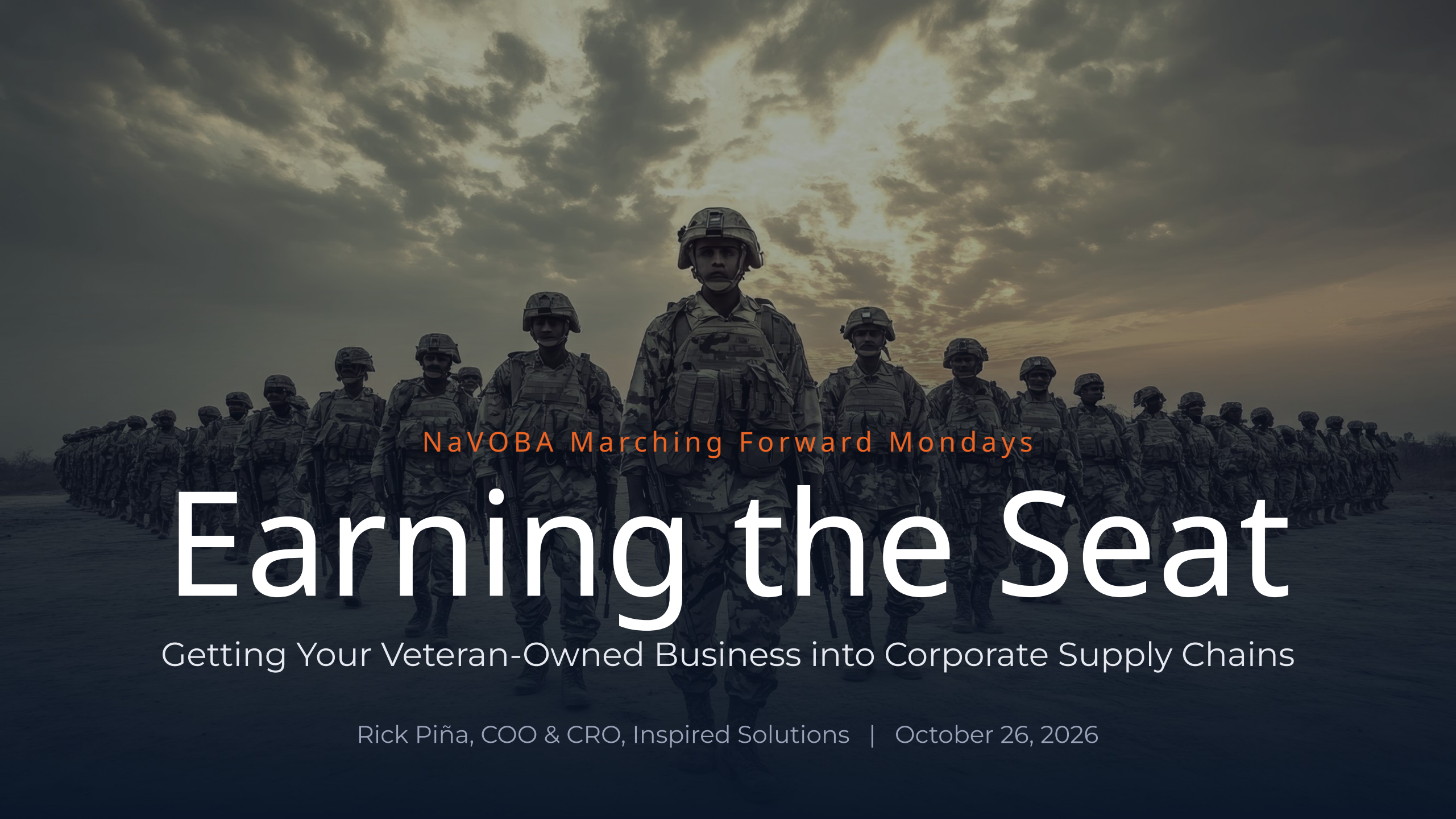


NaVOBA Marching Forward Mondays

Earning the Seat

Getting Your Veteran-Owned Business into Corporate Supply Chains

Rick Piña, COO & CRO, Inspired Solutions | October 26, 2026



Rick Piña

25+ year career in the Army, 36+ years in IT

Started IT career as a Network Engineer

Culminated Army career as the Army Chief Technology Officer (CTO) in the Pentagon

Spent 8 years with WWT: Public Sector CTO & VP of Consulting

COO & CRO, Inspired Solutions, a veteran-owned business

Founder of RIPMinistries; National Advisory Board of the Salvation Army & Conectado

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Sound Familiar?



