

Government Contractor for the Cyber Warfare Space



Ishpi Information Technologies, Inc., (DBA *ISHPI*) is an international SBA, three-time Inc. 500|5000, Multi-Award Winning Company specializing in Information and Cyber Dominance (ID) and C5ISR Engineering and Technical Services (C5ISR E&TS). *ISHPI* delivers mission-critical capabilities to the Warfighter and Defenders of the Homeland protecting the Nation, leading the fight, and saving lives with agility, innovation, and results. Our mission-focused culture is purpose-built to support and enable exceptional subject matter experts with direct, relevant, and critical experience supporting the Intelligence Community (IC), Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Federal Agencies.

ISHPI ID core capabilities are Information Operations (IO), Information Warfare (IW), Information Assurance (IA), Electronic Warfare (EW), Cybersecurity (CS), and Cyberwarfare (CW) and C5ISR E&TS core capabilities are in System Engineering and Integration (SE&I), Intelligence Support Services (ISS), Enterprise Architecture (EA), Acquisition Management (AM), Logistics Support Services (LSS), Training Services (TNG), and Information Technology Services (IT). Our experts deliver our clients' missions throughout the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, and internationally supporting military operations as required. *ISHPI* is an American Indian- and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Verified Service Disabled Veteran-Owned (SDVOSB) certified 8(a) Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) with offices in Charleston, SC, San Antonio, TX, Tidewater, VA, and the National Capital Region.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Leask, what is the concept behind ISHPI?*

Mr. Leask: ISHPI is a government contractor and our focus is to provide services in the cyber warfare space.

CEOCFO: *What does the company understand about that space that perhaps others do not?*

Mr. Leask: There are many cyber companies out there. The word "Cyber" became a big buzz word and one of the fastest growing market segments in the government. ISHPI has always been an offensive focused cyber company. We like to think that a lot of companies recently became "cyber" security companies and they do not have a full understanding of the full cyber operational environment to include offense and exploit. Most are just practicing standard cyber security operations. ISHPI takes an unconventional approach to all of that.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us a little more about your approach so that we can understand how it is different?*

Mr. Leask: A good example is that you can hire a lot of qualified employees who have cyber security certifications to do standard cyber security operations. These folks are capable of stopping 70 to 80 percent of certain cyber security issues. To really understand the cyber environment, you need to have a unique perspective of how to create cyber offensive weapons, as well as the exploitation. The individuals who really understand that make the best cyber security subject matter experts.

CEOCFO: *Can that understanding be learned or is it more intuitive?*

Mr. Leask: There is a certain aptitude and a certain desire. Not everybody can be a software engineering wizard or somebody who can be relentless enough to figure out how to gain access to these systems. It is selective, and there is a lot of training that can be done. We are huge proponents of actually changing the mindset of the government clientele on how cyber warriors should be developed. They need to not only focus on cyber security but on full-spectrum cyber operational experts that understand the offensive side just as well as they understand the security side.

CEOCFO: *Have you made inroads there?*

Mr. Leask: We are being very successful in the federal space.

CEOCFO: *With all the breaches that we hear about, is it a natural progression that people are understanding the problem better or is ISHPI good at explaining it?*

Mr. Leask: There are many factors. The government is realizing that in order to really be secure we are going to have to start doing things differently. This is true even in the commercial world. We, at ISHPI do not focus on the commercial sector today. The answer is yes and no. We have some innovative contests with which we utilize and we cannot really discuss that give us a competitive advantage. We are also a company that is firmly grounded not just in our technology or the things that makes us better, but in the people as well. In order to fight cyber war, it is the people. It is not just technology. Our company goes to great length to focus on our people, our culture and them enjoying their mission space.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the recent contract with Customs and Border Protection?*

Mr. Leask: Keeping it at a very general level, one of the things that they are really looking for is being cost competitive and still delivering the requirements to the client, whether that be information technology or something in the cyber space. They are really looking for these companies that have found ways to keep cost minimal and keep their employees very engaged and happy with a great culture. We have a lot of that going today, and that is part of our win at the customs and border patrol. It was not just about our ability to secure and provide secure communications, but it was also about our ability to come in and provide top-notch services in those areas.

“There are a lot of things that through our hard work we have been able to experience, and our children have been able to experience. We want to give as much as we can to others to experience those things as well that may not be in our situation.” - Noah T. Leask

CEOCFO: *Do you typically provide ongoing services along with an implementation, or do you sometimes just install a system?*

Mr. Leask: We normally provide services. If we do implement anything, normally it has a services tail as well. We are a 100 percent technology agnostic company that does provide services. Our technology solution that is implemented normally is part of our services contract. The technology to us is whatever fits the clients' needs, budget and capability requirements.

