

## CASE STUDY

# I CAME FROM THE WORLD'S BEST LEADERSHIP COURSE

**SIMON WOOLLEY, 52, DIGITAL INTELLIGENCE INSTRUCTOR**

As a teenager in the late 1980s, Simon Woolley couldn't wait to join the Australian Army. Signing up aged "17 and one month", he joined the Signal Corps and embarked on a 15-year adventure that would take him all over Australia, send him overseas, and leave him with an extraordinary set of skills – some that even he didn't recognise he possessed.

"At the age of 19, I was in Cambodia doing peacekeeping," Simon recalls. "When I came back to Australia, I eventually moved to the commando regiment in Special Forces. Jumping out of planes and helicopters, all that kind of fun stuff. And then I moved to Townsville and Darwin."

In 2005, he left the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to spend more time with his wife and two young children – and found himself navigating the civilian world for the first time in his adult life. When it came to job-hunting, there were some hurdles. "The biggest issue was translating my skills into civilian terms on an application," he says. "I went for a lot of public service jobs, but I hadn't applied for a civilian job in my life, ever. I didn't know what to do. Things like selection criteria, a resume ... eventually I had someone professionally write those things for me, and that helped."

The other tricky part was finding a job that could encompass his variety of skills. "I was in IT and I could do everything from making cables to running a server, setting up internet, satellite communications, cryptography ... in the Army you're a Jack of all trades. But in the civilian world, there's a specialist for each one of those things. I had to work out what role I would fit into."

After spending some time running an IT support centre, he worked at the Australian Federal Police for eight years, followed by four years at Victoria Police, "which was where I started my digital forensics career". It helped that he was working alongside other ex-service people: "You all speak the same language. So there's a satisfaction that other people can relate to what you've done."

While "old school" forensics might involve fingerprint and blood analysis, Simon explains, a person working in digital intelligence extracts information from "computers, phones, cars, fridges, whatever's got electronics in it". His time in the police force led to his current role in the private sector, which involves information retrieval and teaching.

Simon says it puts the quality of his Army training into perspective. "The training in the military is second to none. I see training companies using the techniques the Army was using 20 years ago." And there's another reason ex-service people make great instructors: "From the time you're a corporal in the Army, you're starting to teach people, mentoring, passing on the skills you have learned."

Any employer looking for leadership and teamwork qualities in a potential hire should look no further than an ex-service person, he says. "I've been on the world's best leadership course, and it's called the military. In the Army we do a lot of work on leadership – and that includes being able to follow orders. An ex-service person is going to listen to instructions and they're going to follow them to a tee."

Simon says that while concrete skills such as scheduling, budgeting and project management are transferable from the military, "there are also a lot of qualities that the military instils in a person that are valued in the civilian world. Like punctuality, and 'dress and bearing' – that's a military term for how you present yourself. You're not going to turn up looking scruffy."

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Musing about what attracted him to serving in both the ADF and police force, he says: "I think it's about helping people who are in need. There's a lot of disaster response training in the Army, including firefighting. It's all about helping people who aren't able to help themselves at the time. You want to help the community. You want to help your country."

Regardless of where his work takes him, Simon says he'll always be proud to be an ex-service person. "I've gone into the office wearing my medals on Remembrance Day and people are surprised, because I'm now just a civilian. But when you're ex-services, you'll always be ex-services."



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