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An Employer Speaks

Sun State's Oscar Horton: Accustomed to Responsibility

"We focus on more than the hard skills," says Oscar Horton, President of Sun State International Trucks, LLC, a franchise of International Truck and Engine Corporation, the operating arm of Navistar. "We look for a set of attributes that emphasize strengths: innovation, customer service, accountability."

Horton says that his Tampa, FL.-based company spent several years defining the kind of characteristics they wanted for their culture. When they had settled on these attributes, Horton began to realize that veterans had the right qualities for a service-oriented business.

"We found it really was a treasure for us," says Horton. "All we had to do was introduce them to our product. We can get people through the skills part. But what we can't get them through is learning to be accountable, having respect for people, and maintaining a positive attitude."

For example, Horton views Humberto Alvarez, Sun State's Service Coordinator and a retired Navy Chief Petty Officer, as pivotal in the ambitious growth plans for the dealership, whose size more than doubled from \$36 million to \$74 million annual revenues from 2002 to 2004.

"He has everything I'm looking for to get to the next level," says Horton of Alvarez, who is one of the seven disabled veterans employed by Sun State. Sun State employees credit Alvarez with "running a tight ship" as he works with service departments at the company's four locations, which have 51 repair bays and 58 technicians delivering vehicles until 11 p.m.

A recent Colorado visit to the U.S. Air Force Academy and NORAD headquarters in Cheyenne Mountain further convinced Horton that the best young people today are opting for military service.

"I noticed bright individuals who have dedicated themselves to protect us so we can sell trucks," says Horton. "The cadets I saw at the Academy, if not obligated, could go directly into the private sector with signing bonuses."

He adds, "There's something different about young people who go into the military or they never would have taken that first step. They have the kind of mentality we need. All I have to do is tap into it."

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