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From battlefield to boardroom, Kelly Perdeu's leadership skills remain relevant.

by Mark Cantrell

KELLY PERDEW DOESN'T MIND BEING TYPECAST. The producers of *The Apprentice 2* pigeonholed the West Point graduate and Airborne Ranger as the stereotypical "military guy," but Perdeu parlayed the training he received while serving his country into a decisive victory on the show. In his new book, *Take Command: 10 Leadership Principles I Learned in the Military and Put to Work For Donald Trump* (Regnery Publishing Inc., 2005), Perdeu details what his service taught him about leadership and incorporates the advice of other business leaders with military backgrounds, such as Roger Staubach and Ross Perot.

H I R E D

Today's Officer: Why did you decide to begin your career in the military?

Kelly Perdeu: I had the good fortune to have a father who believed strongly that it was up to the individual to secure an education. He's a self-made man who believes you get what you put into things. I felt that military academies presented great opportunities that weren't available in Wyoming, where I lived at the time. While in high school, I attended a speech by Dick Cheney, who was a Wyoming representative, introduced myself, and told him I wanted to attend an academy. It was my first real networking experience. A year and a half later he nominated me for West Point.

TO: What came after West Point?

KP: I went to a military intelligence [operations] basic course at Fort Huachuca — or as it's commonly referred to in the military, "Fort Wegotcha." I spent some time there, in the Arizona desert, learning about enemy operations, how to develop a decision and support template, and how to be a platoon leader. I also wanted a bigger challenge and decided to go for a Ranger tab to give me more credibility in performing my mission of guiding and advising commanders.

TO: I understand Ranger training was a real crucible. Did you have any idea how grueling it was going to be?

KP: No, I had no idea. Getting just three to five hours of sleep a night for weeks on end, one meal a day, humping around 50 to 100 pounds of rucksack through everything known to man is mentally grueling, and the physical component takes its toll as well. Meanwhile, a few feet away you've got Ranger instructors, who are swapped out every 36 hours, sitting around a fire eating a hot meal and kind of teasing you with it. Sort of makes you scratch your head.

TO: The business world must have been a piece of cake after that.

KP: Well, when you're two or three days into a rapid deployment exercise and you haven't slept much, you have

lots of data coming in, and suddenly a general walks into the tactical operations center at 2 a.m. and starts grilling you — it definitely prepares you for sitting across the boardroom table from Donald Trump.

Not that *The Apprentice 2* was easy. One thing that didn't really come across to viewers is how complex and tiring the tasks are that you're given. At times it's literally two to four hours of sleep in that environment as well, because you're doing things like renovating a three- or four-bedroom house in three days or running a restaurant with 48 hours' notice. And the personalities who are involved are often selected because of their extreme natures. But at least it's not outside in the freezing cold.

TO: *Take Command's* main message is that military skills are directly applicable in the business world. What attributes do a good manager and a good soldier share?

KP: Passion, for one. You can't really replace it. Whether you're a manager, an entrepreneur, or an officer, a passion for what you do is essential to motivate the people you're working with. It comes across to everyone you come in contact with. Another necessary attribute is integrity, which I put last in the book because I think it's the most important. If you're a soldier who your troops can't rely on, you're worse than useless — you're dangerous. Subordinates are always watching you, and they read you faster than anyone else. Once you step over that line, it's very difficult to go back.

TO: How do you balance passion and emotion?

KP: That's one of the great things the military teaches you. Going through training exercises where you're operating in a hostile environment helps you get used to adversity so that your heart rate

doesn't go up and you don't lose control. Those who are able to do that effectively and efficiently while still conveying that they feel strongly about what's at stake are the ones who are successful in the end.

TO: Why do you think integrity is in such short supply in the business world?

