

Hispanic Executive

Luis of All Trades

After 20 Years in the U.S. Army, Luis Lugo Jr. conquers the private sector, finding his military skills transferrable

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By [Anthony Kaufman](#)

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Being flexible has served Luis Lugo Jr. well. Over the course of his 30-plus-year career, he's served as a combat medic, platoon leader, staff officer, executive officer, commander of the US Army Sniper School and two separate Infantry companies, and commander of US Army Recruiters. He has also been a human resources director, a marketing executive, vice president of business development at construction management consulting firm Hill International, president and COO of PACO Group, Inc.—a minority-owned construction management consulting firm—and finally, senior vice president of construction claims back at Hill International. And there's more to come.

“I am adaptable,” says Lugo, who continues to change up his career. “As an infantry officer, you develop a plan to execute a mission: You conduct reconnaissance, examine aerial imagery, you have people on the ground, and when you begin the operation you have the best plan—until you begin, and then everything changes,” he says. “Business is the same. You have a plan that you execute, but more often than not, you have to react to changing conditions and be able to adapt your plan in order to achieve your objectives.”



Luis Lugo Jr.
Senior VP, Construction Claims
Hill International

Born in Puerto Rico, Lugo joined the Army at age 18 to “buy some time and figure out what I wanted to do with my life,” he says. Though he never intended to make a career out of it, Lugo rose quickly through the ranks of the US Army, which took him across the United States, to Central America, to Germany, and back. He trained at the US Army Academy of Health Sciences, US Army Nuclear Biological and Chemical Operations Center, the Infantry School, Airborne School, Ranger School, Air Assault School, and the Combined Arms Staff College. His titles have included team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, platoon leader, instructor, staff officer, executive officer, and commander, and he was selected to be a military attaché to the US ambassador in Mexico City.

After 20 years in the Army, Lugo retired from military service and found himself quickly engaged by the private sector. He accepted a job in the engineering industry as chief administrative officer at PACO Group. To quickly get up to speed, Lugo jumped into the engineering field by reading books, attending seminars, and joining professional engineering organizations. But he never saw his lack of experience as a liability. “I had to work harder than most to catch up with my peers in order to make an impact,” he says.

And just as he excelled in the Army, he rose quickly through the corporate ranks, moving from HR to marketing to business development and operations, taking on increasing levels of responsibility. During his first year at PACO, he prided himself on pioneering a new human resources management system in collaboration with a tech-savvy employee. “We went from a paper system to developing a database, which could be accessed throughout our various offices, track the staff, and generate reports,” he says. “[The new system] made it a lot easier for us.”

During his years in upper management at PACO from 2006 to 2010, he oversaw rapid growth at the company, acting as PACO’s project executive on such projects as the Long Island Railroad’s East Side Access, Amtrak’s ARRA program, the Chicago Transit Authority’s Blue Line and Loop renovation, as well as the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority’s Second Avenue subway project. Annual revenue increased at the company from around \$5 million to \$7.3 million, and the number of employees grew by roughly 50 percent.

Lugo attributes his success in the corporate world to his leadership abilities honed during his military years. “My definition is quite simple: to inspire others to do something that they may not want to do and to motivate them to not stop until it’s done the right way, especially when no one is watching. That, to me, is the pure essence of leadership.”

Lugo once again uses his military background to provide a meaningful analogy. “When you train young men and women to put their lives at risk for the good of a mission, when they jump out of a plane at night, they know that bad things can happen,” he says. “But somehow they do it, and they don’t do it for any other reason than for you and for each other. And if you can translate that to the private sector, it’s something special.”

In late 2014, Lugo left PACO for his latest endeavor. Returning to Hill International, where he worked previously, he is now the senior vice president of the Construction Claims Group in New York. He leads the effort to grow and expand the current construction claims practice. “My clients could be local, city, or state governments; a design firm; a contractor; or the attorneys who are representing any of these parties,” he says. “We provide expert services to help solve issues related to design and construction delays and other related claims.”

For Lugo, the position is yet another challenge for him to tackle and conquer. “One of my goals is to complete my master’s degree in engineering and to quickly get involved with the New York Building Congress and other industry associations.”

While he admits there may be a slight learning curve, as with any new job, that’s never stopped him before. “I’m looking forward to this new challenge,” he says.