Registered

You set up your account in their supplier portal.

Certified

You uploaded your veteran-owned certification.

Capability Statement

You uploaded that too.

No Response

Nobody called. Nobody said no.

You did everything they asked. Then the portal went quiet.

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I Have Sat On Several Sides of the Table

25

The Customer

25 years in the Army. The Army's first CTO at the Pentagon.

8

The Partner

8 years inside a $20B integrator, choosing and growing suppliers as partners.

10+

The Supplier

10+ years helping a veteran-owned business earn its own seat.

I will share my experiences with you.

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You can do the work. Most veteran-owned businesses just never get in the right door.

Rick Piña

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The Ground We Are Taking

304,823

Veteran-owned employer businesses in the U.S., 5.2% of all employer firms

U.S. Census Bureau, reference year 2021, released 2023.

$922B

In annual receipts from veteran-owned employer businesses, with 3.3 million employees

U.S. Census Bureau, reference year 2021, released 2023.

$9.8B

Spent with veteran-owned suppliers by 398 large organizations in one year

Supplier.io, 2024 Economic Impact Report

87%

Of supplier diversity programs report the same or more executive support in 2025

Supplier.io, 2025 State of Supplier Diversity Report

The money is there. Now get through the door.

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What You Will Learn Today

1

Recon

How companies and agencies decide who gets in

2

Find the Right Door

Who actually opens the door, and who to go to first

3

Prepare

Why “we're a certified VBE” is not enough, and what to lead with

4

Be Ready To Deliver

Be ready to deliver, and have the cash to carry it

5

After the Win

How to turn a first purchase order into a growing account

End state: a 30-day plan you start next Monday.

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Phase 1 of 5

Recon

Know how the buyer thinks before you knock.

Phase 1: Recon

Vendor vs. Solution

Vendor

"We would love the opportunity."

- Leads with who they are
- Sends the same deck to everyone
- Waits to be called

Solution

"I know your problem. I have fixed it before. Here is how."

- Leads with the buyer's problem
- Brings proof and a number
- Asks for one next step

Be the Solution!

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How Buyers Are Measured

Cost

The best value over the life of the contract, not the cheapest price.

“Will this save us money?”

Risk

On time, compliant, no surprises.

“Can I count on them?”

Results

The people they buy for are happy.

“Does this make my team look good?”

Every buyer is graded. Help them hit their numbers.
(In the government, these are acquisition professionals).

Phase 1: Recon

Know Their Priorities

A Company

Read the annual report. Listen to one earnings call.

An Agency

Read the strategic plan, the budget request, and the forecast.

Top Three Priorities

Know them before the first meeting. Tie your work to one of them.

Know what keeps their leaders up at night before you ask for a meeting.

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Phase 1: Recon

Speak Their Language

In the Army we said		In the boardroom they say
Commander's intent	›	Strategy
Mission accomplished	›	Business outcome
Readiness	›	Uptime and service levels (SLA)
After action review	›	Quarterly business review (QBR)
Logistics	›	Total cost of ownership (TCO)

Also know: KPI, MSA, SOW, and Net 60.

Learn their language. Keep your discipline.

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Phase 1: Recon

Know Their Numbers, and Yours

Their Numbers

What they report upstairs

- Cost savings target this year
- Spend goals with small suppliers
- On-time and quality rates

Your Numbers

What keeps you in business

- Margin on every order
- Cash it takes to carry 90 days
- Cost to serve this customer

If you do not know your numbers, you cannot price it and you cannot carry it.

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Nobody buys a certification. They buy the answer to a problem they already own.

Rick Piña

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Phase 2 of 5

Find the Right Door

Four doors. Each one has a different job.

Phase 2: Find the Right Door

The Four Doors

1

Supplier Diversity

Opens the door. Introduces you, coaches you, counts your spend.

2

Business Owner

Owns the problem and holds the budget.

3

Procurement

Qualifies you, prices you, and puts you under contract.

4

Prime Supplier

Already under contract, and needs small businesses to hit its goals.

Work the doors in order. Never go around anyone.

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Phase 2: Find the Right Door

Same Doors in Government

At a company		At a government agency
Supplier diversity	›	Small business office (OSDBU)
Procurement	›	Contracting officer
Business owner	›	Program manager
Prime supplier	›	Large prime (Leidos, GD, Raytheon)
Supplier portal	›	SAM.gov

See who holds the contract today on USAspending.gov.

