

Fighting Chance

Even a co-founder off at war couldn't hold this firm back.

[Entrepreneur magazine -December 2005](#) By

Nichole L. Torres

When army reservist Joe Witte was activated in November 2003, he had just co-founded CentricSource, an image-building [company](#) that creates logos, websites, stationery and more, with partner Zaheer Dodhia, whose office is in Pakistan. Witte, 32, and Dodhia, 33, had three [employees](#) at the time, including Witte's wife Moira, to pick up the slack when Witte was deployed.

In the short time between Witte's activation and shipping out, the partners had to quickly come up with contingency plans. Witte divided up his tasks for the employees at the Langhorne, Pennsylvania, office, doling out [marketing](#), tech issues and office management. "It was pretty brutal," says Witte. "I think it was hard on everybody, but they managed to hold the fort down and do a good job while I was away."

While the company survived his absence and is expecting 2005 sales of about \$1 million, Witte notes that the company did lose some logo design business-but they managed to make it up in other areas, like [web design](#).

Returning from war in February, Witte found it challenging to get back into his [leadership role](#) at the company, as some changes had occurred in his absence. Not only were there new employees to get to know, but some of the procedures were different from when he left. "I tried to impose my vision on them immediately," recalls Witte, which was a mistake. He says, "Don't 'storm the beaches' when you return-ease in, and observe what has changed while you were gone."

Says Dodhia, "Joe has great leadership qualities, and it did not take the others long to understand that with Joe in control, they would be able to handle their own responsibilities and allow him to resolve and develop administrative and decisive processes."

If changes are necessary after your return, be tactful, and thank your staff for keeping things running. Preparing your staff well beforehand for any leave of absence is ideal, but when you return, easing back into your leadership role will make the transition much smoother.