

Case Study

From Sergeant Major to Solar Operative: Transitioning from the British Army to a career in Solar Engineering Services



Summary

- **Location:** UK Wide
- **Company:** 2DegreesKelvin



2DegreesKelvin (2DK) is a solar engineering company, specialising project life-cycle services and solutions in the utility scale solar industry. They offer a range of boutique consultancy, advanced inspection & testing services, and have become one of the leading specialists in the space to engineer and implement revamp and re-power projects.

Project background

2DK is best known for solar panel testing (electroluminescence & flash), and own and operate a fleet of mobile test laboratories, where it tests solar panels on new-build and operational sites. Building on lessons from the solar boom and keeping pace with the rapid evolution of solar technology, EL & flash testing has become a key industry standard. This practice helps developers manage risk by ensuring the quality of solar panels is thoroughly assessed before installation on large-scale solar farms.

The technology can also be used to validate against installation standards, looking for invisible post-installation mechanical damage and a range of manufacturing defects. Doing so prevents production losses, module, string and inverter faults and downtime for the life of the asset, as well as increasing confidence levels and the value of assets.

With this growing market demand, 2DK has invested in more technology and testing capacity and to complement those advancements, it needed a technically astute, hard-working, and proceduralised team to deliver the rising number of testing assignments.

Project Summary

To find the right people, 2DK developed a job description and went out to various agencies and job boards, with the aim of finding suitable candidates to onboard, train and get up to speed with their range of field services. Following a round of interviews, 2DK found one individual (Anthony Davidson), who showed promise and interviewed well. It was clear from his military background that there was a natural fit.

Anthony was employed as a Field Services Operative and over a 12 month period, was trained how to operate a range of solar panel test machines and rigs, travelled the length and breadth of the UK and Ireland and also provided the opportunity to strengthen the team further with two more ex-Army operatives (Jay & Ste).

Fast forward to today and Anthony is now a Field Services Team Leader and Jay & Ste are now fully trained and competent Field Services Operatives, creating a world class team. Our testing jobs are planned and executed with military precision and service excellence. We test more modules than any other equivalent service provider in the world and not only provide testing services, but now offer a 'full wrap' module handling service and serial number gathering service as well. This team and the hard work they have put in has really cemented 2DK as a market leader in advanced inspection and testing services.

2DK have invested further in this team, headed up by their line manager and head of division (Dan), they have now developed and implemented a competency road map through to electrical technician level, providing C&G Inspection & Testing, 18th Edition and Authorised Person training.



All was with the aim of developing a well-rounded, safe, and effective team, with strength and depth.

Seeing this as a real success story, 2DK are now developing both a training arm (the Academy of Solar Excellence) and a resourcing company, to enable the group of companies to seek, train and deploy personnel into large-scale solar farm construction projects, and to formulate partnerships with the likes of the Forces Transition Group (FTG) and the Forces Employment Agency (FEA). Supporting ex-forces personnel and providing a clear route to roles within the utility scale solar industry has become an important objective of theirs and a very worthy cause.

Anthony's perspective

In 2023 I exited the British Army having joined some 22 years prior. Having had a highly successful and distinguished career, joining as a Private soldier and leaving as a warrant officer, I was offered and encouraged to consider commissioning to become a Captain and extend for a further 10 years of service. Whilst this was a good offer and very attainable, I was conflicted and felt I needed to challenge myself, outside of my comfort zone and so the wheels set in motion to pursue a different challenge and career direction. During this process and whilst resettling from the Army, I attended numerous courses and jobs fairs to identify a sector that called to me.

The issue I found, like many before and no doubt many after me was, how does my array of skills, forged over years of operating in hostile environments and arduous conditions lend itself to what employers want? For the first time there was an element of doubt and trepidation. This was an alien emotion for me and subsequently I applied to a very well-known engineering firm to interview for a position as a civilian instructor in a military establishment, delivering training packages to military aviators and ground support assets.

After a successful interview (my first in 22 years) I was offered the position, which I duly accepted. The job was fantastic, and my colleagues were all amazing. The company were well versed in employing ex-military and some 90% of the company were ex-servicemen and women. I had complete job security; I could have easily have stayed in that role until retirement, and I was in familiar surroundings (just two hangars away from the building where I managed the careers of 186 service personnel as a Sergeant Major).

The issue for me was I did not allow myself to transition away from the military and chose the option of a safe landing. I had not followed through on the reasons for me turning down the option to commission, instead taking a safe route. After 6 months of feeling conflicted, I decided to take a leap of faith and responded to an advert from 2DK. Although not being able to offer any solar qualifications I felt, I had all the necessary attributes any organisation would search for, hardworking, punctuality, problem solver, agile thinker, leadership, pride, attention to detail, to name a few. The interview was a success and 2DK appreciated my willingness to learn and apply myself to their cause, and so my solar career started.

I thoroughly enjoy the role explained above in the overview and have set upon a journey within the renewable energy sector with a view to learn, develop and master my field. I like many other ex-service personnel, thrive on being immersed in challenging environments, the solar industry has many routes for an individual to pursue thus making it a solid career option to consider for service leavers.

As 2DK was actively recruiting, I recommended two individuals from the military whom I had served with and explained to them the potential within the sector and how my experiences have been so far. They had the opportunity to take trial placements to get a feel for our role and have both since become 2DK employees. We all thoroughly enjoy the role our new solar careers are giving us, we get to travel UK-wide and meet people from top to bottom of the industry. We face a mixture of challenges, which keeps the mind sharp, the company is fully supportive of our journey and has provided ongoing training to develop our skillset and competencies.

We also have an outstanding boss, (Dan) who is always personable, reliable, supportive and on hand to freely share his knowledge and solar experience and manage our day-to-day activities (qualities I recognised in only the best leader's I'd worked for or alongside in my military career). The senior management within the company make it feel like a family work environment where your hard work and effort is appreciated.

Personally, I could not be happier with my decision to pursue a career within the solar industry and genuinely believe it would be very well suited to ex-forces and service leavers alike and should be a consideration as a solid future career path after the military.

Learn more about what's happening at 2DK at www.2degreeskelvin.org



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