KP: I don't think it's necessarily in short supply, but the way our economic system is structured — for short-term returns — really pressures people to operate in a way that may not be in their long-term best interests. That's why preparation is so important. The decision [and] support template that every basic officer course teaches, figuring out critical decision points in the future, works the same whether you're engaging an enemy or a business competitor. When an event

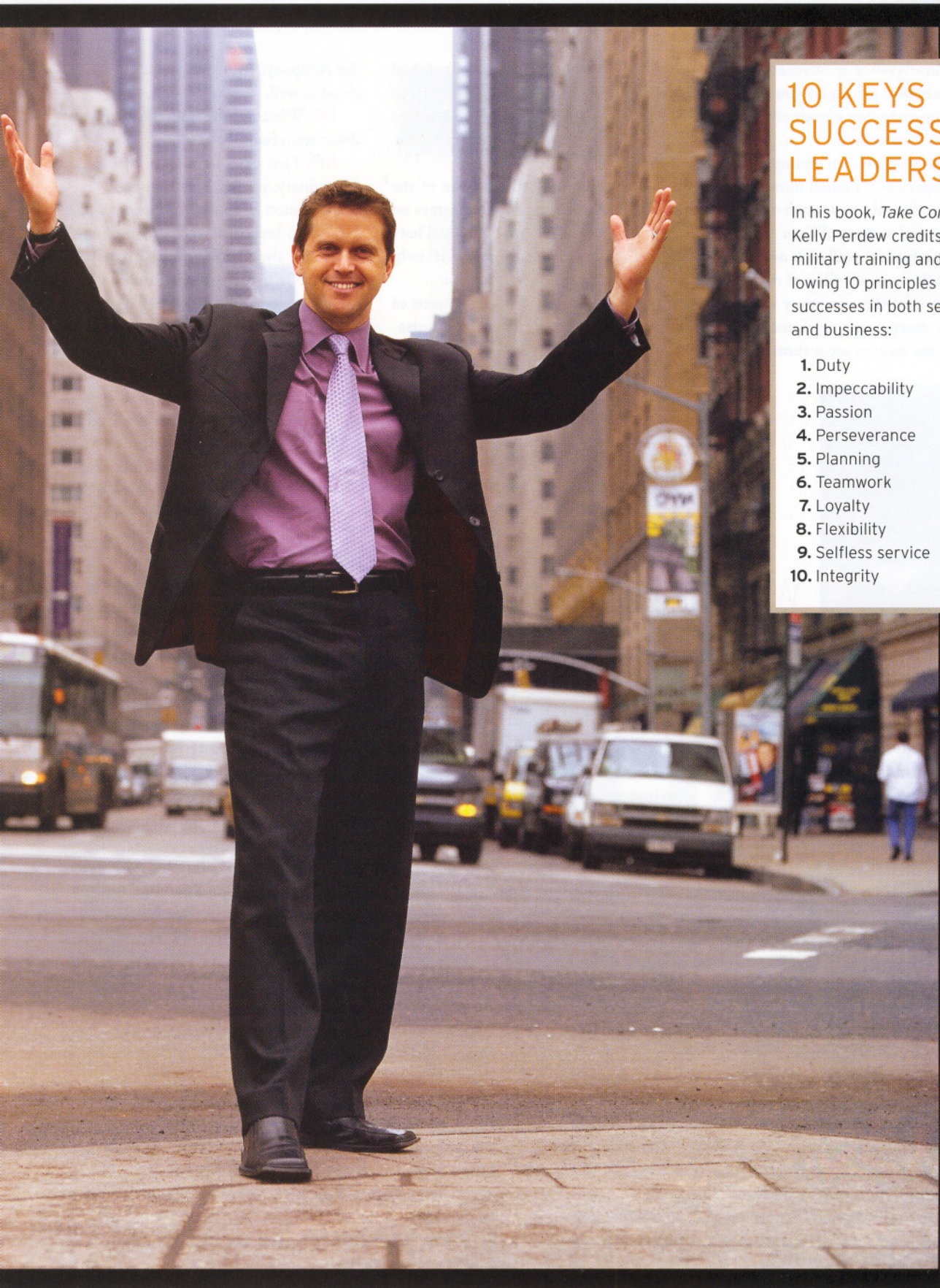
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occurs, you've already run through the scenario and know how to respond.

