**THE BUDDY SYSTEM DID NOT FIND ME UNEMPLOYABLE.**

As Veteran Tigers, service in the Army provided the first job responsibility, the Buddy System a procedure to look after and support your mate, and he does the same for you. The Buddy System goes as far back as 1942; defined as “an arrangement in which two individuals are paired for mutual safety in a hazardous situation”. The buddy system can be thought of as a method of increasing the efficiency of two individuals by pairing them together as a single unit. Throughout service in the Army, nobody was ever unemployed thanks to the Buddy System.

Veterans bring a diverse range of skills and experience and can play a unique role in the workplace; offering skills based on experiences that many are not likely to have.

As a Veteran Tiger in a new job, think about implementing the Buddy System of your past into your new work environment. It will provide benefits for a new employee, and will also be valuable to the employer.

The Buddy System in the context of Civvy Street is an orientation and knowledge sharing process. Knowledge sharing is to capture ideas that can benefit the company. A Workplace Buddy gives the new employee an opportunity to offer confidential feedback about how the onboarding process is going. Recovering from a bad first impression is hard, and the Buddy System can prevent a bad experience from ever happening.

Whether or not if there is a formal process, onboarding is going to happen; the real issue is the quality of the experience. Nothing is more important to a company's long-term performance than choosing the right employees and ensuring they have the proper outlook on day one. Companies with highly engaged workers spend an average of 35 weeks preparing new employees, preventing conflicting expectations, demands, and role ambiguity. Using a process to onboard a new employee is something that is always performed, but often not often done well. As a Veteran, you can introduce the Buddy System to improve the experience.

Well executed onboarding using a Buddy System sets the foundation for long-term success. Implementing the Buddy System can be one part of an effective onboarding program that provides new employees with a reliable, motivated, ongoing, single point of contact for questions regarding work processes. This socialisation and support can make an enormous, positive difference in early performance, social integration, and long-term retention.

The Buddy System is valuable to a new employee; it can also be used to develop existing staff members’ skills through mentoring skills and improve leadership know-how that is ultimately useful to any company.

Ideally, a Buddy is an excellent communicator (**A strong Veteran skill**) who can straightforwardly provide information and encourage the recruit to express their thoughts and concerns in a safe setting.

Building cultural competence is a process, not a one-time event. Relationships matter. An active Buddy System requires a culture of openness and teamwork.

Buddies should have the skills and knowledge to perform the following types of tasks (**all great Veteran traits**):

* Teaching or mentoring;
* Explaining the use of systems, equipment, and processes;
* Socialising the new employee about guidelines, norms, culture, and even unwritten rules;
* Provide insights on how things are done;
* Involve the new employee in social or informal activities, such as tea break, lunch, coffee, etc.

The Buddy provides moral support during the first few crucial weeks by introducing the new employee to members of the company and showing them around their new workplace.

A good Buddy (**Like a Veteran**):

* Is willing to provide example;
* Will have experience and ability to mentor;
* Have excellent communications and interpersonal skills;

A buddy should epitomise the company values, be familiar with the formal and informal structures, and be a dependable source of information. The Buddy will have a constructive outlook and ability to deploy their viewpoint and encourage a sense esprit de corps in the new employee.

Unsurprisingly, some companies who already use the Buddy System choose employees who are Armed Forces Veterans to fulfil the Buddy role.

Should you be asked to be a Buddy, the following might help make the most of the experience:

* Nobody is expected to know everything;
* Focus attention on what is needed for him or her to at ease and creative;
* Patience – it takes time to build a relationship;
* Do not try to cover everything immediately. Initially, the new employee will feel overwhelmed and will need a chance to digest information and settle down;
* Keep a positive outlook. It takes time to grow into a new role;
* Do not force a relationship. Be accessible, give the new employee time to adjust;
* Do not be judgemental. The new employee is relying on you to be a safe source to approach;
* Adopt a positive, attitude towards teaching the new employee.

The underlying assumption is that a new employee will be receptive to the Buddy System, and that employee will share in a responsibility for successful integration into the company. Encouraging questions is essential to the process; as is an openness and willingness to learn from the new employee. Exchange information from previous jobs, and to give feedback on their experience with the onboarding process.

It is estimated that businesses lose £37 billion annually because employees do not fully understand their jobs. These losses are produced by actions that were taken by employees who misunderstood or misinterpreted, were misinformed about, had a lack confidence in their understanding of company policies and processes, or job function. The Buddy System’s purpose in the work place is to help employees understand their role and core business of their employer, which may significantly cut these losses.

Beyond orientation of a new employee, the Buddy System can also be a technique for knowledge sharing and cross-training. Employees can gain valuable mentoring and leadership skills that will be useful to the company. Long term, the Buddy System can create relationships that become an amorphous peer-to-peer learning group that evolves to sustain learning beyond formal training.

Creating a Buddy System is a role that a Veteran Tiger can take forward from experience in the PWRR to Civvy Street. It's not hard or expensive to implement.

The rules are simple – Veterans are willing and competent Buddies; minimum documentation is required, and revise the Buddy System as new employees join the company. Set an end date for the formal Buddy relationship. A new employee will ask questions immediately, so have an efficient system in place to deal with those queries.

A Buddy System can significantly reduce the time a new employee requires to become productive and lead to greater retention. A side effect of a Buddy System is that it provides a forum for knowledge sharing and positive recognition. Providing a new employee with a workplace Buddy can also free critical personnel to focus on core company operations rather than take the time to answer simple administrative questions.

I don’t say Veterans are broken, and I don’t say all Veterans are employment ready, either. But I do say that Veteran Tigers can bring to the work place tactics, techniques, and procedures borne of hard won operational experience, which will benefit a company, such as the Buddy System.

“Life is a book that we study,
Some of its leaves bring a sigh,
There it was written, my buddy…” – Frank Sinatra