

SPOTLIGHT

Keeping an 'aye' out for his clients

Jeffrey Wilke retired from a 21-year stint in the Navy and formed a consulting company, **Easy Step Solutions LLC**, to advise clients how to keep their businesses afloat.

Wilke's time in the Navy ranged from being an instructor who wrote and taught curriculum to working as an engineer, "being responsible for helping the ship go through the water and keeping the lights on," he said.

Using those talents, Wilke now helps clients to build and maintain successful companies.

After a successful career in the Navy, however, his transition to becoming a civilian was difficult.

"I just wasn't finding the leadership positions I wanted," Wilke said. "I knew all the right people on base, but I didn't know anyone in the civilian setting."

After earning a bachelor's degree, he used that frustration to motivate himself, and with the support of his family he earned an M.B.A. at Saint Leo University, north of Tampa.

Wilke discovered his talents leading and directing others during graduate school.

"I was freelancing, doing things to help friends and family get their businesses kicked off," Wilke said. "I really enjoyed it and I found my calling or my passion."

Since forming Easy Step Solutions, he's been putting people on the move in some cases by just listening.

"Most people just need someone to talk to, because sometimes they're scared to take that step," Wilke said. "Whether it's transitioning into a new career, or taking that big plunge from a secure job with a steady paycheck into the uncertainty of a business."

Wilke can empathize with his clients, having taken the big plunge and transitioned into the role of small-business owner and small-business instructor.

Fear is a common element that holds people back from big choices such as career changes or running a startup business, he said, and former-military professionals experience that trepidation as well.

"One thing that is critical for people about to retire from the military is establishing a professional network in whatever industry they're going in," Wilke said.

"Another thing is learning how to translate skills and experiences from the military into the civilian environment."

Wilke hasn't confined his services to ex-military clientele, however. He's worked with manufacturing companies, a spa and a day-care center among others.

Wilke said he just wants to help anyone he can, something he picked up during his Navy training.

"In the Navy environment, we didn't have the luxury of saying we couldn't do something," he said. "Because when you're out in the middle of the ocean on a warship and something breaks, there's nowhere to get help; you have to solve the problem out there."



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