



## **TECHSPOSE**

**Brian Kent**

*CEO – K3 Enterprises (K3)*

1. **Brian, tell us a little about your life before adulthood.**

I grew up on a farm in rural Florida, in the panhandle. My nearest neighbor was about a quarter of a mile away and my first job was on a farm. I worked with produce and hay and did all the things you can imagine growing up on a farm. Then I joined the Army at 17 because I didn't really want to go to college and didn't know what I wanted to do after high school. I joined the Army for the college fund and to have a couple of years to figure out what was next.

2. **What about you would probably surprise people who know you primarily through business channels?**

One, my step-father is a minister, so coming from a small church mentality into the military and out into the world was drastically different. That would surprise some but not others because of the true commitment I still have to values, integrity, and loyalty. Those are qualities we look for in K3 people, not just being smart.

The second thing would be that I'm from a very small, economically distressed area, that wouldn't seem to lead to the lifestyle I have today as a president of a company and being an aggressive individual. I remember the day my mobile home was towed away and repossessed, when I was a 4 or 5. That'll motivate you not to get in that predicament again.

3. **If you were Julie Andrews singing "My Favorite Things," what would you sing about?**

I'd probably sing about what I'm doing now - working hard for my money, solving problems, and helping people.

4. **You had a long, respectable career in the US Army. Why did you make that career choice?**

My first assignment was for 3 years, and, within a year, I got assigned overseas to Egypt and Israel. My MOS [*military occupation specialty*] was 71C, executive administrator. When I went to Egypt and Israel, if you were around executives, you got trained in fire arms, defensive and aggressive driving. I did writing for the organization and was an escort for the distinguished visitors there.

That was a good job for me. After 8 years, I got promoted several times up to the rank of Sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class. It was then I decided to make a career of it, I applied to Officer Candidate School and was accepted. That started me on my way to staying in 20 years.

5. **Your background includes "military special operations." I think of military ops strategists, in part, as gamesmen, moving people and equipment around a global board to encourage, forestall, and defend against actions by a multitude of friends and foe. Is that a true picture?**

I would like to call myself a strategist, looking at the big picture and figuring things out. To be successful, you have to get your people to the right place at the right time. In the military, there's individual training on technology and equipment and learning the purposes for it. Then there's a point that it shifts from being a game to being training.

I like to make that distinction because a lot of people forget how many soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines die as a result of training. In training, they're really pushing you to make sure you're the best you can be *before* you go into combat. I remember the first time I had to write to a mother about her son dying and another time I had to walk to the door and tell a mother. That brought



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home the pressure of leadership. It makes you wake up. It's a different picture than the GI Joe guns and bombs and games. People forget the personal side of military training.

I'm working on my PhD and my dissertation is on the digital divide in DOD. The digital divide is based on the haves and have-nots of the world. Recruiting for the military historically comes from the have-nots. In most cases, they're not the early adopters. There's a huge disparity when you take a guy off the city streets or from rural areas. How do you make them part of the most technologically advanced force? There's a huge gap there.

The military training is truly about how we get these guys to a comprehension level as fast as possible to make them part of the team. Part of it is a mindset. In basic training, you break them down and build them up as a team to convince them they can do anything they put their minds to. I think that's one of the methods for getting technology accepted in the military.

As for Special Operations, you're reaching a different group. They're truly unique in their maturity and thought processes. They can think inside and outside the box because they have to think 3 or 4 steps ahead. They have to think fast and in situations where there may be no way for a re-do.

A perfect example was a couple of years ago when I ran for office. One of my opponents had been a multi-term city council member and mentioned my lack of experience. She'd already commented that it took her almost a term to learn to work on city council. My response was that my experience was different because, in the military, I had 90 days to decide whether young men and women got to live or die.

6. **K3 is a "Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business." How did you earn that distinction?**

You don't earn it. That is the consequence of many years of the training wear and tear. It comes as a commitment, for me, from being a paratrooper and other commitments. The wear and tear accelerates aging. Ankles, knees, elbows, a back injury that had me down for about a year-and-a-half.

We'll see this even more with the current vets with so many overseas deployments. PTSD, lost legs, lost eyes. In comparison to them, my generation wasn't going to war every 6 months, so we beat ourselves up more than we got shot up.

7. **When you left the Army in 2005, which major adjustments did you have to make when you entered the civilian business environment?**

Probably the biggest adjustment was having a funding stream that was not dedicated. Working in the military, you had a budget and a paycheck. It was really about accomplishing what you had to accomplish. In the civilian business environment, finding money becomes a major player in your decisions. That's not a part of the military planning, where you can really focus on your job while someone else above you figures out the financial piece.

One of the advantages that I have is that, in my last 4 years in the military, I was a government procurement officer. That gave me an understanding of how the government purchasing system worked.



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The best thing and worst thing that happened to me was retiring from the military. I'm not boxed in by my environment. The military keeps you on a structured path. Since then, I've been able to expand my mind and try lots of things. But I can also get overloaded.

