FANATICAL MILITARY RECRUITING
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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LEVERAGING HIGH-IMPACT PROSPECTING TO ENGAGE QUALIFIED APPLICANTS, WIN THE WAR FOR TALENT, AND MAKE MISSION FAST

JEB BLOUNT

WILEY
For the men and women who work tirelessly to win the War for Talent for the United States Armed Forces.
We are forever in your debt. Without you, there is no military, there is no freedom, there is no beacon on the hill, there is no American dream—everything we have, love, and hold dear. Our way of life, freedom to be, do, believe, and say anything we choose, is because of you.
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Failure to adequately resource our [military] with the required number and quality of personnel can have far reaching and strategic implications and threaten our nation's ability to defend its national interests at home and abroad.

—Colonel Michael Matthews, United States Army

Shortly after my book Fanatical Prospecting was published, we began to get calls from military recruiting commands. They were ordering as many as 50 books at a time. At first we thought it was an anomaly, but the orders kept coming.

Then, I began getting e-mail and notes on social media from military recruiters and leaders telling me how they were using the techniques in Fanatical Prospecting to fill the recruiting funnel. Entire companies and battalions were reading the book. I couldn't make sense of why there was so much interest from the military in a prospecting book that was written primarily for business-to-business sales professionals.

A Conundrum

Sales Gravy, the company I founded in 2006, is a global training, development, and consulting company with a focus on business-to-business sales acceleration. We’re known for helping our
clients make sales productivity and performance improvements, fast. We’ve built our reputation on shaping and customizing training curriculum around our clients’ unique situations and cultures.

We believe, at the core, that delivering training content in our clients’ language is the most effective way to speed the pace of the assimilation and actualization of concepts and skills in the real world.

So, when the requests started pouring in from military recruiting leaders for Fanatical Prospecting training, we found ourselves in a conundrum—we knew nothing about the military recruiting process and had no foundational knowledge on how the military worked.

We know exactly what we’re doing when civilian companies call us for help. We know the language of business. We speak sales and the sales process. It’s in our DNA. We aren’t starting from scratch.

The US military, though, was a complete unknown. Suddenly we were out of our comfort zone. We didn’t know the language of the United States Armed Forces.

I grew up in Augusta, Georgia, near Fort Gordon. Many of my childhood friends were from military families. One of my best friends joined the Marines right out of high school. Another joined the Navy. My wife’s dad was in the US Army Special Forces. She was an Army brat who was born on base. My dad was a Marine. He used the GI Bill to pay for college and became a lawyer.

Even with these connections, the military might as well have been a foreign country. I was ignorant, and this caused a level of stress and anxiety that I never experience with my civilian clients. Honestly, it is embarrassing to admit how little I knew about how the military worked—especially recruiting.

I was certain, though, that should we attempt to shove civilian sales techniques down the throats of military recruiters, we’d lose all
credibility and make little impact. We’d be dismissed as just another group of civilians who “didn’t get it.”

Learning the Language

My “basic training” began at Fort Harrison in Helena, Montana, when Command Sergeant Major Rick Haerter took me under his wing. He spent hours getting me up to speed and changed my entire view of military recruiting.

Over the ensuing months I continued my education. I met dozens of officers and NCOs who were eager to help me learn. Captain Liz Alberton allowed me access to her entire company of recruiters and arranged a once-in-a-lifetime chance for me to jump with the Golden Knights. Command Sergeant Major Shawn Lewis guided my learning and gave me an opportunity to hone the FMR message with his battalion.

I have a stack of napkins filled with notes that I took while learning about military recruiting over beers with leaders like First Sergeant Michael Downing and First Sergeant Christopher Llewellyn, who graciously helped me understand the life of a military recruiter.

I also had the privilege of visiting the US Army Recruiting and Retention College at Fort Knox with Sergeant First Class James Beaty, where I was able to meet the instructors and observe and participate in classes. Sergeant First Class Beaty invested hours, patiently teaching me how recruiting works and how to speak military language.

It was following a Fanatical Military Recruiting Boot Camp in Nashville, Tennessee, when the battalion commander exclaimed, “If I didn’t know the truth, I’d have believed that you’d been a career recruiter” that I knew I’d passed the first test. With the help of many kind people, I was learning the language and battle rhythm of military recruiting.
Military Recruiting versus Civilian Sales

Through my “basic training” I developed a new appreciation for the role the military recruiter plays in building and maintaining strength of force. I gained deep respect for the price they and their families pay for mission. I was also confronted with the unique challenges recruiters and their leaders face. I learned:

1. Military recruiting is among the most difficult tours. The stress and pressure to perform is unrelenting.
2. Most military recruiters and their leaders adhere to an NCO Creed, take their mission seriously, and are eager to learn, grow, develop, and become better at their craft.
3. The various branches of the military invest heavily in training new recruiters. This foundational training helps green recruiters gain basic competencies for recruiting.
4. Despite the upfront training investment, most military recruiters begin their new role unprepared for the demands of the job and are far outside of their comfort zone.
5. Almost nothing in the military prepares recruiters for the emotional rigors, interpersonal skills, time management, and prospecting discipline required for high performance. No one “joins” the military to be a recruiter.
6. Military recruiters and their leaders recognize that they need more than basic recruiting training to perform at a high level. They see the need to consistently build on and improve recruiting skills. For this reason, they gravitate toward civilian sales books like my book *Fanatical Prospecting*.
7. Commercial sales and military recruiting are not the same. Although there are parallel skill sets between military recruiting and civilian sales, recruiting is a specialized endeavor that requires a specific set of competencies. Therefore, civilian sales processes don’t necessarily translate and thus are difficult for military recruiters to assimilate.
8. Yet, outside of formal military recruiting school, there are few advanced, high-quality training resources designed specifically for the unique needs of military recruiters.
9. More is being demanded of recruiters than ever before. At the same time, the available pool of qualified prospects has decreased significantly,\textsuperscript{1} and the competition in the marketplace for top talent, from all sectors, has accelerated.

10. Therefore, to win the War for Talent, today’s military recruiters must operate at a level of excellence beyond anything asked of them in the past.

The more I interacted with military recruiters, the more my mind-set about their role in our democracy shifted. With the entirety of America’s military strength resting on the strong shoulders of military recruiters, I found it abhorrent that the advanced training resources required for recruiters to grow, develop, and excel either didn’t exist or were not readily available.

So, my mission changed. I became obsessed with developing\textit{ advanced military recruiting–specific} training that honors the special and important role played by military recruiters in keeping our armed forces strong and our country safe.

This book,\textit{ Fanatical Military Recruiting}, is the result of that mission shift. It is the first book in a three-book series that will include\textit{ Military Recruiting EQ} and\textit{ Coaching Military Recruiting}.

-\textbullet\textit{ Fanatical Military Recruiting} focuses on top of the funnel activity—primarily prospecting.

-\textit{Military Recruiting EQ} focuses on emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and the human influence frameworks required to engage highly qualified applicants and successfully move them through the recruiting process.

-\textit{Coaching Military Recruiting} is a field guide for NCOICs that arms field level leaders with the unique tools, techniques, skills, and competencies for leading, developing, and coaching high-performance military recruiting teams.

I believe the timing is right for these new resources because military recruiting is facing a perfect storm. In this new paradigm,
recruiters must quickly up-skill and gain new competencies to win the War for Talent.

**Author’s Note on Language:** Throughout this book, I do my best to incorporate the terms, jargon, and language of military recruiting. The challenge I’ve faced is that each branch of the military has a unique and different language. For this reason, I’ve chosen to use generic terms that readers will understand and can easily translate to their own branch. In other cases, I’ve used my own language and descriptions because I’m unable to find a generic equivalent that connects with all readers and branches. It’s an impossible task to be everything to everyone, so I humbly ask for your forgiveness where my terms may be confusing or I’ve gotten it wrong.
PART I

Mission Critical
Military Recruiting Is Facing a Perfect Storm

*America without her soldiers would be like God without His angels.*
—Claudia Pemberton

The military is no longer, and will never again be, the place of last resort for troubled and low-IQ members of our society. Military service has become an upwardly mobile career choice for the most gifted, talented, and intelligent among us.

Members of the military receive consistent pay raises, enlistment and retention bonuses, recession-proof job security, college tuition, guaranteed retirement income, and incredible benefits including paid housing, free health care, training, and paid education. They also have access to facilities on military bases that are unavailable to most civilians.
From a purely economic standpoint, joining the military is a smart financial move that gives a fortunate few access to a lifestyle and standard of living far above that of most civilians.

Yet deteriorating attention spans have made it difficult to get prospects to sit still long enough to learn about this incredible career opportunity. Meanwhile, fewer young Americans are interested in or even aware of the benefits afforded by a military career.¹

Studies suggest that the majority of those who enlist and serve come from a family in which a parent or sibling is also in the military.² Yet the size of the active-duty US military is at its lowest level in more than 50 years.³ With this, fewer young people than ever before have family members who are in the military or are learning about military life from influential mentors.

Worse, a high percentage of active-duty military members come from just five states—mostly the Southeast—with the Southern states consistently contributing the highest number of new recruits as a proportion of the population.⁴

Despite the incredible career opportunities available in the modern armed forces, military recruiters are increasingly operating in an America where there is a divide between the civilian and military classes.⁵

The pool of prospects with family or geographic associations to military service is steadily evaporating.⁶ With increasing base closures and consolidations, fewer cities have a large military presence. This means young people are less likely to be exposed to military personnel beyond those they see online and in the media.

