Unanet
ERP GovCon

You Can Take It With You: How a Successful ERP Launch at One GovCon Firm Led to Another at Defense Contractor SkyBridge Tactical

Motivation for Seeking a New ERP Solution

When Katherine Fredlund joined Skybridge Tactical as finance director, one of the first things she did was to take stock of the fast-growing government contracting firm's finance and accounting systems. What she found was a firm that was thriving despite relying on shadowy, inefficient processes, along with an expensive legacy enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that people found to be neither intuitive nor user-friendly.

Fredlund had helped rescue her previous employer (also a government contractor) from a similar predicament by engineering a move from an unwieldly legacy accounting and financial software product to a modern ERP system. She knew there was a solution at hand for Skybridge, a contractor for the U.S. Department of Defense.

"I was excited to help take the company away from the dark side and bring them over to the light," she says.

Challenges

- **Inconsistency from the legacy system forced the team to use workarounds.** "We were using software that was not delivering reliable transactions. People were so adverse to the system and its user interface that they had to explore alternative methods for getting the work done. The interface was not set to be produce reliable transactions, so we were forced to perform transactions through journal entries."

- **The legacy system was keeping the firm from fulfilling its growth aspirations.** Because it was creating and reinforcing so many workflow disruptions across the business, the legacy system would have likely kept Skybridge from attaining its goal of growing to mid-size firm stature within three years, posits Fredlund. "If we were to break into the midsize tier, we just couldn't continue to operate like that. We needed a system that was going to work for every department."

SkyBridge TACTICAL

Skybridge Tactical (**skybridgetactical.com**) is a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) headquartered in Tampa, Fla. Founded in 2008 by former members of Army Special Forces, the company leverages its SOF expertise to provide security, operational and training services globally, with a focus on acquisition, logistics, operations, intelligence, security, engineering, rapid prototyping, maintenance and training. Skybridge has 110 employees across offices in Tampa, Pensacola, Fla., and Sheridan, Montana. It has contract support locations in Florida, Texas, Montana and North Dakota within the Continental U.S., and in multiple locations in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Europe.

- **A subpar implementation had undermined the firm's ERP investment and forced people to use multiple, redundant systems.** As Fredlund discovered, the implementation process with the legacy system "was so sloppy that we weren't even shown a lot of the features that we had paid for. The system was never fully configured for our company, so we were not using a majority of the features, and, in fact, we were still using QuickBooks to perform a lot of necessary functions."

- **The TCO (total cost of ownership) tab was mounting.** Fredlund crunched the numbers and found that the cost of using a third-party ERP expert to fix bugs and bottlenecks in the legacy system, and get people trained so they would use the system's capabilities to their fullest, would have far exceeded the cost of switching to a new ERP system.

- **"Real-time" data was a mirage.** Although the provider of the legacy system promised access to real-time data, for Skybridge, that turned out to be more marketing-speak than reality. Project managers had to wait weeks for key labor and expense cost data to find its way into the system, making timely reporting difficult.

- **People were resorting to a shadow cost-tracking system that required duplicative, time-consuming manual data entry.** The accounting team avoided the ERP system to track costs, instead doing so with Excel spreadsheets and manually entering data. It was time, Fredlund and other decision-makers at Skybridge concluded, to find an ERP solution that would help fix those issues and enable the firm to fulfill its goals.

The ERP Solution

The organization selected Unanet ERP GovCon because:

- **It keeps experience at top of mind.** Having lived too long with a substandard ERP, and on the heels of winning a new contract from the U.S. Department of Defense, Skybridge leadership recognized that for the future growth and health of the company, they needed to find a better ERP solution. They sought one that employees would embrace because it enabled them to work smarter and more efficiently — one purpose-built to map directly to a government contracting firm's processes and requirements, and one that would give company leaders and project managers timely, accurate data to make better-informed decisions.

