition, it could have saved me headache, heartache, and money. In short, take advantage of the good resources and good advice available to you.

Serving Out of Uniform

I think that being assigned to an office that affords me an opportunity to mentor junior military analysts is really important to me, because I cannot only guide them through their professional growth, but also I can help them through their transition if they decide to separate as well. Working with the recruiting staff and briefing at Transition Assistance Program events has been a great experience for me. We’re just getting geared up, but I see a lot of potential in the Maryland team, and I think we’re going to do great things to support the veteran community.
Transitioning Military: Get Smart

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**Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)**

It’s a scary transition, but eventually everyone must retire, and it all works out. I do miss the service for certain things on occasion, but I have zero regrets about retiring after 20 years in the Air Force, and my quality of life is better than ever before!

**What’s Different About the Contracting World? Choices**

Coming off of a decade holding leadership roles in the military, I needed to adapt my mindset when I entered the civilian workforce. For instance, in the military, your options on where you go and what you do are fairly finite... your command structure is placing you where they want you for the most part. When you begin looking at contracting positions, the sky is the limit. I found myself with options and flexibility... the freedom to choose where I worked, where I wanted to live, what type of job I would apply to, and more. Plus, I found that companies competed to hire me. In every
interview, the SAIC recruiter or program representative was extremely cordial and respectful, and I felt like I was interviewing them vs. the other way around. In the military, we are not used to having freedom to choose positions most of the time.

I’m no longer bringing “homework” home with me every day, and I can really get into the weeds focusing on my operational duties. Being an operator again is a real joy! There is practically no administrative burden on me doing my job and building expertise on my primary labor category skills. This has been a 180-degree change from being in an Air Force leadership role.

**How to Narrow the Field? Authenticity**

With so many options suddenly available to me, I needed to decide what really mattered in terms of accepting a job and which company I wanted to work for. Stability was most important, followed closely by having a personal touch. I wanted a program where I could settle in and focus on the mission. In looking at companies, I trawled Internet sites and made sure to talk with peers who recently transitioned.

The personal touch was important because I didn’t want to work for a company that didn’t treat me as an individual, as many can treat you like a number. If it was obvious a recruiter didn’t read my résumé, or if I kept having to remind them who I was, that was a major red flag for me. I gained a
good sense of a company’s values during the initial contact and interview stages. If they showed a true personal interest vs. treating me like a number, they had a better shot at hiring me. Physically going to the company, meeting recruiters, technical leads, security personnel, etc., was really helpful to get an idea how the company was run.

What I Wish I’d Known: Get Smart

The military’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) training was beneficial, but I didn’t realize that in the contracting world you’re expected to come fully trained and ready to work when you start in your position. My hands-on operational skills were rusty due to being in exclusively leadership positions for over 10 years. Some training that is readily available to military personnel takes more time to secure as a contractor. Take advantage of access to certain trainings while in uniform… and take advantage of educational opportunities offered by your new company when you get settled in.

Serving Out of Uniform

I didn’t know I’d be looking for this in a company, but find an organization that understands the mission and gives back to the community and employees. SAIC gives me the flexibility to attend TAP mentor events and on-base mentor events, as part of the company’s employee resource group, SAIC Vets (EVETS). The company is always sending updates on its efforts to build homes for wounded vets in partnership with Building Homes for Heroes, and my office is also participating in an upcoming 5K event honoring fallen heroes, which SAIC has been very generous to help fund. EVETS is a newly-reinvigorated, small group here in Maryland. It is a worthy cause, and I hope it continues to grow and give back to the nation’s veterans.

I look forward to welcoming many more service members into SAIC’s ranks as we serve the mission.
I served in the U.S. Army for 29 years and retired at the end of 2010 as a U.S. Special Forces Sergeant Major (E9). For the past five years, I have been with SAIC at Camp Morehead, Afghanistan. In that time, I have had two promotions with increases in compensation and responsibilities. I have seen several employees complete their yearlong contract, leave the company, and then return. I have also seen many who are serving multiple years. Why?

I believe it is the camaraderie of the team of professionals we have here on this program, that bond of belonging to an organization that is committed to its mission. The financial compensation, while fair, is not the overriding factor to our program’s success with regards to employees. Remember, this assignment is overseas, unaccompanied, and in an active warzone. It is not for everyone, and certainly not a usual long-term career choice. Yet, we have over 17 employees out of our current 88-person program who have been on this program for more than five years, several with double that time.

I believe the company’s reputation, its brand if you will, along with its fair financial compensation and benefits are part of what has attracted quality people to work for this program, but it is exactly that quality and the reputation of the professional employees that keep them here and coming back after short absences. Our program
has a demonstrated continued growth over the past dozen years and our quality of service has cemented our enduring relationship as the program of excellence with our military clients through the teamwork of the company, the leadership, and our employees.

**My Path**

I worked as a government employee for about three years immediately after retiring but found the work a tad monotonous and not overly satisfying. In 2013, a former military colleague of mine reached out to me from the SAIC program here at Camp Morehead. I had not heard of SAIC at the time, but the offer was fair and the connection with former Special Forces colleagues convinced me to give SAIC and contract work a try. I know many of my former Special Forces colleagues work for various contract companies around the world, and I spoke with some of them to gain some insight into the pros and cons of contracting, especially overseas military-related type work. I also knew a couple of SAIC employees working on the program from the Special Forces community, which is a relatively small community, either personally or by reputation.

About 90% of our contract is made up of retired or former military personnel as they meet the skill sets, experience levels, and knowledge requirements demanded of our U.S. military client. Since joining the SAIC team, I have been promoted twice, taking on more responsibility and enjoying my roles as mentor and advisor to the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command.

**What to Look For**

A company or program is only as good as its employees. The company’s continued financial investments in its workforce (through pay and compensation) and demonstrated caring commitment to its employees (through its policies and benefits) will help ensure it continues attracting and retaining quality personnel and, in turn, will almost assure continued growth and success.

Take care of your people and they will take care of you.

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**BY BRAD ADAIR**

Initially, hired into a position on the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC) Division G3 (Operations) team conducting Train, Assist, Advise, and Mentoring (TAAM) of various Division Staff Officers, I am now the ANASOC School of Excellence (SOE) Team Leader and Command Mentor and Advisor. The ANASOC SOE is the force generation school for all Afghan National Army Special Operations Forces, including Commandos, Special Forces, and National Mission Units.