# The Recruitment, Hiring, Retention & Engagement
## of Military Veterans

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# Executive
## Summary

**O**ver the past decade there has been significant interest among employers in hiring military and veteran job seekers. Simultaneously, the number of transitioning military and veteran job seekers has increased.[1] Veterans are highly educated and often have transferable certifications and licenses, as well as "soft skills" that employers value. [2] Yet organizations 1) struggle to articulate their business rationale for hiring military and veterans and 2) have difficulty translating individual military experiences into corporate or business proficiencies. Often these challenges arise because both veterans and employers are seeking concrete and direct translation of roles in the military to roles in the civilian sector without considering the broader, and perhaps less obvious, employment-related skills and abilities that translate.

**To quote former President George W. Bush:**

*"Hiring managers tend to look for many of the same skills in job candidates. … However, 'sniper' doesn't tend to be one of them." Chances are, "the vice president of human relations is going to say, 'We don't need one this year.' " Conversely, had that veteran "put on the application form that they have a lot of experience dealing with pressure, that they're a team player, that they're loyal to a cause greater than themselves, [that] they understand how to follow instructions, that they're a responsible citizen, [the] vice president would be more likely to say, 'That's the kind of person we want working for us.' … Veterans and employers have a hard time translating military experience. There's a language barrier."[3]*

The aforementioned problems are compounded when veterans have limited exposure to civilian work experience, knowing which skills are relevant to an employer, and how to communicate that they have these skills, experiences, characteristics, and traits. When veterans lack familiarity with many business and industry sectors, they may not know how to effectively translate their military skills for a civilian audience or for specific roles (Curry Hall et al., 2014). Lack of familiarity may decrease a veteran's ability to communicate how their relevant military-acquired skills apply to civilian employment. Among employers, a lack of understanding or ability to imagine how military-acquired skills translate to civilian roles can inadvertently undermine a well-intentioned veteran and military hiring initiative, obscuring talent that might otherwise be "put to its first and best use" (Curry Hall et al., 2014).

Further, national surveys demonstrate a possible perception barrier on the part of both employers and veterans related to career success (Edelman, 2017). Some academic research suggests that employers view veterans positively and believe they will be excellent employees because of their military-acquired skills, such as leadership or teamwork (Curry Hall et al., 2014). Conversely, other research suggests that despite evidence that veterans enjoy significant career success post-service, often, the perception is that they do not (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, and Bogue, 2017). There is also some evidence that employers overestimate mental health problems among veteran job applicants. For example, a June 2010 poll conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 46 percent of the respondents, human resource (HR) professionals, indicated that concerns about post-traumatic stress (PTS) and other mental health issues posed hiring challenges. Just 22 percent said the same about combat-related physical disabilities (SHRM, 2011).

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[1] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2007). Veteran Population Projections Model (VetPop 2007), Table 2S. Office of the Actuary. Over the next five years, over 1 million vets will transition. Approximately 200,000 service members are transitioning from the military each year, and the majority of them are seeking civilian employment.
[2] See Work After Service: Developing Workforce Readiness and Veteran Talent for the Future for in-demand skills compared to skills enhanced by the military at ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/USAA_Report_Jan27FINAL.pdf.
[3] See www.uschamber.com/above-the-fold/president-bush-hiring-our-heroes-helps-veterans-and-businesses-alike.

**Hiring and retention of "the right people" is critical to profitability for any organization.** Human resource professionals and hiring managers often play a critical, if not essential, role in these endeavors. Nevertheless, research suggests that veterans change jobs twice within the first three years of civilian employment. The common causes of the job switch are 1) a poor fit between the veteran and the job, 2) a lack of personal investment in the organization or the work role, or 3) inflexibility of the position given the veteran's imposed external demands. However, veterans report that their next role is often a promotion, with better opportunities, more responsibilities, and additional salary, because they have learned through their first role more about the civilian sector and how they fit in it, and what their skills are, as well as how they are communicated and valued (Maury, Stone, and Roseman, 2014). A proactive and well-informed veteran and military hiring initiative can mitigate these challenges to the benefit of both employers and veterans by enabling and encouraging effective recruiting, onboarding, training, support, mentoring, and retention of veteran and military-connected talent.

**Targeted toward human resource professionals, this guide will review and articulate the business case for hiring veterans and identify best practices for employers wishing to recruit, hire, and retain military job seekers.** Specifically, we outline how hiring veterans utilizing a proactive strategy tied to an organization's business case can provide the foundation for a competitive advantage. To illustrate this, we provide examples of leading practices from companies that have developed successful veteran hiring initiatives. Finally, throughout the guide we highlight the importance of education as a bridge between military service and civilian employment, providing a common point of reference and shared understanding between job seekers and employers. We draw from sources including scholarly articles on veteran employment (e.g., from RAND Corporation[4]), publications from the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)[5], and compiled input from employers, HR professionals[6], and the Veteran Jobs Mission.[7]

**This guide will cover three primary areas:**

o The business case for hiring military and veteran candidates that describes the important role HR professionals and hiring managers can play in the successful transition of veterans from military service to employment.

o Evidence-based guidelines for practice, including practical case studies and examples as they have been implemented by successful companies.

o Resources and references to programs and services to augment or support veteran and military hiring initiatives.

According to the Veterans Administration (VA), Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable."[8] For the purposes of this guide, we define a veteran as any person (including members of the National Guard or Reserve and current active-duty military) who is actively seeking civilian employment.

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[4] RAND is a nonprofit institution that works to improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. For more information, visit rand.org.
[5] IVMF publications include *The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Clichés, Revisiting the Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: A Strategy for Cultivating Competitive Advantage, Veteran Employment Leading Practices: Tools for Engaging Talent Toolkit*, and the *Guide to Leading Policies, Practices & Resources: Supporting the Employment of Veterans and Military Families.* These and other publications are found at ivmf.syracuse.edu.
[6] This report was reviewed by a team of human resource professionals who provided input, feedback, and content suggestions.
[7] The Veteran Jobs Mission (formerly 100,000 Jobs Mission) began in 2011 as a coalition of 11 leading companies committed to hiring 100,000 veterans by 2020. The coalition has since grown to include 230 private-sector companies that represent virtually every industry in the U.S. economy and has collectively hired more than 400,000 veterans since its inception. For more information, visit veteranjobsmission.com/about-the-mission.
[8] For more information, visit va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/veterans.asp.

