

CEOs Have a Blast Learning To Be SEALs

Education: Program Puts Co. Leaders Under Different Kind of Pressure San Diego Business Journal By **BRAD GRAVES**
Friday, May 2, 2014



A select group of local CEOs learned about business through the lens of simulated combat during a new training program produced by The Jenks Group and Strategic Operations. Photo by Tommy Hughes

Julieann Billings-Riordan kicked open the door and entered the house, coming face to face with two terrorist thugs. She felt for the safety catch on her rifle. The safety wouldn't budge.

So she did what most people would do when the unexpected happens. She froze. And by stopping in the doorway, she blocked three other members of her commando team from going through.

It was a botched entry. Fortunately, the stakes weren't all that high. The self-employed public relations agent and three other CEOs were playing SEAL team members in a drill overseen by five current and former members of U.S. special operations forces.

There are business lessons to be had here, said Sharon Jenks, who produces executive skills courses through her company. The Jenks Group previously offered such training in Salt Lake City, and brought it to Stu Segall Productions — aka Strategic Operations — in April. Military units and SWAT teams also practice at the Kearny Mesa movie set.

Two dozen CEOs and observers attended the April 30 exercise, which was a dry run for future programs.

The Jenks Group provided the curriculum. Strategic Operations provided the stage; the extras, including an amputee acting as if his leg had been blown off; and other special effects, such as nonlethal explosives.

The Jenks Group and Strategic Operations declined to say what they spent on the morning of training, and Sharon Jenks declined to say how much her company planned to charge for future sessions. Terry Bruggeman, a business turnaround consultant who attended, said he has heard of a similar program that takes place at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, where organizers charge \$1,500 per person.

After the CEO groups tried to enter the room the best they could, four professionals demonstrated how they would do it. Their performance was as smooth and graceful as a Tchaikovsky ballet.

“Slow is smooth, smooth is fast” is the special operations maxim that means haste makes waste. Companies will inevitably spend more rushing a project, said Ed Jenks, a business consultant and Sharon Jenks' husband.

Ed Jenks said businesspeople need constant training — and discipline. The latter disappeared from U.S. business in the 1960s, he said.

Going over the entry exercise, Ed Jenks told the CEO participants that SEALs need speed, surprise and impact when facing down bad guys — just as executives need it in dealing with competition. The surprise deteriorated fast when Billings-Riordan hesitated in the doorway.

Fortunately, there are second chances. The principal of JABR Marketing Solutions said her team's second entry went off without a hitch.