COMPETING FOR YOU

Chairman reveals CACI’s recipe for attracting top military talent.

BY DAN FAZIO

The world of IT defense contracts is fiercely competitive, an industry where companies jockey to recruit the most talented transitioning service members armed with skills, training, experience and security clearances.

CACI International, a long-time Military Friendly® Employer named to the elite inaugural list of Military Friendly® Companies this year, is in the thick of the competition. With veterans comprising one-third of its workforce, CACI clearly has a clue about how to recruit and retain America’s military talent. So what’s the secret?

If you ask Chairman Dr. J. Phillip (Jack) London, and we did, he’ll tell you it’s all about the corporate culture.

“We attract people who believe in what we do,” London said during an interview at his office overlooking Arlington, Va., where CACI is headquartered. “I think that reinforces the value of the company and people’s pride and the fact that we understand that it’s an extremely competitive business – there are no handouts, there are no gimmies. We have to compete for every contract opportunity. We’re not going to win them all, but we have...
to be able to win more than our fair share to be able to grow an organization. I think we’ve been very successful at this.

Indeed, they have. In 55 years, CACI has grown from a small professional services firm to a formidable technology force with nearly 20,000 employees worldwide. In 2016, the company generated $3.7 billion in revenue. In the first six months of FY 2017, 65 percent of the company’s revenue flowed from the U.S. Department of Defense and another 29 percent from federal civilian agencies.

Military talent plays a significant role in CACI’s success. London, 80, himself a former Navy officer and Navy Reserve commander who served as the company’s president and CEO for 23 years, helped build a corporate culture that attracts top military talent.

“I would say there’s a patriotic theme that runs through the company,” London said. “Respect for traditions, respect for military heritage. These things are appreciated here, and people understand it and realize it. I’ve kind of made it a way here – part of our ethos. Our style. And I’ve found that it works for CACI.”

FAMILY BUSINESS
Visitors to London’s office quickly pick up on that patriotic theme. The spacious outer chamber resembles a small museum, richly appointed with glass display cases showcasing mementos of his military service and that of family members: models of ships, military figurines, challenge coins, hats, coffee mugs, awards and commendations. Photos, flags, placards and posters line the walls, including the stories of half a dozen cousins and uncles who served in World War II. Two of them didn’t come home.

Born at the tail of the Great Depression of the 1930s, London was indelibly shaped by his family.

“My grandfather’s family – great-grandfather – came into the Oklahoma Indian Territory in a covered wagon,” he said. “So I think the thing that reflects onto me from that period was self-reliance – there was nobody that was going to take care of us except ourselves and our family and our extended family.”

He learned about business from his parents, both of whom owned small businesses that thrived despite the economic turmoil of the 1930s. London’s father had a home furnishings store, while his mother partnered with another woman to recruit bookkeepers and office workers for companies in the Oklahoma City area. As a child, London observed the way his parents did business.

“I watched my father make a number of business deals with vendors and suppliers on a handshake, right in his office,” he says. “I learned a lot about street smarts on how to run a business from a small entrepreneurial perspective.”

LEARNING LEADERSHIP
Before London leveraged the business lessons he learned from his family, he pursued a military career. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1959. During 12 years of active duty London flew helicopters from an aircraft carrier and saw service in the Cuban Missile Crisis. He also served under several flag officers with distinguished combat records in World War II. From them, he learned leadership.

“They were amazing people,” he recalls. “These fellows were clearly dignified, •
distinguished people that had all been proven heroes in combat operations, so they had nothing to prove in that area.”

He learned from the likes of Adm. J.D. “Jack” Arnold, a highly decorated air group commander at the Battle of the Philippine Sea (the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot”) and Rear Adm. Gene Flucken, who received the Medal of Honor and four Navy Crosses during his service as a submarine commander.

London absorbed the character traits these men exemplified: dignity, integrity, dedication and mission-focus, among others. He was impressed with how they treated people, “the way they treated me, the way they treated the stewards in the mess, the way they treated the ladies. It was something you just kind of admired from a distance.”

**TRANSITION: TURBULENCE**

London left active duty in 1971, a time in American history when service members hardly topped the popularity charts. He didn’t encounter the hostility that faced many Vietnam veterans, but he did encounter a tough economy.

“I didn’t have any difficulty from the public. What was more the issue was finding a position because of the economic stress at that time in the early 70s. And so finding a position wasn’t a slam-dunk,” he said.

London had “pretty good” credentials, including a master’s degree in operations research from the Naval Postgraduate School and a doctorate in business administration from George Washington University. He landed a position at a small engineering firm in Maryland that specialized in weaponry associated with submarine warfare. In 1972, he joined CACI as the 35th employee. He continued his military service in the Navy Reserve while growing with the company into the Fortune 1000 company it is today.

**BUMPS IN THE ROAD**

It hasn’t been all roses. A CACI employee was accused of abuses at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, accusations led London to push back when he published a book titled, “Our Good Name: A Company’s Fight to Defend Its Honor and Get the Truth Told About Abu Ghraib.”

“When you’re accused of something and you’re innocent, you don’t like the idea of lynching mobs and kangaroo courts and serving the media just because the media is standing up and yelling at you,” he said.

Veterans want to work at a company that embodies character, London says, and preserving the company’s reputation was paramount.

“Recruiting’s a big deal for us. We have a turnover in our industry that by and large is pretty high, for all kinds of reasons, compared to other kinds of organizations. We are challenged all the time on getting good people, and retaining good people,” he says.

**SO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?**

CACI favors senior enlisted veterans who have the skills to match the company’s contracts in intelligence, network and telecommunications, information systems, and logistics. They’re looking for veterans who are committed, capable, dependable and can work on teams.

“If you get the big picture right in terms of what’s important to employers, and then if you’re aggressive about it and have your act together and can communicate, you have a good chance of being successful,” London says.

The continued success of CACI depends on veterans like you.

“We recruit the kind of folks we believe will support and take pride in working for the United States government and military services on a contract basis,” London said.