# Veteran Hiring: What We Know and Research Gaps

More than 3 million veterans have joined the civilian workforce since September 2001, and another 1 million are expected to join by 2020. Collectively, around 11 million veterans, approximately half of all U.S. veterans (20.8 million), are active participants in the civilian labor force. As more veterans join the civilian workforce, startling concerns arise: Despite the numerous resources offered to post-9/11 veterans may experience challenges related to finding civilian employment. Translating military experience, obtaining the right education and credentials, identifying the right job opportunities, and overall job availability are just a few of the many challenges veterans face, especially in their transition. As a result of these transition challenges, veteran employment initiatives have become a key focus area for policymakers, employers, researchers, and veterans themselves. Below are a few insights from the literature:

**MAXIMIZING TALENT PAYS OFF**—Private-sector hiring (of veterans) has contributed to a decrease in veteran unemployment. To sustain this impact, firms must leverage veteran talent and maximize how veterans' skills can be best utilized within their company.

**MATCHING IMPROVES RETENTION**—Matching a veteran to a preferred career can improve job retention. Equally, veterans matched in civilian positions similar to their military occupations can lead to a higher likelihood of the veterans staying.

**EMPLOYER INVESTMENT IMPROVES MATCHING**—To effectively match veterans' career interests with a company's goals, and thereby improve on-the-job success and retention of veteran employees, several steps should be taken by employers: 1) be knowledgeable of the relationship between military skills and civilian workforce skills, 2) offer workforce development opportunities to veteran employees, and 3) offer workplace support, such as veteran-specific employee resource groups.

**FINDING EMPLOYMENT IS STILL HARD**—Despite declining unemployment rates, in a self-reported study, 55 percent of veterans still report employment as a top transition challenge.

As we learn more about veterans and their entry into civilian employment, other topics relating to workplace performance have emerged as potential gaps and areas of focus for employers:

> **ACCOMMODATIONS**—Despite laws to aid persons with disabilities in gaining employment, veterans with a service-connected disability are still having trouble getting and retaining jobs.

> **FAMILY MEMBERS**—To aid in reducing challenges to a service member's transition to the civilian workforce, continue expanding job opportunities for both veterans and their family members.

> **PLACEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**—Veterans bring unique and valuable talents to the workplace. Move toward further developing veterans' skills, talent, and knowledge, which will provide firms with a more competitive advantage.

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Note: Adapted from *Veteran Jobs Mission Leading Practices* by R. Maury, N. Boldon, & N. Armstrong. Copyright 2017 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.

# The Business Case
## for Hiring Veterans

**B**ecause most Americans are civilians—including most HR professionals, hiring managers, and corporate leaders—they have little to no 1) exposure to the military, 2) knowledge about the skills that are acquired during military experience, or 3) knowledge about how military-acquired skills might apply to employment outside of the military.[9] Though there is a business case for hiring military and veteran job seekers, even those organizations and businesses that are motivated and interested in hiring veteran and military talent may find it challenging to clearly articulate the "how" and "why" of their business case. As a consequence, hiring managers, executive leadership, or other interested stakeholders may not see the immediate benefits of employing or retaining military-connected job candidates. On the other hand, a clear business case with goal alignment among stakeholders encourages horizontal and vertical organizational buy-in critical to any successful hiring initiative (Haynie, 2012). With regard to military hiring, HR professionals often play a central role in supporting this alignment as gatekeepers and communicators about employees or potential employees within an organization.

To clarify, a business case is commonly understood to be the rationale for why a project or undertaking is likely to create a business advantage. A cogent business case can determine whether a particular venture succeeds or fails; even a good idea may never materialize if there is no one who can effectively champion its cause or describe the likely return on investment. Table 1 provides an overview of the business case for hiring veterans based on skills, characteristics, and traits outlined in a 2012 paper published by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), *The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Clichés* (Haynie, 2012). This paper describes 10 empirically supported characteristics that veterans acquire as a result of their military service that contribute to their success as employees and how these might be assessed by HR professionals and hiring managers within an organization.

In general, planning for a military and veteran hiring initiative involves familiarizing oneself with the business case for hiring veterans, and then customizing it to one's specific organization, assessing available resources including time, staff, money, and the investment needed to succeed (Haynie, 2016). HR professionals and hiring managers who familiarize themselves with this business case measured against available resources are better positioned to articulate their reasons for wanting to hire veteran and military job candidates and can then use this assessment to strategically align the stakeholders within their respective organizations.

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[9] According to the Pew Research Center, "Only about one half of one percent of the U.S. population has been on active military duty at any given time during the past decade of sustained warfare. Some 84% of post-9/11 veterans say the public does not understand the problems faced by those in the military or their families. The public agrees, though by a less lopsided majority—71%." For more information, see pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/.

**TABLE 1: THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING VETERANS FOR HR PROFESSIONALS AND HIRING MANAGERS**

