

Applying the art of war to your business



Lt Col Ivan Yardley, managing director of Zulu Creative, and below, serving with the Territorial Army

The last decade has been a time of huge change and trouble for both the military and business worlds. **Tom Scotney** speaks to Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Yardley about bringing strategy from the battlefield to the boardroom.

It used to be the bible for every sharp-suited business guru.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* was picked up by experts looking to link up the boardroom and the battlefield. But now, at a time when both Britain's businesses and its armed forces are under more pressure than they have seen in half a century, one of the Midlands' top military men is bringing his experience of the warzone to the West Midlands.

Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Yardley commanded the largest infantry battalion in the British Army. During his two-and-a-half year command in the Territorial Army, his battalion deployed more soldiers onto the battlefield than any other TA unit.

He is now a directing member of staff at the UK Defence Academy on the advance command and staff course. He

has also earned a PhD based on leadership and the wider applications of military planning to the business world.

But in his civilian life, he is also the managing director of Zulu Creative an advertising and marketing agency based in Sutton Coldfield that works with a host of high-profile clients.

And he says he is on a drive to make businesses more aware of the benefits of taking a military approach to planning.

He says: "The business community has always been fascinated by military practice, it's been impressed by its success – the ability to build up trust both individually and within an organisation, and to have a comprehensive way of doing things."

"You can see why war and business might be natural bed-mates. The word 'strategy' is from the Greek word for 'military thinking' and in the world of marketing and advertising we refer to a plan as a 'campaign'."

"But now, in this harsh financial environment, strategic thinking is critical. In any busi-

ness and in any sector. The secret is to combine it with creative input to give clients a significant advantage, which is where Zulu sits.

"I think that the confidence a military background brings gives people the ability to have a limited risk-taking methodology. You have to be prepared to take risks, because that leads to having a culture of innovation, a culture of support.

"Developing this attitude really makes your business more agile, more responsive. And

when businesses are under pressure – as they are at the moment – you need to be adaptive."

He added the responsibility of being at the top of a chain of command had made a

huge difference to the way he went about the job. During his military career he said he had to deal with the death in action of his soldiers on a number of occasions, and the challenge of dealing with care, advice and support for families had brought back the importance of people rather than money.

He says: "There is a real misconception that the military has a hierarchy where you do whatever you are told without question. But the reality is it allows you to seek and take advice from people junior to you."

"I think in business its actually much more difficult – if you are having a board meeting with junior people its very very difficult to seek advice from them. And I think its something business needs to do more of, without having to fear undermining themselves.

"You need leaders who are good at leading, not just managing.

"And I don't think business is very good at that in terms of developing leadership because we are focusing on promoting development through pay.

"If you want people to progress you have got to get them to realise that it is a good organisation that they believe in it."



Markets to stay volatile as election draws close

Interest rates look set to rise and the volatile markets will offer a stern economic test to whichever party wins the upcoming general election, a leading Midlands businessman has warned.

Adrian Quin, head of the Birmingham office of investment manager Williams de Broe, said despite some chinks of optimism, there was still plenty of reasons to be cautious in 2010.

"The outlook for all financial markets this year is trickier to call than for a considerable time," he said.

"At the start of 2008 it was not difficult to look into a crystal ball and see that we were in for a rocky ride. And one did not have to be too much of a contrarian to see that the world was likely to end 2009 in a better state than it had entered it. As we now look forward to the rest of this year and towards the start of 2011 it is more difficult to see which way the scales will tilt.

"On the domestic front we have a general election in the UK in the first half of the year with a change of Government seeming almost inevitable and this will in turn change the terms of reference for monetary policy which is currently under very heavy political influence.

"Markets always like to test new governments and with inflation highly likely to be above target at that time we should expect that there will be considerable pressure for interest rate increases.

"We can envisage a scenario towards the later half of the year where inflation is at or above its two per cent ceiling, base rates and gilt yields are on the up, taxes are rising for both individuals and corporates, and earnings expectations for 2011 are being cut," he added.

Speaking ahead of its Professional Intermediary Investment Roadshow at Opus Restaurant, Mr Quin added: "It can be an easy mistake to look at the UK and Western economies in isolation because, while we have been slumbering, emerging markets have been making hay.

"This year is one where the potential outcomes are more difficult to predict and poles apart.

"It is a year when more than ever active, dynamic asset allocation is an absolute prerogative for successful investment management."

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