

BY ANDY KANEFIELD AND MARK POWERS

Vic Richey, chairman, CEO and president of ESCO Technologies Inc., says that “everything I’ve learned about leadership, I learned in the Army.” ESCO, serving customers around the world, provides special purpose hardware and software solutions for electric, gas and water utilities, engineered filtration products for aviation and space applications, and radio frequency shielding and electromagnetic compatibility test products.

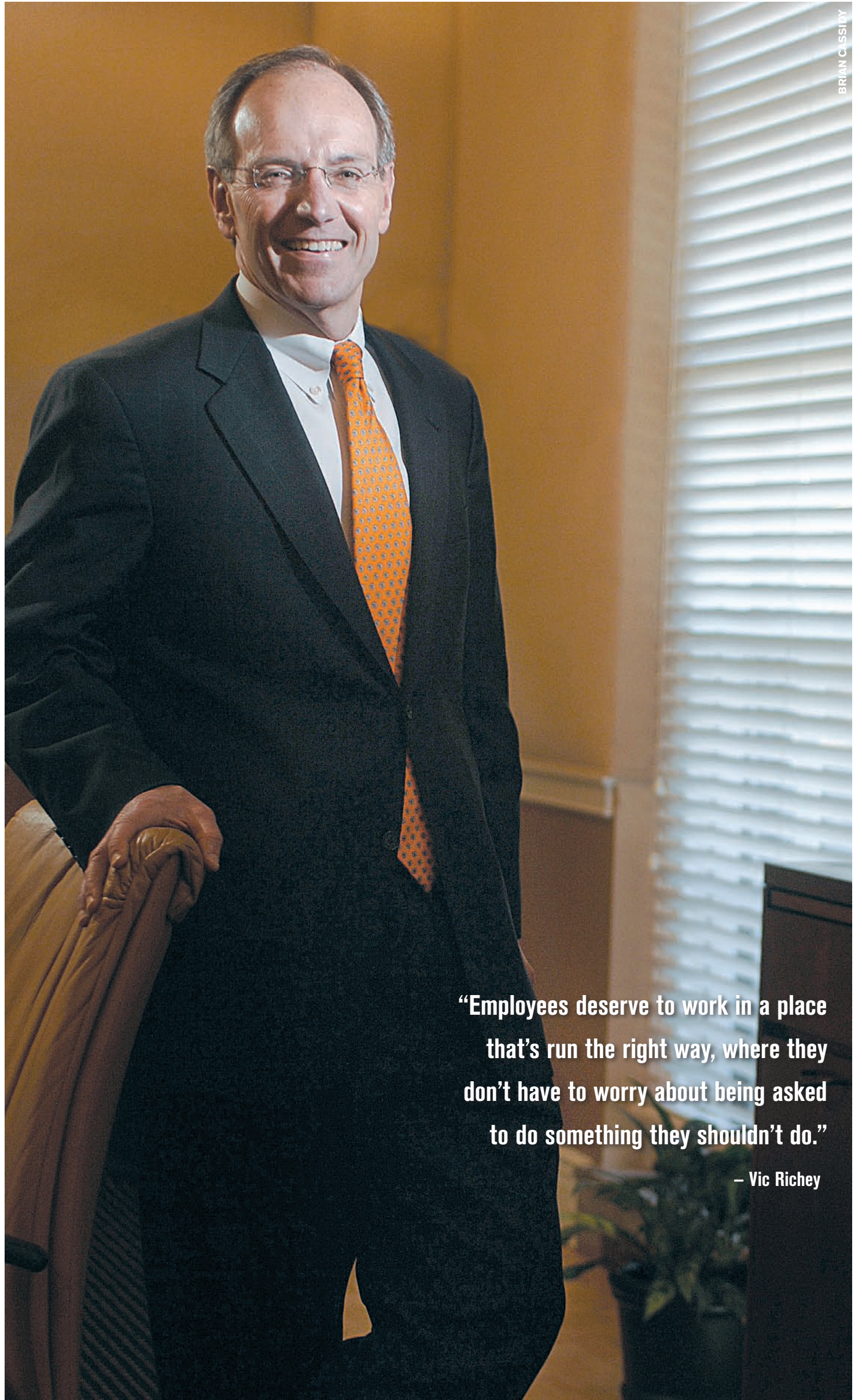
One of the military leaders who inspired Richey most is Gen. Colin Powell, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “It is more than just the common bond of simple beginnings that is inspiring about Powell,” Richey says. The general embodies the character Richey values.