| BUSINESS CASE PROPOSITION | HR RELEVANCE |
|---|---|
| **Veterans are entrepreneurial.**<br><br>Across multiple studies, research illustrates that this attribute is generally characteristic of military service members and veterans and suggests that those who go into military service are individuals with a high need for achievement (self-selection), demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy and trust, and have a strong sense/comfort with autonomy and the dynamic decision-making process (Baron, 2007). | Where in the organization are entrepreneurial skills needed? Has the job candidate demonstrated entrepreneurial skills in his or her previous work experience? Is he or she self-directed, and is this important in the role the candidate will fill? |
| **Veterans assume high levels of trust.**<br><br>The ability to trust co-workers and superiors is highlighted in organizational behavior literature as a significant predictor of high-performing teams, organizational cohesion and morale, and effective governance systems (Hitt, 2000). Research studies focused on both military personnel and veterans indicate that the military experience engenders a strong propensity toward an inherent trust and faith in co-workers, and a strong propensity toward trust in organizational leadership (Haynie and Dean, 2011). In turn, the academic literature broadly supports the finding that organizational performance is enhanced when trust between co-workers—and between employees and leadership—is strong (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c). | Identify positions that would require autonomy and trust, and consider veterans who have demonstrated those attributes. Does the veteran have a security clearance? Has he or she had oversight of people, equipment, and/or budgets? Can trust-related skills improve the work environment? Are there positions that require trust in superiors, perhaps due to requirements for quick action or compartmentalized information, as in financial securities or mergers and acquisitions roles? |
| **Veterans are adept at skills transfer across contexts and tasks.**<br><br>"Skills transfer across context and tasks" is defined as the ability to recognize and act on opportunities to transfer skills learned in a specific context to a different setting or circumstance. Active-duty service members are trained (through scenario-based teaching) to develop skills for reacting to different—often difficult—situations. Such training is beneficial in the work environment because it helps to strengthen and facilitate knowledge/skills transfer between distinct yet dissimilar tasks and situations. Military simulations are one example of service members' transfer of skills. These simulations—also known informally as "war games"–include those focused on "practice fire" for marksmanship qualification, along with "shoot-don't shoot," a scenario to test one's ability to not fire on noncombatants (Chang, 2009). Other training examples include the Joint Readiness Training Center, Operations Group (JRTC OPSGRP), which provides relevant, rigorous training in a realistic environment, and the U. S. Army Combined Arms Center-Training (CAC-T), which supports and enhances individual and collective training in order to build readiness and capabilities that support U.S. Army and joint force commanders. | Cement the importance of company buy-in across leadership, recruiters, and hiring managers. This may include sharing anecdotes and success stories, and identifying hiring managers who are successfully engaging with veteran employees. Help stakeholders understand how skills used in the military might be applied to open positions, especially when the similarities are not obvious. In a recent IVMF survey of more than 8,500 service members and veterans, 55 percent of service members said that they have pursued or are likely to pursue a career that is different from their military specialization (Zoli, Maury, and Fay, 2015). |
| **Veterans are comfortable and adept in discontinuous environments.**<br><br>The business environment is dynamic and uncertain, and research consistently highlights the organizational advantage of environments that are able to act quickly and decisively in the face of uncertainty and change. Those in the military are trained to accurately evaluate a dynamic decision environment and subsequently act in the face of uncertainty. This skill is further enhanced in individuals whose military experience has included service in a combat environment (Haynie, 2016). | Consider veterans for positions that are dynamic with competing demands and uncertainty. Ask for examples to assess and provide training, mentorship, or work-specific training to augment lack of experience. |
| **Veterans exhibit high levels of resilience.**<br><br>As a consequence of the military experience, veterans (in general) develop an enhanced ability to bounce back from failed professional or personal experiences more quickly and completely, as compared to those who have not served (McGeary, 2011). This resiliency gives veterans an edge in the civilian work environment, especially where intermediate or terminal failures are likely to be high, such as in new-product development, early-stage ventures, sales, high-technology ventures, or in environments where customer relationships are transaction-based (Haynie, 2016). | Provide regular and consistent feedback about performance and a plan for advancement within the organization. Provide opportunities to receive mentoring. |

Note: Table 1 adapted from *The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Clichés*, by J.M. Haynie retrieved from ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Business-Case-for-Hiring-a-VeteranFINAL-DIGITAL.pdf. Copyright 2012 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. Also adapted from an upcoming book chapter, "Why Hire Veterans?" by J.M. Haynie from *How to Hire and Retain Military Veterans: A Guidebook for Business Leaders and Human Resources Professionals* (Editors Nathan D. Ainspan and Kristin N. Saboe). Copyright 2018 by Oxford University Press.

| BUSINESS CASE PROPOSITION | HR RELEVANCE |
|---|---|
| **Veterans have (and leverage) advanced technical training.**<br><br>Military experience, on average, exposes individuals to highly advanced technology and technology training at a rate that is accelerated relative to that received by their nonmilitary, age-group peers. This accelerated exposure to high-level technology contributes to an enhanced ability to link technology-based solutions to organizational challenges. Consequently, not only do military veterans, on average, have more advanced exposure to high-level technology relative to their age-group peers, but they also make the most of that knowledge by effectively leveraging knowledge across other, disparate work-related tasks (U.S. Army Combined Arms Center). For example, people who enlist in the U.S. Army are tested in special skills and awarded an Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) if completed. The purpose of the EIB is to recognize infantrymen who have demonstrated a mastery of critical tasks that build the core foundation of individual proficiency that allows them to locate, close with, and destroy the enemy through fire and maneuver, and repel an enemy assault through fire and close combat (U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence). Numerous and arduous tasks at multiple stations must be completed in order to get the EIB. Stations include first aid; nuclear and biological chemicals training; indirect-fire station; basic technique training (e.g., moving under direct fire and using visual signaling techniques); communications (e.g., operating the Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System (SINCGARS) and Advanced System Improvement Program (ASIP) radio channels); map reading; security; and intelligence (Army Study Guide, January 2017). These skills, all technical in nature, are in fact transferable skills for a variety of civilian roles, including logistics and project management, information technology, medical care, personal security, engineering and manufacturing, along with cultural and multi-lingual communications (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c). For example, many military automated systems are similar to the technology used by corporate employers. Thus, many military job seekers have the skills necessary to learn and use a complex system. | Develop hiring pathways to include higher education and certifications, dependent on the needs of the employer or organization. Consider, too, that each industry is unique and requires its own approach and strategy. Regularly engage employees in continuous learning and the acquisition of new skills, and technologies. |
| **Veterans exhibit advanced team-building skills.**<br><br>Compared to those who have not served in the military, veterans are more adept with regard to 1) organizing and defining team goals and mission, 2) defining team member roles and responsibilities, and 3) developing a plan for action (Godé-Sanchez, 2010). Those with prior military service are shown to have a high level of efficacy for team-related activities; that is, veterans exhibit an inherent and enduring belief that they can efficiently and effectively integrate and contribute to a new or existing team (Haynie, 2016). | Hire for soft skills while training for "hard" skills. |
| **Veterans exhibit strong organizational commitment.**<br><br>Military institutions are particularly adept at institutional socialization, and as a result, the military experience engenders a strong linkage between the individual and the organization. Military veterans bring this strong sense of organizational commitment and loyalty to the civilian workplace. For the organization, this strong sense of organizational commitment contributes to reduced attrition/turnover, which, in turn, is reflected in a positive, high-level work product (Godé-Sanchez, 2010). | Identify necessary workforce readiness pathways allows veterans to understand what they need to do to qualify for roles with employers and organizations. |
| **Veterans have (and leverage) cross-cultural experiences.**<br><br>Multiple studies consistently highlight that people with military backgrounds 1) have more international experience, 2) speak more languages more fluently, and 3) have a higher level of cultural sensitivity as compared to age-group peers who have not served in the military (Goldberg and Warner, 1987). The cross-cultural experiences characteristic of a veteran's military career represent a competitive advantage for any employer organization, given the increasing globalization of the business environment. | Does a veteran or military hiring initiative enhance existing global initiatives that require cross-cultural work experience or working with people in multiple countries and regions? How do veterans fit into global goals? Can existing resources be expanded to include military and veterans and to enhance the experience of the company's work in multiple cultures and regions? |
| **Veterans have experience and skill in diverse work settings.**<br><br>While the military has been publicly criticized for a lack of diversity on several important dimensions, research conversely and consistently highlights the fact that the all-volunteer military represents a heterogeneous workforce across myriad dimensions, including educational background, ethnicity, culture, values, and the goals and aspirations of organizational members. Consequently, those with military experience are, on average, highly accepting of individual differences in a work setting and thus exhibit a high level of cultural sensitivity to such differences in the workplace (Godé-Sanchez, 2010). | Findings from the VA from over 245 companies and six *Fortune* 500 companies noting the need to educate employers about issues specific to veteran wellness and information about veteran transition from military to civilian employment. va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/Veterans_in_Workplace_Final_Report.pdf.<br><br>Overview of results from centerforamerica.org/AJAH_Large_Employer_Military_Hiring_Guide.pdf summarize best practices for employers in recruiting and hiring National Guard members, veterans, and reservists. |