**8. Why did you start K3 Enterprises?**

When I got ready to retire and looking for employment, I was restricted on where I could work because I'd been an acquisition officer. There was a cooling off period. I could be a consultant but I couldn't actually represent those companies. So I became a technology transfer specialist and a consultant, and that's how I started framing the business model for K3. I became a translator, so to speak, translating the requirements and purpose between the military and the provider.

**9. In which circumstances would companies call K3 for help?**

We help companies write their government contracts and get the awards. We don't build anything. They want to stay with their core focus, which is building their products. So we work with them through the production process, into production. We help with training manuals and forecasts about the government process, then our new equipment training teams (NET) can help get the equipment on the ground. K3 will get it to the soldiers and train them on it.

At K3, we talk about the 4 Ts – technology introduction, technology training, technology integration into the military plans, and technology sustainment. If companies have a product or a challenge in any way related to selling into the US military, we can help them.

Our tagline is "end to end solutions for your world today." We look at the total goals of what companies are trying to accomplish and team up with them to help them do it. We can go after contracts for them, train them or their government customers, implement the sale, or take it from start to finish.

Larger companies call us because we're nimble and fast. We're on those companies' 911 lists. Recently, a large company won a contract in Africa, but their hiring process was cumbersome, took months. March 10 they asked us to help provide 5 people in Africa and they were there by March 31. We handled everything from getting passports, visas, medical screens, and getting them on the plane. There's my military background, moving people quickly.

**10. K3's website mentions "asymmetrical software." What is that?**

Basically, asymmetrical software is more a methodology than a software. It's a couple of applications put together to allow you to identify networks and affiliations. Commercial companies can find local customers or marketing bases through links and ties using the same technology that we use in the military to find terrorist groups. For instance, let's say I want to get to John in RTP at IBM. How do we get into his decision making circle? We identify who the key decision makers are at RTP and how you identify those who're most important to meet in order to become John's client or a vendor.

**11. K3 was #14 on Inc's list of fastest growing North Carolina companies, growing almost 600% over the past 3 years. How did you do that in a recession?**

The biggest thing was that people were looking for very solid companies that could move fast. A lot of deals during the recession were made quickly and didn't have time to drag out a procurement



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decision for years. We're ISO 9000 and, unlike many companies, we could still pay our bills and our vendors. We do 360-degree planning and provide rapid, high quality throughout the process.

12. **As CEO, what would you advise other CEOs to do if their companies are growing at a similar speed-of-light pace?**

- The first thing is that they have to stay engaged with the money. If you're CEO and you're not aggressively pursuing cash every day, you're not in the game. You can't play if you can't pay.
- Then you have to hire good people. Unemployment's high but a lot of good people are working. We haven't had a lot of trouble hiring people unless the government requirements severely restrict the pool.
- Go after a mindset. Let's say you think you need 12 people to do the job. If not all 12 are motivated, those who aren't will distract the others. I've found that you give me 8 motivated people and they'll give you the work of 12. You can't hire dummies, but there are a lot of smart people without the right mindset. And, while everyone can't be in charge, you want everyone to carry the weight in their lane and give you extra.
- And you've got to make sure your people are trained and that they understand the value of what they bring to the team.

13. **I read that K3 is "a company that thrives on the use of innovation" to exceed customer requirements. Tell us about some of those innovations.**

We believe in being innovative, thinking about the total problem, and providing an idea based on the best solution. One of the things we do is independent verification of the products we recommend. We talk about capabilities and do evaluations. We don't endorse a particular manufacturer. If you have a problem, I'm not necessarily going to come in and pitch you a CISCO solution. I have no problem mixing and matching the best products within a system to get you the best solution available.

We don't look at the cheapest technology, but at what's the best value. People sometimes forget the life cycle in reviewing low prices. What's the true total cost of this solution? Part of that comes in working with government in which, most of the time, you must give 5-year plans. In the commercial market, people think of the next 90 days.

14. **Which technologies does K3 focus on?**

Electronics, information technology, biometrics, and software. We truly check lots of technology boxes. So we spend lots of time with different technologies and work with R&D in the military and civilian labs. I want to be known as the best solution guy, not as the guy who sells just Cisco or IBM. We put the right people together regarding how to accomplish what they want. It's about getting people together to innovate.

15. **In 2009 NCTA named K3 its Small Technology Company of the Year and in 2011 K3 was recognized as one of NC's fastest growing tech companies. Why and how has K3 invested itself in NCTA?**

I've been associated with NCTA since before K3, when I met Joan Myers back in 2003 and she was CEO of NCTA. That relationship was through my government buying role. Joan could point me to companies that might have a technology that would solve whatever my problem was.



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So, when I retired, I knew the value of NCTA and became a member my first year at K3, in 2005, and have been ever since. It's worth the membership. I may only get to 1-3 events per year, but I've never been disappointed. If I can't make it, we try to send one of my staff. Through that affiliation, we've met other companies and made government affiliations to benefit ourselves and our business.

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