Soldiers find ally in job hunting

By Cheryl Pruett, OCLNN Monday, May 17, 2010

George Carson and Jim Stedt (foreground) of Business SoftSkills reach out to military. (Photo/Business SoftSkills)

Just one "Yes, sir" may ruin a job interview and a soldier's chances of landing post-military work. That's an interview tip from two Santa Ana businessmen who created a DVD training program for soldiers re-entering civilian life.

Jim Stedt and George Carson, co-owners of Business SoftSkills, realized the massive need for career training for the roughly 295,000 soldiers that leave the military each year. Most are not prepared to compete for jobs or to enter the workforce, they say.

"The civilian workforce is distinctly different than the way the military operates," said Tom Graham, president of nGap, a San Diego-based company that is guiding the entrepreneurs through the Department of Defense procurement process. "Just understanding the difference between the two domains is really challenging." The company's "basic training" course includes 13 DVD lessons with rules, tips, role playing, exercises, tests and case studies. It's written from a business perspective, said Stedt, whose career has ranged from computer engineering to public relations.

The core SoftSkills product is a career and basic job-training program currently used in 112 California community colleges and in state-run career centers. When human resources professionals explained that transitioning military personnel had special needs, Stedt and Carson put the military edition first on their agenda.

The program covers how to eliminate military lingo/jargon from a conversation and writing, and to promote one's positive military traits such as discipline, loyalty, integrity, decisiveness and resourcefulness. The more general skills include interviewing and resume writing. Breaking into the armed forces' career offices is the company's goal, Stedt said. He and Carson are negotiating with all military branches and developing iPhone apps to market the programs.

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