# Leveraging Veteran
Talent in the Workplace

**A**s the business case implies, planning for a veteran and military hiring initiative involves identifying and effectively articulating the tangible and intangible reasons why hiring veterans might be advantageous to an organization. For example, organizations generally have limited recruiting and training budgets. If there is cost savings or a revenue-generating opportunity for companies in terms of acquiring talent, improving work culture, increasing diversity, or decreasing the turnover rate, companies can achieve a tangible or quantifiable benefit. On the other hand, the intangible benefits are difficult to quantify. Below we outline some of the tangible benefits to hiring veterans and some of the difficulties related to quantifying the return on investment (ROI).

## The Work Opportunity Tax Credit for Hiring Veterans

In addition to the numerous and diverse skills that veterans bring to the civilian workforce, there is an additional benefit to hiring them: The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring individuals from certain target groups (see Veteran Target Groups, below) who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment. Employers can earn up to $10,000 in federal and state tax credits. For each veteran hired, the federal government gives from $2,400 to $9,600 for the first year of employment. The amount of tax credit depends on certain criteria, including the number of hours employed during the first year, disability status (particularly service-connected disabilities), unemployment status, and receipt of vocational rehabilitation services from a state certified agency or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

### VETERAN TARGET GROUPS

**A new hire qualifies for a veteran target group if the individual is:**

○ A veteran who is a member of a family that received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (food stamps) for at least a three-month period during the 15-month period ending on the hiring date.

**OR**

○ A disabled veteran who is entitled to compensation for a service-connected disability who has been:

- Hired within one year of discharge or release from active duty.

**OR**

- Unemployed for at least six months in the year ending on the hiring date.

**OR**

○ A veteran who has been unemployed for:

- At least four weeks in the year ending on the hiring date.

**OR**

- At least six months in the year ending on the hiring date.

**Please note that to have eligible veteran status for the WOTC, an individual must:**

○ Have served on active duty (not including training) in the U.S. armed forces for more than 180 days OR have been discharged or released from active duty for a service-connected disability.

○ Not have had a period of active duty (not including training) of more than 90 days that ended during the 60-day period ending on the hiring date.

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The criteria for the target group may be subject to change.

Go to https://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/ for the most up-to-date information.

## The Return on Investment (ROI) of Hiring Veterans

According to research conducted by Guo, Pollak, and Bauman (2016), the aforementioned tax credits cost roughly $10,000 or less per job-year. The cost is "on par with other tax credit programs and substantially less than some larger-scale federal employment initiatives (e.g., the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which cost $151,000 per job-year). Overall, the new credits cost $610 million or less over 2007 and 2008, while increasing yearly income for disabled veterans by more than $1 billion. The results suggest that hiring tax credits can be a powerful and cost-effective policy tool to stimulate the hiring of veterans." Business leaders often support the development of veteran employment programs within their organizations, believing that hiring veterans represents both good citizenship and good business. However, as private-sector veteran hiring programs have evolved and matured over the past decade, discourse related to veterans' employment is beginning to take a subtle but important shift and is increasingly focused on how to best quantify the value created for the organization relative to the investment required to resource a veteran employment program (Curry Hall et al., 2014; Haynie, 2016). Metrics that demonstrate higher performance, longer retention, or cost savings related to veteran employees may be important to justify use of veteran employment resources (Curry Hall et al., 2014). It is important to note, however, that retention is often unique to individual and particular businesses, industries, and work, and the metrics and retention goals used by one industry or organization may not apply to another.

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"I invest in veterans not to do them a favor; they are actually doing me a favor, because the qualities they bring to the workforce are invaluable."

—Roger Staubach, JLL Americas,
Pro Football Hall of Fame Quarterback and
Veteran

# The Foundation
for Competitive Advantage

The key to leveraging veteran talent is to identify what a job seeker brings to each workplace and how employers can leverage those unique skills to achieve a competitive advantage. This approach requires employers to assess themselves in terms of both what they offer to veterans as employees and what they expect to gain by hiring veteran job seekers (Bradbard, Armstrong, and Maury, 2016).

## Practice Guidelines: A Framework for HR Professionals to Leverage Veteran Talent and Cultivate Competitive Advantage.[10]

