



Leaks, Ships and Trust

BY LINDA WOLSTENCROFT

This past April, an RCMP probe led to the removal of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman for leaking cabinet secrets to an executive in a company about a multi-million-dollar shipbuilding program.

The full story of this may never be publically known - and it may not matter. The fact that it happened is a sign in and of itself. The sharing of information between government and industry carried out by individuals leads to a deeper question than merely what led to that particular incident. The real question is about fundamental beliefs and fundamental objectives.

Are we in this business – whether in military or civilian uniform – to truly serve the greater good? Do we believe that we are supporting international security by our work in the defence business? Are other objectives at play, such as excess personal gain?

There are two fundamental objectives for us to participate in the defence industry. The first is to make a living (for some, the objective is to make a really good living). The second is to feel part of something bigger. That which is bigger than us who work in the defence business – international security – is extremely important in our lives. This work is not like making breakfast cereal, selling houses, or developing apps to facilitate personal contact. And while those are all noble professions, they won't matter much if we are not safe.

Defence is not only a business, it is a power that supports international security. I believe many readers would share this same belief. In this industry, we don't have to wear a uniform to serve our country.

What does this have to do with Defence Marketing?

The issue is trust.

Every day, we have choices on who to work with, who to talk to, and who to do business with. Trust is the basis of these interactions. If we are not vigilant, we can be fooled.

One fundamental area to assess in business partners is the true motive that leads to personal gain. There are those that will take equitable reward based on the value that they have provided, then there are those that have self-serving interests and take more than they are due. For example, a CEO who profitably runs a defence business and leads the company to produce products and services that are highly useful to our defence missions should be equitably rewarded. On the other hand, an executive who makes the decision to be unsupportive of urgent defence requirements because to be supportive would mean that his or her bonus would be affected should not be rewarded.

The message is that there are values above and beyond personal gain that we can aspire to.

In order to **test trust** in business relationships, one can assess actions such as:

Responsiveness – This is measured not only by how quickly a response to a request is received, but how thorough and thoughtful the response is. The speed and quality of the response provides an indication of trustworthiness.

Emails vs. Verbal Discussion – In this era of email dependency, it is easy to lose precious time or miss solutions in the misunderstandings that result from poor

writing or misinterpretation of emails. A verbal discussion, as long as it is clear, inclusive, and honest, will achieve better results and serve to build trust.

Avoiding the question – Long-winded conversations around the edges of a question that take away the focus from the issue at hand can be a trust breaker. The same goes for ignoring a question.

Changing the question – This is a tactic in which the question is changed so the focus is diverted from the original question. For example, if a question is asked about price or cost, and the responder knows that the true answer will not be popular, other questions are raised that divert from the initial question.

Creating a tangential issue – This tactic is similar to changing the question but is typically the raising of an issue that is difficult to solve. This might be seen in the case where a solution can only be delivered by those who happen to be absent, such as a higher level decision-maker or experts that are not at the table.

Going on the offensive when challenged – Instead of being honest when challenged, the respondent brings up an issue knowingly difficult for the challenger to easily resolve. Remaining focused on this difficult issue serves to divert attention from the original question.

Information leaks – The objective of this action is typically to control a situation outside of the normal process. Be wary of leaks, even if they appear to force a positive outcome; this is a sign of dishonesty.

These are trust-busting actions, and sometimes it's not easy to see them.

Our security is at stake. Let's play fair.

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