



# From wardroom to boardroom – Business lessons from National Service

In life, there are lessons we learn that help us move forward. For me, lessons I gleaned from National Service (NS) and my time with the Republic of Singapore Navy were helpful in running my business.

Here are three of them:

## #1 Look ahead

When I was learning to operate a warship, we learnt to look ahead for floating debris and oncoming vessels. In business, “looking ahead” is about strategising, anticipating, and being vigilant for any variable that may affect the business. At my company, Emergenetics Caelan & Sage (ECS), we constantly review our strategies and plans to ensure we are prepared to overcome future challenges so as to stay ahead of the game.

## #2 Think safety

Safety is a big thing in the Navy, especially when we were out at sea. We were constantly drilled to watch out for dangers, and put safety first in whatever we do. In business, “Think Safety” is about mitigating risks. It is also about creating a workplace culture where people feel safe to voice their opinions. At ECS, we put a lot of effort into building and sustaining a workplace culture that is respectful, inclusive and promotes team psychological safety.

## #3 Take charge


Since the first day that I was handed a rifle at Basic Military Training, I was trained to be dutiful, responsible, accountable, and to take charge of every situation. This meant rising to the occasion, taking the initiative and lead, especially when circumstances were ambiguous and could potentially become dangerous. “Tak(ing) Charge” in business is about compassionate leadership; having the courage to make difficult decisions, to be accountable and to take positive action. This is why at ECS, we encourage everyone to front projects, so everyone can feel a sense of ownership and gain the opportunity to practise leadership.

Apart from learning and applying these lessons to my business, it is also important that I model the way with my thoughts, actions and words. If I want my team to care for our customers, I need to care for them first. If I want dedication, commitment and respect from my team, I need to exemplify these traits as well. This includes how I view NS and whether my actions have been consistent in demonstrating my commitment to defending our nation. Through my show of support for NS, such as having HR policies that support our NSmen employees, I model the way for the team to respect and be grateful for what we have. This includes acting with integrity,

having the courage to do the right thing and pursuing excellence.

I am honoured that ECS has been recognised for our commitment in supporting our NSmen employees through the NS Mark accreditation scheme, and pleasantly surprised to be conferred the prestigious NS Advocate Award for SMEs in 2019 at the Total Defence Awards Dinner. Even though I am grateful for these accolades, it is more important to me that our story inspires others to take positive action to support NS.

As businesses operating in a peaceful and stable environment, it is important that we band together to do what we can to support national defence. As I've learnt in the Navy – “we're all on the same boat”.

What are your lessons from NS and how are you applying them to help you navigate uncharted waters? 



Mr Terence Quek, CEO of Emergenetics Caelan & Sage