### Start "In the Business"

Leveraging veteran talent involves both the veteran and the employer. First, it is important that employers identify, seek out, and subsequently leverage the skills unique to military and veteran candidates as they apply to specific work environments. Second, employers must look internally at their own company culture.
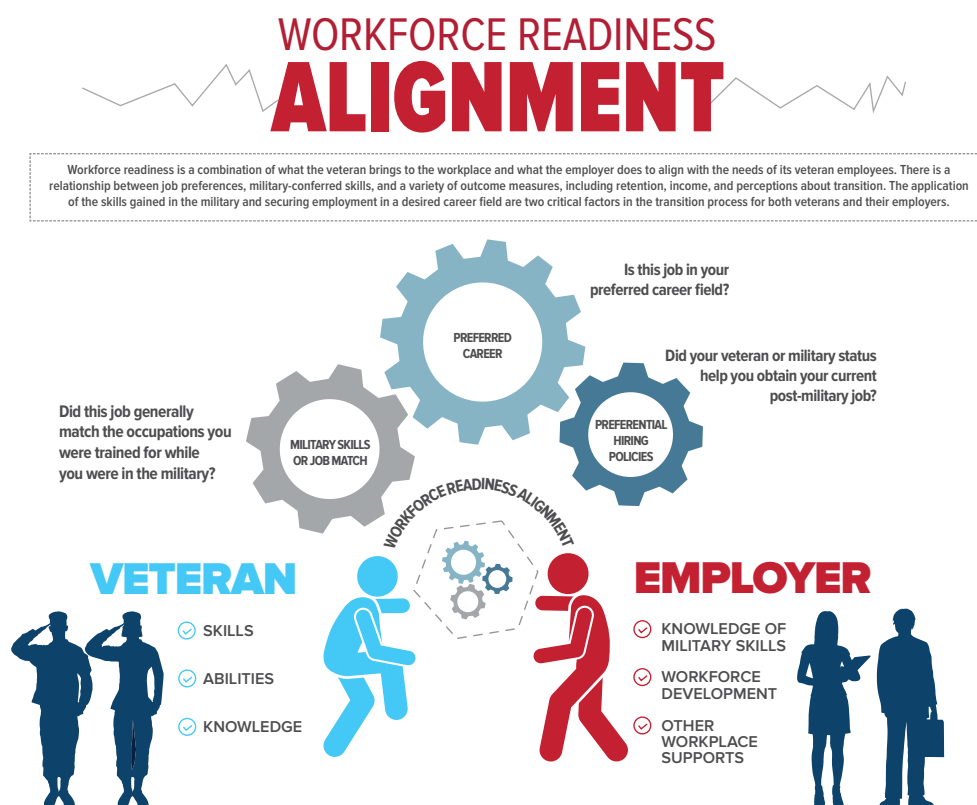


Note: Adapted from Workforce Readiness Alignment: The Relationship Between Job Preferences, Retention, and Earnings (Workforce Readiness Briefs, Paper No. 3) by R. Maury, B. Stone, D.A. Bradbard, N. Armstrong, and J.M. Haynie retrieved from ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WORKFORCE-READINESS-ALIGNMENT.pdf. Copyright 2016 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.

[10] Unless otherwise indicated, content in this section is adapted from Haynie, J. M. (2016). Revisiting the Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: A Strategy for Cultivating Competitive Advantage (Workforce Readiness Briefs, Paper No. 2). Syracuse, NY: The Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University. https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IVMF_WorkforceReadinessPaper2_April16_Report2.pdf.

**Identify marketplace-connected skills and competencies** that are central to current and future competitive advantage for an organization or particular industry. Employers can more effectively recruit military-connected job candidates once they determine where veterans and transitioning service members with specific desirable skills and competencies are located (e.g., currently serving, currently employed, or in higher education). This also may include a clear statement about an interest in hiring not only veterans but transitioning service members, student veterans, members of the National Guard, and reservists (Haynie, 2016).

**Audit company culture**, including opportunities that need to be filled, and consider whether the culture within the organization matches the military culture and employment needs of job-seeking veteran and transitioning military candidates. Simultaneously, avoid making assumptions about individual candidates based on their military affiliation. This also could include examining how veteran and military candidates are perceived and how they are assessed within the organization, both before and after they are hired. This audit also involves ensuring there are resources available such as employee resource groups, onboarding that addresses the specific needs of military candidates (e.g., identifying a mentor within the company), or military culture training for hiring managers and other relevant employees (Haynie, 2016).

## Define and Introduce a Competency-Based Recruiting and Selection Process

Human resource professionals can look across the organization and take a skills and competency inventory to identify 1) areas across the enterprise where necessary skills and competencies are both superior and lacking, and 2) how competencies can be bolstered and deficiencies could be reduced through a veteran and military hiring initiative. For example, employers can work with their HR professionals and hiring managers to identify common employee success characteristics and build a profile to reference within the areas that are superior or lacking. Evaluations for hard and soft skill requirements and preferences can be included in the profile. It is worth noting that in-demand skills desired by employers match closely with the skills that are enhanced by military experience. See "In-Demand Skills" on page 15.

In order to understand veteran fit in a specific role, one must evaluate skills as they match particular roles and responsibilities. Organizations can then track retention, advancement, and performance relative to the fit. Collecting business-specific metrics can enable companies to evaluate their efforts against their own unique targets and goals. Be aware that state policy is often relevant to veterans' meeting specific job requirements for licensures and certifications, as the qualifications earned in the military may be transferable in some cases and not in others. Academic transfer, licensing transfer, and waiver of eligibility requirements in the presence of specific qualifications or experience can sometimes be considered by employers as equivalent or as substitutes. Collection of data and metrics, including sourcing metrics, can help guide and refine future initiatives.

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## Revisit How Your Company Recruits and Hires Veterans

Some research has shown that employers believe that veterans do not have successful civilian careers post-service, and they may also underestimate veterans' level of education. For example, Edelman and Edelman Intelligence released its Veterans' Well-Being Survey—Education and Employment Focus in October 2017 and found that:

*"49% of employers and 48% of non-veterans believe that most veterans do not pursue a college/vocational school degree either while they are in the military or after they've completed their service. And, despite data that shows the contrary, only 9% of employers and 8% of non-veterans believe that veterans are more likely than average citizens to obtain a graduate degree. Finally, 52% of employers believe that veterans do not have successful careers when compared to average citizens."*

## IN-DEMAND SKILLS
## COMPARED TO SKILLS ENHANCED BY MILITARY SERVICE

**Most Important Skills Cited by Employers for Workplace Success**
- Professionalism/work ethic
- Teamwork/collaboration
- Communicating effectively
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Ethics/social responsibility

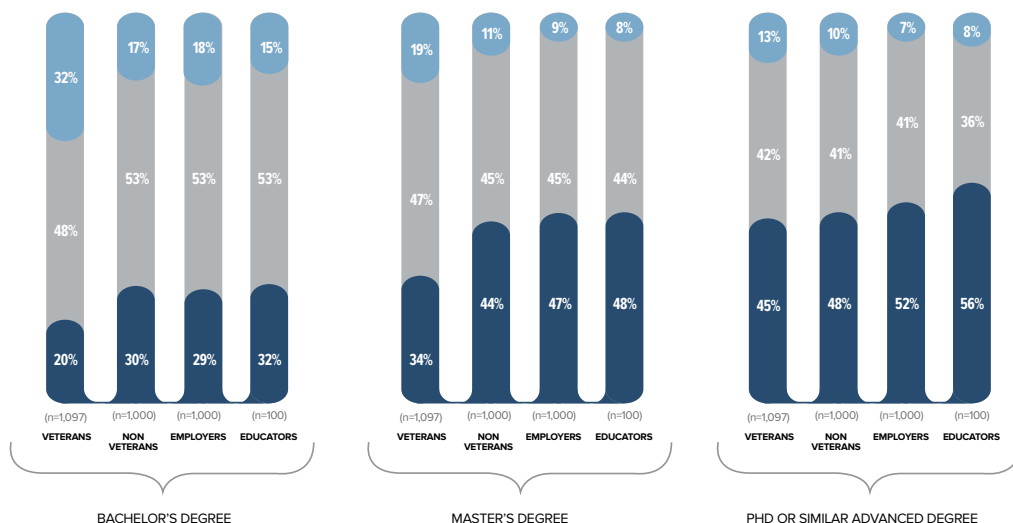**Skills Strengthened or Enhanced by Military Service**
- Work ethic/discipline
- Teamwork
- Leadership and management
- Mental toughness
- Adapting to different challenges
- Professionalism

