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Entrepreneurial Spirit

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Many veterans transitioning from active duty struggle with finding a civilian career that utilizes the skills, experience and knowledge gained during their military service. The answer for one Iraqi combat war veteran: Start your own firm.

"I founded Integrated Finance and Accounting Solutions (IFAS) in 2007, drawing from my experience as a finance officer in the military," explains chief executive Tabatha Turman. "After transitioning from combat to consulting for government agencies, I recognized significant gaps in the tools and systems required for effective operations within both the government and military. This insight motivated me to start

my own business.

"Leveraging my time serving in Iraq, I was able to secure contracts there, managing projects on the ground without needing to be physically present," she continues. "By staying focused on business development and leveraging my network of former peers and mentors, we grew rapidly. Within just three years, we generated over \$2 million in revenue."

IFAS has become an award-winning, premier midsize federal financial management systems and services provider with more than \$350 million in government contracts.

"We leverage technology to provide integrated financial management solutions

and capabilities that include Program Budgeting and Cost, Accounting and Auditing, Enterprise Performance; and Acquisition Solutions to federal government clients worldwide," Turman explains, adding that IFAS actively seeks to hire veterans and support military families.

"One of the things I'm passionate about is identifying veterans and helping them find gainful employment," Turman declares. "Because of this, I have hired former peers from the military in the company, which was very rewarding to provide employment to transitioning service members that I served with.

"At IFAS, supporting military and veteran families is core to our mission," she continues.



"Both as a company and as individuals, we support a variety of nonprofits and charities that provide valuable resources to veterans and their families. In 2015, IFAS created the IFAS Corporate Citizenship Advisory Board, an employee-resource group that encourages IFAS employees to support programs and causes that are meaningful to them as individuals, in four key areas: Environmental Advocacy, Arts & Education, Health & Wellness and Military & Veterans."

Turman enlisted in the U.S. Army immediately after high school and proudly served for more than 20 years as an enlisted service member and Finance Officer. She served two tours, including Operation Desert Shield/Storm (1991) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2004-2005) as a finance detachment commander in Iraq. During her time in the military, she earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and a master's degree in Business Administration from Cameron University.

"I learned so many useful tools and lessons from my time in the military that have enabled me to be successful in civilian life," Turman points out. "The first is to be mission-driven and focused. Particularly when starting a business, there's so many different directions you can go in and it's easy to get distracted. But you have to stay laser focused on your goals."

"Being in the military and working closely

with my soldiers has made me more empathetic and focused on the hearts of people," she continues. "There were a lot of young people who were in my battalion and I remember looking in their eyes and seeing their fear and concern. That stays with me on a daily basis and it's one of the main reasons that IFAS is such a people-centric company."

"Another lesson I learned from military experience is the ability to be resilient during hard times," she adds. "When you're on a mission, there are times where you're afraid, you don't know when your opposition will strike and yet, you have a difficult mission ahead. But by relying on your team and being narrowly focused on the mission at hand, you can get through it and achieve your goal. This mindset is how I was able to get through the tough times of entrepreneurship."

Being a mother of two during her deployment and missing out on some important family experiences, Turman is particularly interested in supporting women veterans.

"One thing that is not talked about enough is the challenges that women who are mothers in the military face," she asserts. "Typically, families deal with the male figure in the home being deployed. However, when the woman and mother in the home is deployed, there are some unique challenges that come along with that, everything from swapping traditional gender roles to managing 'mom guilt.' I wish there

was more focus on providing resources to reintegrating moms who are deployed back into the family. I would love for the military to be more supportive of mothers, especially in their transition back into civilian life following deployments.

"I hope that families will remember to provide grace to each other," she adds. "To the person who was deployed, there is a transition period to coming back into your family; to the families, remember that your loved ones missed you so much but they may need time to get adjusted back to civilian life."

Turman points out that wanting more time with her family was one of the initial factors that piqued her interest in entrepreneurship; although, she says founding and running her own company has sometimes led to unpredictable circumstances. "Entrepreneurship is full of ups and downs and no two days are the same, especially in the early days," she remarks. "It's difficult but you have to remain flexible while staying focused on your mission."

"Learn to rely on your team," she advises. "When I was in the military and we would be on assignment, there was no way that I was going to be successful on my own. So, trusting your team and relying on each other is imperative to success." 