Same doors. Different names.

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I can get you a spot on the dance floor, but you have to dance!

Attribution omitted. See editorial notes.

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The Fourth Door: Tier 2



Find the prime. Get on their roster. Build toward direct.

Tier 2 means you sell to the company that already sells to them.

Phase 2: Find the Right Door

Warm Before Cold



An Introduction

From someone they already trust. Nothing beats it.

A NaVOBA Connection

An event or one of NaVOBA's Corporate Allies.

Their Prime or a Customer

Someone who already works with them and knows your work.

A Cold Message, Last

Three lines: their problem, one result with a number, one small ask.

Make it easy for them to say yes.

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Phase 3 of 5

Prepare

Your certification gets you registered, not paid.

Lead With Problem, Proof, Number

Problem

The problem you solve, in the buyer's language.

"Your field teams wait two days for parts."

Proof

Where you already solved it, and how recently.

"We have past performance with...."

Number

What it saved. Days, dollars, percent.

Customer-specific outcome omitted from this study copy.

Then mention the certification. Now it is the bonus, not the pitch.

Rewrite Your Opener

Before

"We are a certified veteran-owned business and we would love the opportunity to work with you."

The buyer hears: nothing they can use.

After

"We help [your kind of company] fix [their problem]. Last year we [one result]. Can I show you how in 15 minutes?"

The buyer hears: my problem, proof, and a small ask.

Fill in the brackets tonight.



Phase 4 of 5

Sustain

Answer the three silent questions. Carry the cash.

Phase 4: Sustain

The Three Silent Questions

Can You Scale?

Answer with capacity, people, partners, and references at their size.

Can You Carry the Risk?

Answer with insurance, financials, a continuity plan, and security answers.

Will You Make Me Look Good?

Answer with on time, on scope, no surprises, clean reporting.

If you do not answer them, the answer is no. And you never hear the question.

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Phase 4: Sustain

Your Day-One Kit

Unverified statistic omitted from this study copy.

Check applicable security requirements in the current solicitation and contract.

- General liability certificate of insurance
- Cyber insurance, often asked for on its own line
- W-9 and banking details
- Financial statements
- A plan to keep delivering if something breaks
- Security questionnaire answers
- References from customers their size
- Your capability statement

Ready before the first meeting, not after.

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Phase 4: Sustain

Deliver Today. Get Paid in 90 Days.

6 payrolls, every two weeks, before the first dollar comes in



Day 0
Deliver

Day 30
Invoice approved

Day 60
Still waiting

Day 90
Paid

You deliver on day 0. You get paid on day 90. Payroll does not wait.

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HISTORICAL SLIDE: financing figure requires correction. See final editorial notes.

$1,708

Extra cost to a small business of financing one $100,000 invoice for 90 days at 10%.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Prompt Pay Pledge

The bigger the account, the bigger that number.

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Phase 4: Sustain

Carry the Account

01

Ask Before You Sign

Ask for supply chain finance, dynamic discounting, or an early pay program. Use those words.

02

Line Up Credit Early

Size your line of credit to the payment terms before the first order, not after the first invoice.

03

Read the Terms

Payment terms, invoicing rules, penalties. Then price the wait into your bid.

Plan the cash before you win.

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Your job is to make your champion look good (whoever gave you a chance).

Rick Piña

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Phase 5 of 5

After the Win

Winning the contract is the beginning, not the finish line.

Phase 5: After the Win

From First Order to Account

Test Order

Small on purpose.

Repeat Order

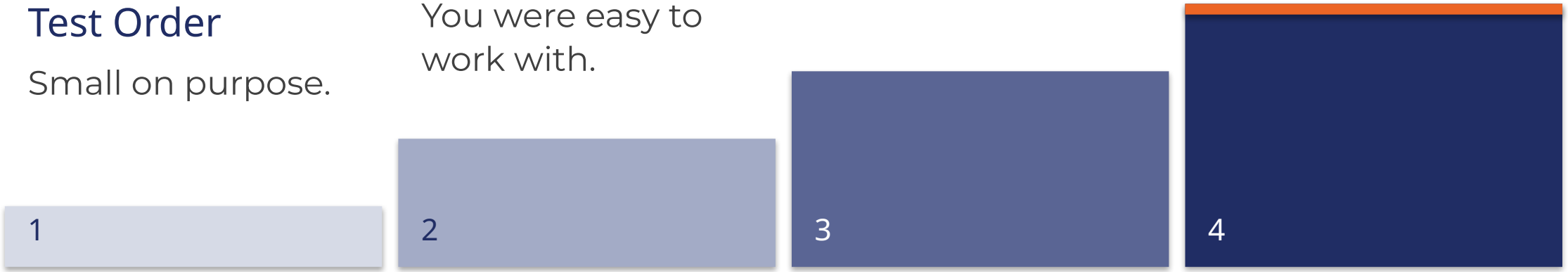
You were easy to work with.