Note: Adapted from Work After Service: Developing Workforce Readiness and Veteran Talent for the Future, by D.A. Bradbard, N.A. Armstrong, and R. Maury retrieved from ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/WORK-AFTER-SERVICE-Developing-Workforce-Readiness-and-Veteran-Talent-for-the-Future.pdf. Copyright 2016 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.

## Only 9 percent of employers believe that veterans are more likely than the average citizen to obtain a graduate degree.

### PERCEPTIONS OF VETERANS' EDUCATION

- ■ Military veterans are more likely than the average citizen to obtain a bachelor's/master's/Ph.D. or similar advanced degree.
- ■ Military veterans are equally as likely as the average citizen to obtain a bachelor's/master's/Ph.D. or similar advanced degree.
- ■ Military veterans are less likely than the average citizen to obtain a bachelor's/master's/Ph.D. or similar advanced degree

**BACHELOR'S DEGREE**

| | VETERANS (n=1,097) | NON VETERANS (n=1,000) | EMPLOYERS (n=1,000) | EDUCATORS (n=100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Less likely | 32% | 17% | 18% | 15% |
| Equally | 48% | 53% | 53% | 53% |
| More likely | 20% | 30% | 29% | 32% |

**MASTER'S DEGREE**

| | VETERANS (n=1,097) | NON VETERANS (n=1,000) | EMPLOYERS (n=1,000) | EDUCATORS (n=100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Less likely | 19% | 11% | 9% | 8% |
| Equally | 47% | 45% | 45% | 44% |
| More likely | 34% | 44% | 47% | 48% |

**PHD OR SIMILAR ADVANCED DEGREE**

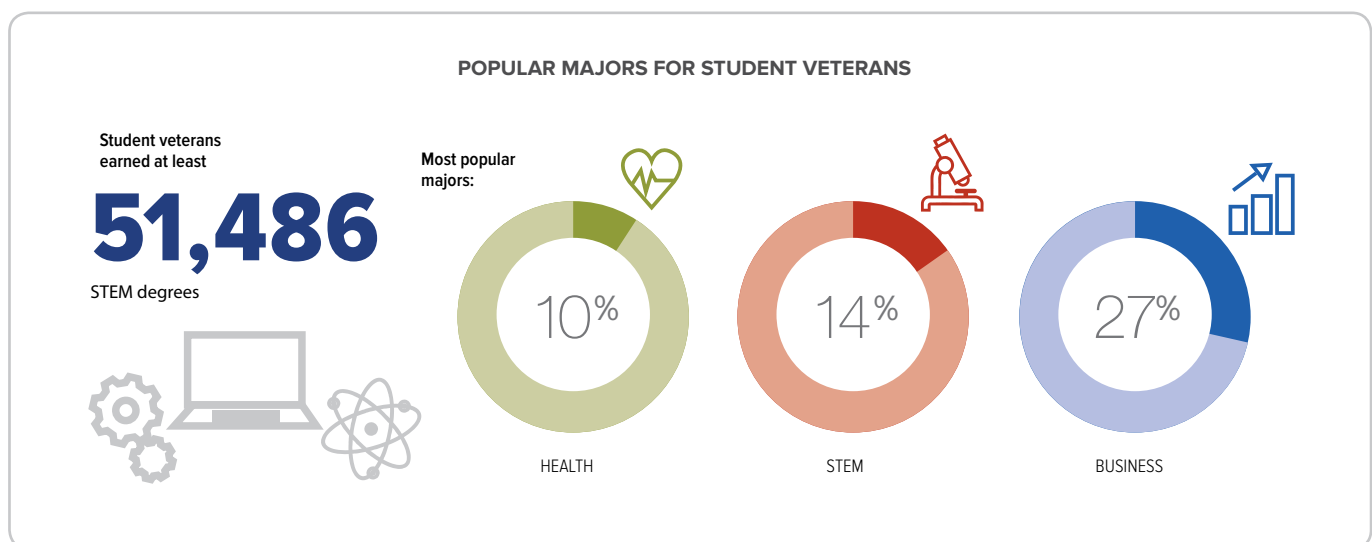| | VETERANS (n=1,097) | NON VETERANS (n=1,000) | EMPLOYERS (n=1,000) | EDUCATORS (n=100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Less likely | 13% | 10% | 7% | 8% |
| Equally | 42% | 41% | 41% | 36% |
| More likely | 45% | 48% | 52% | 56% |

Note: Adapted from Veterans' Well-Being Survey by Edelman and Edelman Intelligence. Retrieved from slideshare.net/EdelmanInsights/2017-veterans-wellbeing-survey. Copyright 2017 by Edelman and Edelman Intelligence.

Because employers are starting with this misperception, it is very likely that veteran employees are being hired into roles that are below their abilities and skills, and that companies are missing talent represented by student veterans during their college careers (about half work full time while in college) and as they graduate. Importantly, not only employers, but veterans, nonveterans, and educators all have similar perceptions about degree attainment, and those perceptions are erroneous (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, and Bogue, 2017).

To underscore this point, in 2017, Student Veterans of America (SVA) released the first comprehensive review of post-9/11 student veteran education outcomes and reported on student veterans' success rates, areas of study, and demographics (including diversity), and demonstrated the talent pipeline represented by student veterans. The National Veteran Education Success Tracker demonstrated that veterans attain high-demand degrees at high rates of success, with success rates higher than their civilian peers who have never served. Additional research by SVA demonstrates that veterans have higher grade point averages than their civilian peers. Degree fields include business, management, and marketing

(27 percent); science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or STEM (14 percent); and health professions (10 percent) (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, and Bogue, 2017).

