

SPEAKER

**HOW VIETNAM
POW LEADERS
CONNECT WITH
AUDIENCES**

**WHY HIRE
MILITARY
SPEAKERS?**

**HONORING
U.S. MILITARY
VETERANS**

Battlefield experiences strike a patriotic chord in audiences

**FEE-BASED
ASSESSMENTS
PAY OFF BIG!**
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**10 MILITARY
PRINCIPLES TO
GROW YOUR
BUSINESS**

**SPEAKING FOR
FREE COULD
COST YOU**

**Take a Page from the
BROADWAY
PLAYBOOK**

Be **ALL** the Speaker Yo

10 Military Principles to Grow Your Speaking Business

BY CMDR. MARY C. KELLY, PHD, CSP, U.S. NAVY (RETIRED)



Leadership happens at all levels of an organization, Kelly says.

My older brother, his wife, my sister, her husband, my late husband, my boyfriend, my younger brother, and I all served on active duty in either the Marine Corps, Navy, or Air Force.

Some might wonder how I made the transition from a military family background and a 25-year active duty career in the U.S. Navy to a speaking career. Actually, it was easier than you might think.

Many lessons I learned in the military apply to my speaking business. And, fortunately, many corporations like to hire veterans, people with a military background—as employees and as speakers—for a variety of reasons.

The military teaches valuable lessons that corporations need. Corporations

today are facing rapid change, and they need effective leaders who can look at situations, diagnose problems, assess possibilities, and make good decisions fast. The military does this at all levels, so speakers from the military can relate to everyone from top management to new hires.

Companies value teamwork. There probably is no better organization that creates teamwork than the military, which has to coalesce people with diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions to bond together and form cohesive teams.

The military has an advantage that civilian organizations don't. We start off all together. By that, I mean that we all train together. If you ask anyone who's ever been in the military, they will tell you that the people they bonded with the most

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are the people who were with them in boot camp, or with whom they endured hardships.

Corporations like military speakers because we tell some military stories that are entertaining, informative and instructional. I address serious leadership topics like change management, increasing profits, and conflict resolution. While I use some military examples, those tend to be the funny ones, because the stories have to relate to every single audience member.

Both the military and corporations look at how to do the right things better, more efficiently, and more effectively. That means developing the right leadership with the right information so people are encouraged to take risks, to try and fail, and try again to develop new technologies and processes. That involves some level of risk, but that is where the growth is.

When dealing with profits and losses, it is helpful to have a background in the economic environment

Cheering for a Navy win at an Army-Navy game.

and the financial aspects, but most of what needs fixing or needs a little push forward is all about leadership. That includes being able to problem solve, manage people, overcome obstacles, deal with crises, manage fear, and get people to work together as a team. My focus is on creating leaders who make good decisions to improve profits for organizational growth.

How to Be an Army of One

Here are 10 military principles you can apply to your speaking business, so you can “be all the speaker you can be.”



Kelly explains how to transition from lines in the sand to the bottom line.

1 Accountability. Let people know where you are. As a speaker, we routinely travel for the job. Do you let your meeting planner know when you arrive? Tell the planner you are there and ready to go.

We take accountability very seriously in the military because things happen and people can get hurt. One evening on a ship in the middle of the Persian Gulf, we couldn't find a young sailor. His supervisor had not seen him since trash duty. We had to assume that he had fallen overboard and immediately turned the ship around. Against all kinds of odds, we found him two days later, staying afloat by clutching a trash bag. When asked if he was scared, he said, “I knew you would come back to get me.” That kind of trust comes from routines and systems that people use.

2 Use a checklist. Every pilot I know uses a checklist for every flight. Having checklists for routine processes ensures we don't forget anything, we are doing what we said we would do, and we have things completed.

We tend to be comfortable with things we do all of the time, and it is easy to miss a step when complacency sets in. I have checklists for getting the hotel arranged, booking flights, sending handouts, shipping books, etc. A speaking engagement could be ruined if something falls through the cracks.

3 Adapt. Improvise. Overcome. I know, a Clint Eastwood movie reference. But we really do use this in the military.

At the end of a multi-national exercise with more than 20,000 highly stressed people from nine different countries, there was a great deal of celebration when the last ship pulled in. I was the chief of police and my boss's direction was “I do not want any incidents.” He didn't want people driving after drinking, and he didn't want any international incidents. So, we positioned patrol officers at the clubs on base, and provided free rides home to anyone needing them. We had no incidents, and the international military thought it was great.

Meeting planners and bureaus tell me they appreciate my flexibility. We should do everything possible to make meeting planners' lives easier and make them look like rock stars. Of course, we should cheerfully oblige. If no one is shooting at me, why should I be irritated?

4 Follow through. Do what you say you're going to do by the time you promise. People need to count on us every time, all of the time, and by the promised time.

5 Know the situation and be prepared. There is no such thing as having too much good information, or being too prepared. For those reasons, conducting demographic research on audiences is important. The more we know about our participants, the more we can customize their program. Conduct interviews, ask about the business and the organizational structure, peruse websites and promotional items, join their LinkedIn and Facebook groups, and try to understand the culture.

Even in similar industries, corporate cultures are very different. Talking with U. S. Army recruits is a very different conversation than talking with their NCOs (non-commissioned officers), even though they are all in the Army. Similarly, Zappos' employees are very different from employees at the JCPenney call center.

6 Volunteer. Currently, the military has an all-volunteer force. With the risk of committing time and resources also comes rewards, and not quid pro quo payments in the form of referrals. Getting involved with the local community, your local NSA Chapter, and other groups that need you is not just giving back; it's an opportunity to learn, meet people and be professionally challenged.

7 Always be training.

In the military, we train constantly. We prepare for events that may never happen. We hold multinational exercises on everything from humanitarian relief to war so we are prepared for as many eventualities as possible.

As speakers, downtime is an opportunity to train ourselves and improve. Use the time to read books on your topics, review blogs, attend conferences, and create products. Being prepared allows you to see and grab opportunities when they occur. If you are not getting better, you are staying the same or getting worse. Speakers have to guard against getting stale.

8 Work as a team. Great events are the results of team effort. Be part of the team. Reach out to other participants, facilitators, panelists, speakers and committees to work collaboratively to make the event a huge success.

9 Act now. Things move fast in the military. We turn ships around and send people back on deployments. There are units that know they can be flown into an area within a matter of hours. It creates a sense of urgency. Focus on what you can accomplish right now.

10 Be authentic. People need to know you for who you are and that you are authentic.



I'm an animal lover. When I was chief of police, my people knew that, too. So, one day when my patrol people were alerted to four abandoned kittens, they brought them to my office. I was on my way to a morning meeting where we were discussing a military exercise, wearing camouflage or "cam-mies." I tucked the four little fur balls into a pocket. About halfway through the meeting, the kittens woke up and started meowing. I tried to cover the noise by coughing loudly. I revealed the contents in the pocket to the officers next to me, and they joined in the coughing spells when the kittens meowed. It was hilarious. Of course, we found homes for all of those kittens. Roger that.

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