Preferred Supplier

They call you first.

Growing Account

More sites. More phases. More categories.



Every step is earned the same way: onboard right, deliver, report, then ask.

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Phase 5: After the Win

Bring Value Beyond the Purchase Order

Bring Ideas

A way to save them money or time. Bring it before they ask.

Share What You See

You are in the field. Tell them what you see and what it costs them.

Easy Reporting

Send your results and spend in their format, on time, every time.

Bring ideas, not just invoices.

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Phase 5: After the Win

Stay Connected to the Customer

Monthly

Check In

A short call with the business owner. How are we doing?

Quarterly

Show Results

A quarterly business review: what you delivered, what you saved, what is next.

Events

Show Up

Their supplier days and NaVOBA events. Be seen.

Always

Close the Loop

Tell your supplier diversity guide what you delivered.

If they don't see you, they won't think of you.

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Phase 5: After the Win

Take Care of Your People

Pay Them on Time

Every time. Even when the customer pays you late.

Train Them

On the customer's standards, safety rules, and systems.

Recognize Them

Out loud, and in front of the customer when you can.

You customer is paying for your people. But YOU must take care of them. Culture matters!

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Phase 5: After the Win

The Follow-On Ask

Gets Forgotten

"Let us know if you need anything else."

- Sent to the portal
- No results attached
- Nothing specific to say yes to

Gets a Yes

"Can we take your second site next quarter?"

- Asked of the business owner
- Your results in hand
- Something specific: a site, a phase, a category

Give them something to say yes to.

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Your Next 30 Days

Week 1

Targets

Pick three: a company, an agency, or a prime.

By Friday

3 targets

Week 2

Doors

Find three names at each target.

By Friday

9 names

Week 3

Your Story

Fix your capability statement. Build your kit.

By Friday

Ready to go

Week 4

The Ask

Warm first. Ask each for 15 minutes.

By Friday

3 meetings

I will share these slides with NaVOBA after today's session.

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Five Things to Remember

01	Recon	Know their priorities, their language, and their numbers.
02	Find the Right Door	Four doors. Work them in order.
03	Prepare	Problem, proof, number. Certification last.
04	Sustain	Answer the three silent questions. Carry the cash.
05	After the Win	Bring value. Stay connected. Take care of your people.

Your 30-day plan starts next Monday.

INSPIRED SOLUTIONS



“

Earn the seat before you ask for the order.

Rick Piña

INSPIRED SOLUTIONS



Let's Stay in Touch

Rick Piña

COO & CRO, Inspired Solutions

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/rickpinaofficial

If we do not get to your question today, send it to me there. I will answer it.

Appreciate those who opened the door. Leave the door open for the next person.

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Any Questions



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Editorial notes for this study copy

Study copy of the original NaVOBA presentation, with disclosed redactions and editorial corrections. Original slides are preserved separately. Speaker notes, hidden slides, comments and attachments are not included.

Slide 22: a customer-specific numerical outcome example is omitted. Slide 26: the unsupported 77% claim is withheld; security obligations depend on applicable requirements. Slide 18: quote attribution differs between preparation material and delivered speech and is omitted.

Slide 28: the $1,708 financing statement must not be read as total 90-day interest at 10% on $100,000. The cited Chamber article compares with 5% financing but does not explain that figure's calculation. A separate simple-interest illustration is $100,000 x 10% x 90/365 = $2,465.75 before fees. This is an editorial calculation, not a corrected quotation from this class. The historical statement has not been silently rewritten.

Slide 6: Census figures describe reference year 2021, released in 2023; Supplier.io figures describe participating organizations/report respondents, not all corporate spending or a promise of available contracts.

Sources: census.gov newsroom, October 26, 2023 employer-business characteristics release; Supplier.io 2024 Economic Impact Report and 2025 State of Supplier Diversity; uschamber.com/small-business/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-prompt-pay-pledge.

Editorial notes are separate from the original teaching and are not quotations from this class.