CEOCFO: *Are there particular agencies with whom you engage?*

Mr. Leask: As a contractor in the government, we are in a special government and an 8A program. We are very selective about the work we go after and the work we want to do. We have a pretty specific business plan, and as long as we stay within our business plan we can provide those customers the best services as well as, the best protections at the absolute best prices in the market. When you tend to go after work that you are not really capable of doing, that tends to blow your model at times. We are very selective. If you ask what type of clients, it is 100 percent federal. We like to take on the clients that really have needs in a heavy information technology space specifically dealing with cyber or something similar. That said, there are a lot of clients out there that we can work for. For example, you would think today we are predominantly supporting the intelligence community and the Department of Defense as well as DHS. That could also include the Department of Commerce and their network operations center, which is where they would conduct their defensive cyber operations. There is a plethora of opportunity in the federal space for what we provide.

CEOCFO: *Many people do find it somewhat challenging working with the federal government. Is it different because of the type of service you provide or the area you are working in? Is it easier or do you face the same challenges that most companies find?*

Mr. Leask: We face the exact same challenges that others are fighting. There is no difference. There are challenges with different accounting standards that you have to adhere to if you are working in the defense space with the Defense Contract Accounting Agency – DCAA – so it is challenging. There are long acquisition cycles, and specifically one of the number one challenges in the federal space today is the protesting of contracts. There are really no ramifications for fictitious protesting. If you are a common contractor, you lose. There is really no reason for you not to protest because you will get an extra three to four months' worth of revenue while the protest is being looked at. If anything, it would be beautiful that something like that could change – at least to stop the erroneous protesting.

CEOCFO: *What have you learned from your previous experience that has been most helpful in ISHPI? What did you bring from your naval and wartime experience?*

Mr. Leask: First and foremost, I learned leadership in the military. How to lead from the front and empower people to do their job. That is number one. Number two is how to work with groups of diverse backgrounds and cultures. The military is fantastic for that. Coming out of the military and going to the civilian space was unique. There are a lot of great people that I worked for in the past and I was able to learn defense contracting on the civilian side. I learned everything that went into the contract side of house, human resources as well as, some of the accounting and business development. I learned a lot, and it was this natural progression similar to when I was in the military. Whenever I had a chance to take on a new

role, I just said, “yes sir,” and jumped at the opportunity. When I left the military, I was a very high- level information technology cyber expert and it led me to starting my own company.

CEOCFO: *ISHPI has been recognized on the Inc. 5000 list as well as other venues. What is the most important to you businesswise and personally, if anything?*

Mr. Leask: I will tell you that from all the awards we have won, I cannot single out one award that means more than the others. Each one of those awards directly comes back to the people that work with me -- my team. My name is on a lot of those awards, and although I did start the company with my wife and carried all of the risk, the very first thing I do when I get up and accept an award is thank the men and women of ISHPI. Their hard work, mission focus and delivery of the client's mission is why I am even here and still doing this. Their devotion to the mission is unparalleled. I am always thankful for the sacrifices that my mom and dad made to help me get here. If you want to know what made me more happy last year than anything, it was the fact that we are huge in philanthropy. We gave more money away than we had ever given away in our life and we cannot wait to do it again. We have established scholarships in my tribe – I am a Native American of the Sault Sainte Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. We have an annual scholarship, which was exciting, and we funded a therapeutic horse riding program up in Northern Michigan that was about to shut down. We already re-funded it and guaranteed more scholarships this year. We started scholarships at a private school here for special needs children, and we are a statewide partner for the Special Olympics. We just entered into an agreement to do a lot of awesome work with the veterans. Like I said, it is the employees. I am so blessed to have an amazing team and an amazing culture at ISHPI. What sets us apart is that at ISHPI we are focused on the employee and their families. As an organization, we truly work and build bridges for other people. That has been very exciting for us!

CEOCFO: *Why is that so important for you?*

Mr. Leask: I am an Eagle Scout, and very proud of it. I grew up very humble, with no entrepreneurial leaders in my family. We did not grow up on easy street dancing through beds of roses. By growing up humble, we have been able to see the value of working hard and working smart. Through hard work we are able to offer new opportunities and experiences to our children and others. There are a lot of things that through our hard work we have been able to experience, and our children have been able to experience. We want to give as much as we can to others to experience those things as well that may not be in our situation.

At the end of the day, we believe in giving. Like I said, it is one of the best things that we are fortunate enough to engage in. Most of the time, we give anonymously. It has nothing to do with us being involved or getting accolades. We just know it feels great. I think it is a part of the job. We are working hard; this is not anyone else's hard work. We are doing it and our employees are making it possible, but we believe it is our job to help others where we can.