“I did get to work for him for one year, which was fascinating. I was a junior intelligence officer so I always had the night shift when we were in the field. He was a very low-key, laid-back guy who didn’t have to tell you he was in charge; it was obvious. We share some core principles. Like always treat people right. Always. He was a very consistent person. I saw him in some extremely difficult situations. But he always maintained his demeanor and handled things well.

“I’ve transferred the lessons from my six years in the Army to civilian management principles:

- Understand the difference between a manager and a leader.
- Hire the best and smartest people you can afford.
- Embrace the differences in people. There are a lot of different ways to get to the same place.
- Give people responsibility and get out of the way.
- Follow up because you care, not just to check on compliance.
- Give praise often and publicly.
- Counsel people as necessary and in private.

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– Vic Richey

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- Make the tough decisions yourself.
- Be accessible.
- Have fun.

“There’s a misconception that the military is all structure. But beyond the structure it’s very unstructured and supportive and like a family. There’s probably less racial tension and gender discrimination than most people would believe. We’re all in there working for the

same thing, and we’re all equal.

“ESCO is a very informal organization. We’re more informal than most organizations our size because we’re in a lot of different locations. Even if we wanted to, we couldn’t manage with the same level of detail as if we were all in one place.

“When I ask people what they like about being here they say, ‘I like the people I work with, I like the culture, I like the fact that no one is look-

ing over my shoulder all the time.’

“And we emphasize doing the right things. Our most consistent messages are about ethics. I never have a meeting with employees where I don’t bring it up,” Richey adds. “When I interview people and ask them what they know about ESCO, they often say that they’ve heard that ethics is really important here.

“Employees deserve to work in a place that’s run the right way, where they don’t have to worry about being asked to do something they shouldn’t do. I also think that helps them perform better.”

How have these management principles and informal structure helped?

“Our management team has stayed together and as a result our overall retention has been very good. And while each of us might talk about these principles differently, we are in agreement with them. Our leaders have set the example and people have stayed with us.

“A lot of us have grown up in the organization together. There’s a bond between the senior team and the rest of the organization. Almost like a family environment. We try to take care of them, and they try to take care of us. People have hung with us through some tough

The most important lessons I learned from the Army...

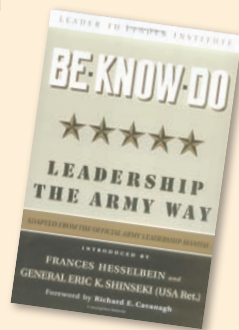
- Eat, drink, and sleep only after your people have.
- Never ask somebody to do something you wouldn’t do.
- Set the example because everybody’s watching.
- Challenge people and hold them accountable.
- Treat people as you wish to be treated.

Take a tip from the Army when it comes to leadership

Central to the U.S. Army’s success are strong leadership and exceptional leadership development. Army leaders must be able to act decisively and effectively in challenging situations. But the Army, despite its organizational structure, does not train leaders in a hierarchical manner. Dispersed leadership is the key to the success of the Army leadership model.

“Be Know Do: Leadership the Army Way” describes the Army’s leadership philosophy in the hopes that leaders will successfully

apply the following principles to civilian organizations:



1. **Be:** Leadership is about character. It is not a pretense. Honesty, discipline and duty are paramount for a leader.

2. **Know:** Every leader must be knowledgeable not only about their job, but everyday things. Since knowledge enables, a leader must be highly knowledgeable.

3. **Do:** Leaders must put their skills to a good use.

SOURCE: “BE KNOW DO: LEADERSHIP THE ARMY WAY”

times. We have very low turnover throughout the entire organization.

“It can sound trite, but it really is about doing the right thing for customers, employees, and vendors. If you do that over time, things will always work out.”

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