Veterans use a variety of strategies and tools when they transition from the military. These include education, certification, on-the-job (OJT) training, and apprenticeships, to name a few. Ideally, these resources, when utilized by the veteran, can offer incentives for both veterans and employers. For example, veterans in an approved on-the-job training program can use their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit and receive a tax-free housing stipend. This provides a cost savings to the employer and an opportunity for the veteran to receive education, training, or more advanced workplace skills. Additionally, veterans can use these opportunities to build a relationship with a specific employer, improve their skills and competencies, earn wage increases, participate in occupation-focused training and education, and earn the opportunity for career advancement. Finally, employers can benefit through increased productivity, higher employee retention, and a stable pipeline of qualified workers.

**POPULAR MAJORS FOR STUDENT VETERANS**

Student veterans earned at least

**51,486**

STEM degrees

Most popular majors:

10% HEALTH

14% STEM

27% BUSINESS

Note: Adapted from National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill by Cate, C.A., L.S. Lyon, J. Schmeling, and B.Y. Bogue. Retrieved from http://nvest.studentveterans.org/. Copyright 2017 by Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.

In addition to working through colleges and universities, employers might also work with nonprofit veteran service organizations that offer employment services free to veterans and interested companies. Companies also may choose to develop relationships with the installation-based military transition centers that frequently welcome companies to their job fairs and military transition classes. Likewise, local and state-based agencies often have workforce commissions or coalitions that help veterans with employment services.

Some veterans may have myriad needs in addition to employment, such as health and wellness; wounded, ill, or injured veteran accommodations; higher education; transition; re-integration into families and communities; and so on. A number of organizations and programs focus on these other needs, including with fundraising campaigns and by showing success overcoming post-service barriers. Paradoxically, prevalent messaging about veterans' health and well-being (e.g., homelessness, health care) may inadvertently obscure the fact that most research shows that veterans overall are employed (with wages for all veterans averaging $10,000 more annually than for their civilian peers) and unemployed at a rate 1 percent lower than their civilian peers who have never served. Moreover, veterans who have attained degrees are even better positioned in relation to purpose in life and social and financial well-being: With a bachelor's degree, their wages are nearly $17,000 higher than for those who have never served, and at the graduate-degree level, their wages are slightly more than $29,000 higher than for those who have never served (the Institute for Veterans and Military Families and Student Veterans of America, 2017). While some factors (e.g., discrimination by employers, skill mismatch, injury, poor health) may hinder some veterans' employment outcomes, it is worth noting that census data does not reflect that there is an overall employment disadvantage (Guo, Pollak, and Bauman, 2016).

In 2017, the IVMF, in collaboration with the Veteran Job Mission (VJM), collected survey data from 46 companies that voluntarily answered questions about their veteran hiring initiatives,

### NUMBER OF DEGREES BY FIELD

**Blue shading indicates STEM fields**. For the National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST), STEM is defined by the conservative grouping of science, technology, engineering, and math that excludes the social sciences.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 96,270 | Business, Management, Marketing | 2,072 | Construction Trades |
| 37,138 | Health Professions and Related Programs | 1,972 | Natural Resources and Conservation |
| 34,812 | Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies | 1,869 | Physical Sciences |
| 34,199 | Homeland Security, Law Enforcement, Firefighting | 1,534 | Theology and Religious Vocations |
| 21,800 | Computer and Information Sciences | 1,215 | Philosophy and Religious Studies |
| 14,977 | Social Sciences | 1,130 | Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences |
| 10,532 | Education | 1,121 | Agriculture, Agriculture Operations |
| 10,153 | Engineering Technologies | 1,075 | Mathematics and Statistics |
| 9,769 | Mechanic and Repair Technologies/Technicians | 959 | Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics |
| 8,798 | Multi- and Interdisciplinary Studies | 732 | Architecture and Related Services |
| 8,510 | Psychology | 694 | Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies |
| 8,057 | Engineering | 619 | Science Technologies/Technicians |
| 7,436 | Public Administration and Social Service | 616 | Military Technologies and Applied Sciences |
| 5,621 | Transportation and Materials Moving | 509 | Communications Technologies/Technicians |
| 4,311 | Biological and Biomedical Sciences | 156 | Library Science |
| 4,268 | History | 62 | Leisure and Recreational Activities |
| 4,266 | Legal Professions and Studies | 58 | Military Science, Leadership and Operational Art |
| 4,013 | Personal and Culinary Services | 33 | Basic Skills and Developmental/Remedial Education |
| 3,787 | Visual and Performing Arts | 31 | Residency Programs |
| 3,656 | Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies | 3 | Health-Related Knowledge and Skills |
| 3,123 | Communication, Journalism | 3 | High School/Secondary Diplomas and Certificates |
| 2,342 | English Language and Literature/Letters | 1 | Citizenship Activities |
| 2,340 | Precision Production | | |

Note: Adapted from National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill by Cate, C.A., L.S. Lyon, J. Schmeling, and B.Y. Bogue. Retrieved from invest.studentveterans.org/. Copyright 2017 by Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.

including their recruiting practices, initiatives implemented to support the company's veteran employment goals, and what they believe is the impact of implementing initiatives for their organization and for their veteran employees (Maury, Boldon, and Armstrong, 2017). Companies were also asked to share information on what they measure in house and their use of promotional materials for their veteran employment initiatives. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 of the participating companies. Leading practices were compiled and are presented in the box above.

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# Recruiting Best Practices

## VETERAN-SPECIFIC RECRUITING EFFORTS

o Offering customized hiring events for veterans and military-connected individuals

o Making strategic outreach efforts, which include targeted marketing

o Creating recruiting program(s) in which veterans employed at the company assist in recruiting prospective veteran employees

o Regularly publicizing open positions to colleges and organizations serving veterans

o Designating a center dedicated to talent acquisition

o Designing a resource guide for company recruiters

## PARTNERSHIPS AND USING AVAILABLE RESOURCES

o Leverage Department of Defense (DOD) and VA resources, such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), to locate qualified veteran candidates

o Partner with like-minded companies

## TRAINING AND CERTIFICATIONS

o Offer pathways to certification for job skills and honor military experience/certification

o Generate opportunities for on-the-job training

## HOW COMPANIES ARE MEASURING RECRUITMENT

o Sources of applications
  • By program and talent type
o Success of leadership program
  • By practice and location
o Offers and hires made
  • By veteran status and disability status
o Effectiveness and cost of recruiting efforts, including events
o Veterans' experiences with company's recruiting and hiring process
o Retention and promotion of veteran hires
o Number of veteran employees involved in recruiting programs