The connection between civilians and the military is eroding,⁷ making it much more difficult for recruiters to engage prospects and their parents. “We speak a different language. We are governed by a separate set of norms and dogma. We even live apart from each other,” says Phillip Carter of the nonpartisan think tank the Military, Veterans and Society Program at the Center for a New
American Security. He describes America’s sprawling military bases as our “most exclusive gated communities.”

This gap has extended to public schools and universities. Increasingly, faculty are ostracizing the military and its recruiters, either overtly or in more nuanced ways. These institutions, despite legal obligations to provide access, make it difficult for military recruiters to engage students, using either passive roadblocks or outright hostility to create de facto no-go zones.

Though the military is among the most trusted and revered American institutions, in the words of Lieutenant Colonel Remi M. Hajjar, a professor at West Point, “Many Americans consider the military a bit like a guard dog. They are very thankful for the protection, but they probably wouldn’t want to have it as a neighbor. And they certainly are not going to influence or inspire their own kids to join that pack of Rottweilers to protect America.”

Qualification Standards Continue to Tighten

Meanwhile, as the available talent pool shrinks in the midst of this perfect storm, the military apparatus continues to tighten qualification standards, and politicians play games that strain recruiting budgets.

Still, even when recruiters identify qualified prospects who have a propensity for joining the military, they face another, daunting gauntlet. The prospects in this new generation have more power—more information, more distractions, more options, more at stake, and more control over their future—than at any time in history.

With so many options available for talented people, they can afford to wait for “something better to come along.” This, combined with extreme information overload, creates fear and insecurity that often leaves prospects and their parents clinging to the status quo. Doing nothing, making no choice at all, is often their preferred course of action.
It’s no wonder so many recruiters are struggling. It’s no wonder that recruiting leaders are frustrated and more stressed out than ever. And it’s not surprising that most recruiting units are staring down the barrel at 50 percent or more of their recruiters consistently missing mission.

This perfect storm of obstacles creates an existential threat to the strength and readiness of the greatest fighting force ever assembled on earth and may weaken its ability to protect our democracy.

If we’ve lost the benefit of historical family ties to military service, if our education system is a hindrance, if the gap between civilian society and the military is growing, and if young people have more options, feel less inclined to serve, and are ill informed on the benefits of military service—then our only hope lies with our military recruiters and their ability to close the gap.

This is why it is imperative that we arm our recruiters and NCOICs with the skills they need to win the war for talent in this challenging environment.
The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his.

—General George S. Patton

Recruiting is a war. Just a different kind of war than the one you prepared for and trained to fight. Recruiting is a War for Talent—for the hearts and minds of the next generation of talent that will protect and defend our country and way of life.

Rather than bullets and bombs, this War for Talent is won through disciplined use of time, intellectual agility, emotional intelligence, mastering your own disruptive emotions, leveraging human influence frameworks, and massive prospecting activity.

But make no mistake: The War for Talent is real. All organizations in America—businesses, health care, nonprofit groups, sports, education, and the military—are in an outright and never-ending battle to recruit and retain the brightest and most talented people.

Smart, competent, and capable people are rare and in high demand. You are competing with every other organization and your fellow
recruiters from other armed services branches to gain the attention of and engage this talent. It’s winner takes all. There is no good enough. There is no prize for second place. Once you lose prospects to your competition, the probability that you will ever get them back plunges.

On this highly competitive, ever-changing, asymmetric battlefield you must be at your best—always. If you:

- Allow your discipline to slip, you lose.
- Let your guard down, you lose.
- Whine about how hard things are, you lose.
- Get distracted, you lose.
- Get tired, put down your ruck, take a knee and rest awhile, you lose.
- Are unable to manage your emotions, you lose.
- Are undisciplined with time, you lose.
- Fail to execute a systematic and methodical daily battle rhythm, you lose.
- Fail to maintain focus and attention control, you lose.
- Are afraid to interrupt people and ask for what you want, you lose.
- Don’t talk to enough people, you lose.

**On Most Days, Recruiting Doesn’t Feel Much Like Winning**

You are a winner. You are the type of person who hits every target you put in front of your sights. That’s how you landed this recruiting tour in the first place—you are among the most talented people in your branch of the military. The top tier. You are used to winning.

Yet on most days, military recruiting doesn’t feel much like winning. You strike out a lot. You are rejected, told no, and pushed aside.

When you are used to winning, what seems like almost constant failure can be demoralizing. You feel out of your element and out of control. If you failed this much on any other tour, you’d be removed from the service.