



# Army Sustainment Command

## News Release

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RELEASE 20100420--01

April 20, 2010

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## Army ethos can help business succeed

ASC's CSM Blake enlightens businessmen on leadership

**ROCK ISLAND, Ill.**—When the Army Sustainment Command's top enlisted leader speaks, people listen.

Such was the case when Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Blake spoke at the 2010 Midwest Small Business Government Contracting Symposium held April 12-13 at the i Wireless Center in Moline, Ill.

Facing a post-lunch crowd stifling yawns on the symposium's second day, Blake took the stage and placed his hands on the wooden podium. He looked up and then began speaking, breathing new life into the docile crowd.

Blake presented a captivating speech that compared running a successful business to the principles of professional Soldiering and leadership. Specifically, he addressed the purpose of business and doing business with honor.

"It's all about opportunities," Blake said of the Army and free enterprise.

Drawing from his own life as a country boy from West Virginia who often had to split firewood, he related how that boy left mountain life in rural America to build a 29-year career in Army maintenance and logistics that includes four combat deployments – three to Iraq and one to Afghanistan.

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As a noncommissioned officer and now holding ASC's highest enlisted position as its command sergeant major, Blake said his focus has always been Soldiers and families.

"It's about our honor; it's about our product; it's about our integrity," he said.

Looking friendly but stern, Blake admonished local business leaders: "You owe it to your people sitting in the i Wireless [Center] to do better.

"We have to want better for everyone," Blake said. If you believe in that, "then guess what, it's worth fighting for. Our country can only be as good as you are."

Blake said today's youth deserve good-paying jobs, a good education, and in general, a leg up.

"We're struggling as a nation. They need jobs," he emphasized. "Would you like fries with that?" he asked. "The answer is no!"

To illustrate the value he places on education, Blake said he went to school when he could during his career, culminating in a college degree at age 41.

"It's about our business as people," he said. "Looking out for people."

Blake gave a few heartfelt personal examples of taking care of people with honor.

"Our country has to be about honor. Our business has to be about honor," he said, and then rhetorically asked, "Do we give the honor that we expect from everyone else?"

Through the illustration of slides, Blake showed some deployment photographs of his troops and sparse living conditions over the years. As time went on, the conditions improved, he said, thanks to American business supporting the U.S. military through innovations and new products, especially during wartime.

“This is somebody’s son or daughter,” he said of a slide photo of young deployed Soldiers. “Part of a small business...doing it with honor.”

Blake then stated the Warrior Ethos Soldiers live by:

- *I will always place the mission first*
- *I will never accept defeat*
- *I will never quit*
- *I will never leave a fall comrade*

Blake urged business leaders to talk to their employees. “We’re blind at the top,” he said.

He then closed by reminding the attendees of the 27,000 veterans and family members buried at Rock Island National Cemetery. Business leaders must ask themselves a couple of questions of their business, he said: “Is it an honorable business? Am I giving my people a chance?”

A standing ovation attested to Blake’s effect on the audience. There were no more yawning symposium participants.

The event, now in its third year, was the first time ASC headquarters participated as an exhibitor. Capitalizing on the theme “Building Strong Together,” the ASC exhibit featured a visual display of the command’s missions and the Soldiers it supports. An estimated 400-plus attendees were present on opening day, according to local media reports.

As it had in previous years, ASC’s Small Business Office had its own display. Both of ASC’s booths offered abundant literature outlining the command’s mission and explaining the federal acquisition process for small businesses.

The symposium included presentations from industry experts and networking opportunities for small business contractors, ranging from prime roles to subcontracts.

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