TO: What can you do if you're working for someone you just can't agree with?

KP: You have to be the person who's responsible for your career. You can never get away from politics, even in the military, and you're never going to be able to get along with everyone. You also can't force a solution. So when a problem is put in front of me, I try to see it as an opportunity. If you're not getting along with your boss, it can be a great opportunity to see what else is out there for you. That doesn't mean giving up; it's part of the creativity and flexibility attributes I talk about in the book. The person with the most varied responses typically wins in any given situation.





10 KEYS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP

In his book, *Take Command*, Kelly Perdue credits his military training and the following 10 principles for his successes in both service and business:

1. Duty
2. Impeccability
3. Passion
4. Perseverance
5. Planning
6. Teamwork
7. Loyalty
8. Flexibility
9. Selfless service
10. Integrity

TO: Perseverance is another one of the 10 leadership principles you outline, but you also state that it's not always the best policy. Why is that?

KP: I'll give you an example from my own experience. I raised money from family and friends to launch my first entrepreneurial venture. When it began to fail, I resolved — really felt an obligation, right down to the fiber of my being — that I would show integrity and personally go down swinging if necessary. I felt it was my duty to see it through. But

told me they didn't know why I had stayed with it so long. That's one of the reasons why I now try to surround myself with advisors who act as sounding boards.

TO: You mentioned that one of the ways to make sure your business stays on track is by measuring productivity. That's great for employers, but can it help employees as well?

KP: One of the things I've seen in business, especially in large organizations, is that many workers don't really

the company. And that helps them get ahead as well.

TO: What did the military teach you about team building?

KP: That cross training is critical. In the military, it's key because of the constant rotation of troops. In business, you may try to keep turnover to a minimum, but you're always going to have a certain amount. It usually seems to come just before a major product launch or when you're trying to hit your year-end numbers. The better cross training you do, the more resilient and better able to persevere your organization is going to be.

TO: What happens when it's time to leave a job?

KP: Sometimes organizations have a knee-jerk reaction; they feel they've spent so much time, money, and energy training you that they feel

betrayed by your leaving. But I still think it's better to treat the organization you're leaving with respect. If you're lucky, it's an organization that understands that great people have great opportunities and will still want to have a relationship with you and your new company. I've tried to maintain a strong relationship with every organization I've been a part of. ★



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many of the factors causing the problem were not under my control, and I was not able to pull it out and make it a success. I stayed in it well past what [might have been] considered prudent from a business standpoint, putting myself in harm's way financially by staying with it out of a sense of duty. When I talked with my friends and family later, they

understand where their bonuses or raises come from. Often their activities are not tied to their rewards. Many people don't like to work in a confined, measured environment, but I think that in most areas — marketing, sales, even software development — you can measure things that will help your employees understand what they need to be doing to help

WHAT'S NEXT?

Check out some of the projects Kelly Perdew has taken on since "The Donald" told him "You're hired!"

- Author of *Take Command: 10 Leadership Principles I Learned in the Military and Put to Work for Donald Trump* (Regnery Publishing Inc., 2005). Perdew will donate 5 percent of his royalties to the USO. Readers are encouraged to give Perdew feedback about his book and discuss his 10 leadership principles at www.kellyperdewforums.com.
- Cofounder of Perdew Properties LLC, which acquires and develops a variety of real estate projects, with his father and brothers.
- Host of the Military Channel's *GI Factory*, which premiered in March. The show has Perdew traveling to various factories and talking to workers who build military equipment to see how Abrams tanks, weapons, helmets, and other items go from raw material to finished product (<http://military.discovery.com>).
- Managing partner of a venture capital fund called Angel-Led Venture Partners, which is currently trying to raise \$50 million to coinvest in early-stage ventures (www.angel-led.com).