

Senate Inquiry into Recruitment and Retention of Defence Personnel

Submission from Grey Worldwide

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GREY WORLDWIDE ADF RECRUITMENT CREDENTIALS

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Grey Worldwide's association with ADF recruitment goes back to June 1994 when we were appointed to handle all recruitment advertising for Army (full time and reserves).

As a result of our successful work on Army we were awarded the responsibility for all service advertising, Navy, Army and Air Force in January 1999.

In July 2000 our tender was up for renewal and tenders were sought from eight of Australia's leading agencies, including ourselves. Unfortunately, after getting down to the final two, we were advised that we were unsuccessful with Young & Rubicam being appointed.

Our six years of working closely with the ADF took us to many bases across the country enabling us to candidly talk at length to hundreds of in service personnel, both General Entry and Officer.

In addition, we were intimately involved in all key research projects seeking feedback constantly from thousands of members of our key target audiences that predominantly comprises of 16 – 24yo males and females with either neutral or positive feelings towards the ADF.

Not surprisingly, we learnt an enormous amount about ADF recruiting during this period with our learnings translating to record levels of enquiry.

Consequently, Grey Worldwide would humbly profess to be positioned to make well founded recommendations that will make significant improvements to the current situation. Furthermore we would propose that currently very few of the initiatives and strategies outlined in this paper are being pursued by the ADF.

“Are the current recruitment and retention strategies of the Australian Defence Force effective in meeting the organisation's personnel requirements?”

Whilst we do not have access to the latest target achievement statistics, we understand that targets are not being met and there is no evidence to suggest that this trend is improving. Consequently, the answer to the question is clearly “no” and the following pages contain a range of thinking, initiatives and approaches that will reverse the trend.

Naturally, we would welcome the opportunity to present the following in more detail and contribute further to your inquiry.



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A SHRINKING POOL

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New Focus Research over the last five years has consistently highlighted the alarming fact that the number of people that will consider an ADF career is shrinking dramatically.

Consequently, the role of any ADF recruiting marketing programme is twofold:

- To generate immediate enquiry from the relatively small amount of people predisposed to an ADF career.
- To motivate those currently holding neutral or negative feelings towards the ADF to re evaluate the perception of the ADF and increase their predisposition.

In summary, the ADF must increase the number of people that will consider an ADF career.



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THE MAJOR IMAGE BARRIERS

Some very significant attitudes and issues exist that the ADF must seriously consider and properly address if it going to be successful as positioning itself as an employer that more people aspire to joining.

The major barriers that are most dramatically affecting recruitment performance include:

LIFESTYLE PERCEPTION

People perceive the lifestyle to be highly restrictive, regimented and overly disciplined which is a real turn off for many that are enjoying 'post school freedom' for the first time.

RELEVANCE OF ADF

Most don't really understand why we need a Defence Force.

"What do they do all day?",

"What is their role?",

"Would we really be involved in a war?"

are the most commonly raised questions.

RELEVANCE TO LONG - TERM CAREER ASPIRATIONS

A vast majority of the quality people the ADF want assurance that the ADF is an appropriate 'stepping stone' to for their long term career. Currently, a major 'mismatch' exists in young people's minds as they find it hard to understand or foresee how ADF experience will set them on a successful long - term career path.

Consequently, the ADF is increasingly being left off young people's 'job shopping lists'.

ADF EXPERIENCE NOT HIGHLY REGARDED BY CIVILIAN EMPLOYERS

Currently, not enough people believe that the ADF will provide the relevant skills, training and experience necessary and don't see civilian employers as regarding ex ADF employees as being highly desirable and valuable employees.

The ADF must acknowledge the fact that people do leave and begin to make big news out of ex serving personnel who attribute the success they now enjoy in the civilian world as being a direct result of their ADF experience.



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IMPROVING MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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In response to the enormous task the ADF faces in terms of changing attitudes, Grey has consistently recommended a three - tiered approach to ADF recruiting communications.

This approach doesn't appear to be adopted currently which would account partly for poor enquiry rates.