CEOCFO: *What are the intangibles that you look for in your people?*

Mr. Leask: We have a very thorough hiring process here at ISHPI. It is very important that we find the right employees, and we do not always hit it all the time. We really are looking for people that are motivated, highly energetic, disciplined self-starters. That is our hiring model. What really makes us different is our management and leadership of the people at the program and project manager levels. They have to know our people. We are a distributive model. I have almost 200 employees throughout the US. There could be one, two or three on a site by themselves. The federal clients need our people in remote spots so sometimes it can be tough. We have such fantastic leadership at that level that they understand our culture and they understand what we are doing and why we are in this mission space. It is their job and they do a wonderful job keeping our employees engaged. I cannot do it from Charleston by myself. A standard thing you hear from most business owners is that “you are going to be upset if you are a good owner because you are not going to be able to know everybody's names.” That is true, but I will tell you who does. If I ever need to know anything, first, I will go to our HR team and they know everybody. They are phenomenal and they focus on creating outstanding interpersonal relationships with our employees. They never treat anyone like just another employee number. Alternatively, I can go down to the PMs. They know their people, and it is so critical to be fully engaged while building trusting relationships with your people.

CEOCFO: *What is next for ISHPI?*

Mr. Leask: In the federal space, we are approaching some unique things that you do not experience in the commercial space. We currently are competing in the small business space under \$35 million over a three-year average. It keeps the large businesses from competing at certain spaces. The only reason why I mention this is because we are about to be in the large business space where we will be competing with General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin and other billion dollar organizations. There is no middle business size. It is either you are small or you are competing with the very large companies. That is next for us. In fact, that said, we will be growing again quite quickly here in the first quarter. We are going to continue to try to help our clients defend what we can defend in cyber space and help our offensive clients to do what they need to do. In addition, we love being able to create jobs for this nation and help others be successful.

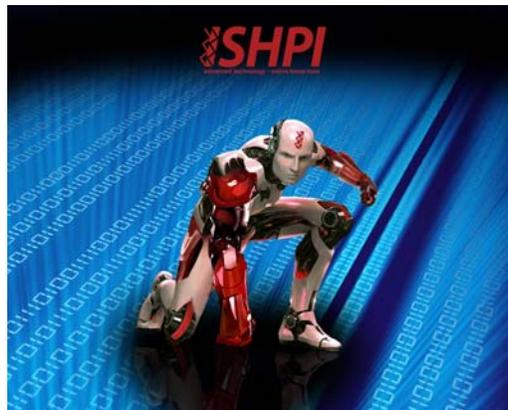
CEOCFO: How do you keep up with new technology?

Mr. Leask: Within the space we are in today, our people are paid to keep up with technology. The challenging work that we engage in allows us to be surrounded by extremely talented people. If you have the right type of professional, they never get tired of this. They never get tired of learning and they never get tired of finding new ways to do things. I can tell you myself that it does get tiring trying to stay up with technology. Everything changes; you buy an iPad and it rocks and then all of a sudden the Surface Pro is better so you have to switch to that. It never stops. Also, you are talking about exploit. The exploits we know about have been around for a while. There is a day one exploit will be developed every few seconds around the world. A day one exploit is something that you do not even know is something that can be hacked. It is a cyber-weapon that you do not even know about yet. It is almost impossible, and that is why the way we are defending cyber today is just ludicrous. We put a firewall out there and we hope nobody gets around it. That is not going to happen, and it is very expensive for people to do cyber security right because cyber security requires very sharp humans and active monitoring. There is some technology now that can help, but technology is not the only answer in this war. It is the cyber warriors. I do not want to turn this into marketing, but that is the only difference and we get that.

CEOCFO: Final thoughts?

Mr. Leask: We are so thankful to the Veterans out there as well as the active military. We will continue to give back to our Veterans and do whatever we can to help. Our personal goal is to continue to have an impact on national defense and the war fighter, hopefully through some of the things we are doing at ISHPI and some of the clients that we have. My wife and I think it is phenomenal that our company and our people can actually have an impact on saving lives. You cannot put a price on that, because that is above everything we are doing.

BIO: Mr. Noah T. Leask (Nee-gon-ee-me-gwun-ahbay [Leading Eagle Feather]) is a Service Disabled Veteran with over ten years of wartime service in the U.S. Navy conducting global operations supporting National Defense where he played a critical role in providing the Nation and the U.S. Navy with Cyber, Information, Signals, and Information Technology Dominance as a deployed member of the U.S. Naval Security Group Command afloat and ashore. Mr. Leask has a wealth of experience successfully starting, managing, and growing businesses having been recognized as a U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 2013 National Small Business Award Winner, the 2013 South Carolina Small Business Person of the Year, honored in the 2013 Annual CEO World Awards as CEO of the Year, a two-time Top 10 American Indian Entrepreneur by Inc. Magazine (#1 in South Carolina 2011-2012), as National Leader in job creation, as the SBA 2009 Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year for South Carolina and Southeast Region, Region IV, for the work he is doing in support of veterans, wounded warriors, and veteran-owned businesses nationwide. He was honored as one of the 2010 Charleston Regional Business Journals "Forty under 40" which acknowledges the recipients as the future of the community and celebrates their commitment to professional, personal and philanthropic endeavors, including a well-rounded lifestyle that focuses on work and community.



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