- **It was easy to convince the organization's leadership of the value add.** For Fredlund, whose experience implementing Unanet at her previous employer had made her a self-described "huge champion" of Unanet ERP GovCon, the choice was obvious. But others within the Skybridge leadership team had to be convinced Unanet was the right choice for the company. Convincing them was easy. "As soon as we did the demo, I had my leadership team on board with a switch to Unanet. Our president told the team when we were done with the demonstration that they had him in the first five minutes" due to the ease of access to timesheets and expense reports, in real time, and the overall user-friendliness of the interface.

- **Implementation is seamless.** Still, members of the leadership team had questions they needed answered before committing to Unanet ERP GovCon. Could Fredlund handle an implementation with her team at its current size? How would the cost of the system shake out over a three-year period in terms of total cost of ownership? What would the transition to Unanet be like? "It really took me getting their buy-in," Fredlund says. And once people like the company's head of HR and director of contracts felt all their questions had been satisfactorily answered, they, too, were onboard with the decision to migrate to Unanet ERP GovCon.

Impact

- **Scalability.** As a cloud-based system, Unanet is built to grow in step with a firm. "I truly believe it will be able to support our growth plan over the next several years," says Fredlund.

- **Second-to-none support.** Service and support were spotty and expensive with Skybridge's former legacy ERP provider. All that changed with Unanet. "If I was having an issue, they were always there. Nobody ever left me hanging and it didn't cost me a dime extra. They weren't constantly telling me I had to pay more support costs to get them to help with something. Unanet kept their commitment to support us through it, and it was a lot of hours. But they understood they were the ones responsible for making this synchronization happen. When you live and breathe that software like I do, and it's part of everything you do every day, it's so important to have that kind of support."

- **Real-time data for project managers.** "As soon as I showed our PMs that they can have real-time reports the moment somebody allocates a cost to their project, it was all hands in the air singing, 'Hallelujah!,'" Fredlund says, "because it makes budgeting and looking at their contract costs much simpler for them."

- **A system so intuitive anyone can use it.** With Unanet, she says, "I can send a PowerPoint presentation out to the team everywhere, and they will be able to instantly log in and perform the actions without a struggle. That's not something we could do with our legacy system." That ease of use is particularly important for the firm's field employees, many of whom have competing work priorities leaving them without time to stay up to date on software. "They don't use technology, so they need to have something very, very simple, where they can log in and the system is extremely intuitive, so they have what they need when they need it."

- **Out from the shadows, into the light.** Gone are the days when PMs wasted valuable time entering project data into a shadow spreadsheet system.

- **A mobile app that works well in war zones, desert areas, etc., inside and outside the continental U.S.** The legacy ERP system had a mobile app but the few people that had it rarely used it because it didn't work well in-theater, Fredlund explains. The powerful Unanet mobile app gives them offline entry capability so they can put information into the system even when comms are down. "As soon as they connect, it'll upload. They don't have to go back and redo it."

- **You can take it with you.** If, as in Fredlund's case, the ERP system is familiar and it works exactly as you need it to, why not bring that system to your new employer? Based on her prior experience implementing Unanet ERP GovCon, she was confident she could do a large portion of the implementation at Skybridge herself, knowing the ins and outs of the system, and feeling confident that with Unanet, employees would receive proper training.

- **Stop throwing good money after bad.** Fredlund determined that she and her team could fix the legacy system and get people trained to use it, but doing so would have cost the firm almost twice what it took to start fresh with Unanet. That's when decision-makers at Skybridge decided they were done sinking money into a dead-end ERP system.

- **Be willing to part ways with a software provider that treats you like less than a partner.** When Fredlund informed her contact at the legacy ERP system provider that Skybridge was considering switching to another provider, the legacy provider promised to slash prices to keep them as a customer. Ultimately, however, no promise of price cuts could compensate for the shortcomings of the legacy system and the company that provided it.

- **Set yourself up for success by prioritizing a strong implementation and solid training on the front end.** Rather than settling for a subpar implementation and training, as the firm did with its prior ERP implementation, it got robust, hands-on service and training from Unanet throughout the implementation process and beyond.

- **Consider total cost of ownership and long-term value.** An ERP product may cost less in terms of initial capital outlay. But when that product demands substantial ongoing investment from the customer, the initial cost advantage can quickly evaporate.

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