The focus of the most recent advertising only seems to be on communicating what's involved with certain jobs and the satisfaction and fulfilment that the job gives someone. Whilst these aspects are important, they only go a small way towards addressing the big image issues outlined earlier.

ADF recruiting, must properly invest in a communication programme that addresses the three key issue areas that the target audience want to know about in weighing up whether an ADF career is the right choice.

Don't combine all together. Treat them as three separate campaigns.

LIFESTYLE & ADF RELEVANCE

Promoting a more realistic and positive image of life in the ADF displaying that is isn't that different from civilian life eg: you can go out, listen to music, have a girlfriend/boyfriend, you're not cut off from family and friends, accommodation isn't a corrugated iron hut! etc. The role of this campaign component must also be to make people understand the role, relevance and importance of their Defence Force.

EQUIP ME FOR LIFE

Communicating everything the ADF gives you to set you for life – personal development, transferable technical skills and qualifications, interesting job challenges, security, friends for life, a confident and prosperous future once you do return to the civilian world.

THE SPECIFIC JOBS

The final layer of communications must then promote and describe the specific jobs that are available always making them appealing and relevant to future aspirations. When promoting jobs focus on unique selling points such as paid to learn, guaranteed job, the unique aspects of the job function and the amazing equipment that you'll work on.



IMPROVING MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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FISH WHERE THE FISH ARE

Finally, the opportunity exists for better targeting of recruiting messages. More analysis should be done to identify those areas of greatest potential for the ADF (eg: regional towns and areas of higher unemployment.) with media funds and recruiting resources being allocated accordingly.

Currently, little is done in this area as the current attitude is that the ADF must make ADF careers equally accessible for every Australian.



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BETTER RECRUITING TECHNIQUES

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Following are a range of initiatives and processing principles that will improve the conversion of enquiries to application.

INTERNET. MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR THE ADF

The 131901 response mechanism should remain.

However, the 'cost per recruit' will decrease significantly with the proper exploitation of the potential that Interactive technology provides, keeping in mind that young people, more than any other group, are very comfortable with its use.

In addition, it is important to note that today's youth begin giving serious consideration to career/job choice at around 13 years whereas ADF's recruiting and marketing focus is usually targeted at 16 – 18 yo's who, in many cases, already have made some decision as to what path they might take.

Whilst restricted resources might prevent recruiters from spending much time with the younger age groups, interactive technology has the capability of being a highly effective recruiters' surrogate to get an ADF career on a 13 – 14 yo person's 'job radar'.

An example of the type of interactive initiatives include:

- Establishing on-line dialogue with 13 – 14 yo's: In an informal, relaxed, no obligation manner provide young kids with the opportunity to ask any questions, chat to in service personnel and find out about what the ADF does and the huge range of jobs that are available.
- At 15 – 16 years: Dialogue is established and the person is likely to have a rough idea of what he / she would like to do eg; Uni Degree Officer, Apprenticeship etc.
- 16 – 18 years: Provide all the details of the specific job that has been mutually decided as the most ideal.

Following is a range of specific on line interactive ideas:

- Virtual work experience – Travel, for example, around the bridge of a ship and be spoken to by a Combat Systems Operator explaining what he / she does and why the role is integral to the ship performing it's role.



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- Video downloads
- News on upcoming open days / information nights
- Chat lines – Enable site visitors to speak to in service people who currently do the job they're considering.
- Order / download information packs.
- Career counsellor section – Have section that is specifically designed to assist school career advisers in providing guidance to their students.

Apart from being a more efficient, professional and contemporary way of doing business that removes the intimidation many young people feel, this approach will also realise enormous print savings.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Whilst it is logistically complex, the ADF must consider what can be offered to enquirers in terms of giving them a taste of what ADF life and the service / job type they're considering is like. Brochures, videos and internet sites can only do so much. More investment needs to be made finding activities such as Open Days and Sea Days available as well as taking groups of enquirers to actually live on a base for a number of days.

SLOW PROCESSING OF ENQUIRIES

Many enquiries are not responded to for weeks and sometimes months. With such a small and 'shrinking pool' of potential applicants, every enquiry is extremely important and should be treated accordingly.

Slow or poor responses to enquiries won't only lose the potential applicant but also result in very damaging 'word of mouth'.

Especially during peak enquiry times eg: December – February additional resources must be allocated to respond to all enquiries promptly.

ALL ADF PERSONNEL ARE RECRUITERS

All 60'000+ serving members should be regarded as recruiters promoting the ADF to friends and family members so they better understand what the organisation is about and can make a more well founded decision as to whether it's right for them.

Consequently, more work should be done internally to address this and motivate ADF members to speak more enthusiastically about their employer to their civilian peers.



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We realise that the issue of revising ADF job and commitment requirements is a highly sensitive one whereby a delicate balance must be achieved between what the ADF really needs and responding to the needs of today's young job seeker.

Whilst some changes have been made over recent years to try and make many ADF jobs more appealing, such as flexible Reserve training, we would argue the opportunity exists for greater improvements that will increase applications to the ADF.

COMMITMENT

For most 18,19 & 20 yos a five year period of commitment is a lifetime. Is there anyway ROSO etc. can be reviewed to reduce this minimum required commitment to, say, three years, for a basic GE position? Obviously the hope is that, after they do reach the required minimum period of service they will, by then, have embraced the ADF way of life and want to stay.

CHOICE & CONTROL

Feedback from enquirers suggests that once they actually make further enquiries into what's available they are only provided with an indication of the limited specific jobs that are available 'right now' in the hope of filling immediate targets.

If, for example, someone comes in wanting to be a driver, then he /she should be advised of all the different driving jobs that are available with an indication of when training begins. On going dialogue should then be established with the applicant to ensure he / she maintains interest while this waiting time passes.

PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

One of the most commonly cited reasons for not pursuing an ADF career is the fact that, no matter how well you perform, promotions are only made after a set amount of time.

For example, the amount of time it takes to be promoted from Lieutenant to Captain to Major might be seven years. In the civilian world, a strong performer can make it from a clerical job to senior management as little as 2 - 3 years if he or she is deemed to have what it takes.

Understandably, this is extremely frustrating and demotivating for in service personnel when they see their civilian friends quickly rise through their company's ranks.



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REVIEWING ADF OFFERING

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Consequently, we recommend that some flexibility and greater performance incentive be introduced whereby each individual's talents are rated and rewarded accordingly.

Any improvements here will have a positive impact on both recruiting and retention rates.



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The media is extremely powerful in influencing public opinion. Unfortunately, they tend to focus only on the isolated negative stories such as 'Crossing the Line' ceremony, Collins Class Subs, ADFA bastardisation, harassment etc.

More work must be done on the media with ADF's Public Affairs department culture being focused more on promoting the many positive stories, not waiting to minimise the impact of disasters when they arise.

An enormous opportunity exists to gain far more value from the media in return for the significant funds that are spent, especially through television. Use this clout to motivate media bodies to consider stories on the ADF (What people do, the role of the ADF, an insight into training, follow a group of trainees through to graduation etc.).

When we were working with the ADF it wasn't difficult to negotiate, for example, a 'no charge' 4pp liftout each quarter with the major news groups in return for regular advertising commitment.

A media vehicle such as this or television programme are the ideal solutions for beginning to reverse the highly negative and inaccurate perceptions that were outlined earlier as being key barriers to entry.

The ADF must place more emphasis on courting and briefing the media on ADF developments. This will achieve a far healthier relationship that will result in much greater coverage of positive news that minimises the impact of individual scandals and negative stories when they do inevitably occur.



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UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE LEAVE

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The key to solving the increasing separation rates that currently exist is to gain an accurate understanding of what the reasons why people are leaving.

It is our understanding that no formal 'exit interviews' are conducted with resigning personnel.

Once they've made the decision to leave, human nature is such that they would be very willing to provide the ADF with candid feedback as to the reasons behind their decision.

Naturally this information would provide an invaluable basis from which to form strategies for the better retention of personnel.



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GREY WORLDWIDE CONTACT

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