# Impact of Initiatives

## ON COMPANIES

o Stronger candidate pools and better retention rates

o Stronger teams and more experienced leaders

o Better military-to-civilian work environments

o Increase in veteran hiring

o More military friendly

## ON VETERANS

o Opportunity to network with other veterans

o Sense of value to company

o Long-term career path at company

# Leading Practices Identified

## RECRUITING EFFORTS

o Build relationships with colleges to recruit on campus and receive veteran referrals.

o Be clear on veteran recruitment goals.

o Implement system to help communicate with veteran candidates

## KNOWLEDGE SHARING

o Put together a guide that links resources for veterans

o Build a platform for veterans to share knowledge

o Join committees or groups that can offer valuable education on hiring veterans

o Communicate regularly with veteran candidates about open positions

o Highlight and share success stories of veterans within the organization who are making a difference

o Internally publish articles that promote veterans initiatives which could help nonveteran employees accept recruiting veteran employees

## COLLABORATION/PARTNERSHIPS

o Leverage TAP and other programs established to aid veterans in gaining employment, such as Wounded Warrior Project and LearnKey

o Put together a group of individuals to lead the company's veteran-employee hiring initiative

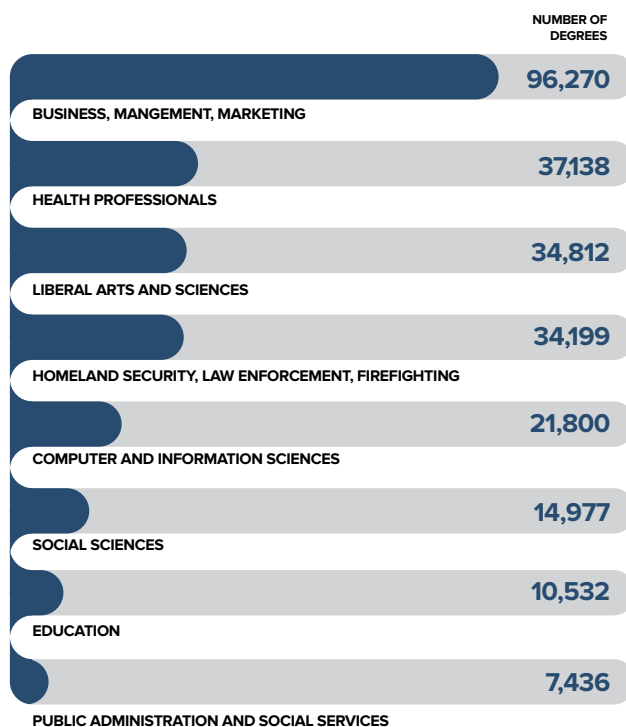## Use Resources for Employers to Find Veteran Job Candidates

**Become a Veteran-Friendly Employer:** Employers can offer veteran- and military-specific opportunities, training programs, and outreach to build their brand as a military-friendly employer. For example, veteran- and military-specific website portals on an organization's webpage can enable job seekers to apply for open positions and establish "high-touch" connections with human resource professionals with specialized knowledge about military candidates. Additionally, organizations can proactively participate in military-focused events, donate resources and time to military-related causes, and actively pursue veteran and military employees to build a strong reputation within the military community.

**Rely on Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR):** ESGR is a Defense Department program. Its goals are to create a culture in which all U.S. employers value the military service of their employees and to minimize issues between employers and service members. ESGR is able to answer any questions employers have regarding rights and responsibilities in the employment of National Guard or Reserve service members. Employers interested in hiring members of the National Guard and reservists can participate in the Department of Labor's efforts to support veteran hiring at Veterans.gov. Through their online tools and their network of 2,400 American Job Centers, they provide employers labor market counseling, interview and job-seeker selection tips, a vast job-seeker network, and subsidies for hiring veterans. Visit esgr.mil/Employers/Benefits-of-Hiring-G-R

**Hold Hiring Fairs:** Military installations often coordinate hiring fairs that enable employers to connect with transitioning military and veteran job seekers. Employers can establish relationships with local installations to share information about upcoming events.

**Offer Internal Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Existing employee resource groups within organizations can be excellent sources for candidate referrals, as existing employees can often effectively refer transitioning military or veterans knowing how that candidate might fit within the work environment.

**THE POST-9/11 GI BILL HAS HELPED VETERANS EARN DEGREES IN:**

NUMBER OF DEGREES

| Field | Number of Degrees |
|---|---|
| BUSINESS, MANGEMENT, MARKETING | 96,270 |
| HEALTH PROFESSIONALS | 37,138 |
| LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES | 34,812 |
| HOMELAND SECURITY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, FIREFIGHTING | 34,199 |
| COMPUTER AND INFORMATION SCIENCES | 21,800 |
| SOCIAL SCIENCES | 14,977 |
| EDUCATION | 10,532 |
| PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES | 7,436 |

This figure is included to demonstrate that student veterans continue to serve their communities and country long after their military service ends.

Note: Adapted from National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill by Cate, C.A., J. S. Lyon, J. Schmeling, and B.Y. Bogue. Retrieved from invest.studentveterans.org/. Copyright 2017 by Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.

**Join Veteran-Focused Employer Hiring Groups:** Groups such as the Veteran Jobs Mission and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes Veterans Employment Advisory Council can assist in connecting employers and military job candidates. These groups meet on a regular basis and provide opportunities for employers to share best practices for recruiting, retaining, and hiring military job candidates. Visit veteranjobsmission.com/ and uschamberfoundation.org/hiring-our-heroes.

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**Leverage LinkedIn:** LinkedIn, a career networking social media site, offers advanced search capabilities to help HR professionals narrow their search for the most qualified candidates for the opportunities they are looking to fill. LinkedIn offers a suite of tools with which to search, segment, and connect with veteran job seekers. Learn from a military-talent branding expert to make the most of LinkedIn's talent acquisition and outreach tools. Visit linkedinforgood.linkedin.com/programs/veterans/employers

**Look into Nonprofit Organizations:** Nonprofits focused on employment often work directly with veteran job seekers and can assist employers in locating qualified candidates while assisting veterans with translating their resumes. Hiring Heroes USA, for example, offers resume services and can connect transitioning service members with employers. Visit hireheroesusa.org/get-registered/. The Wounded Warrior Project can connect employers to veteran job candidates with disabilities and provide employers with resources to assist them in hiring these job seekers, providing reasonable accommodations, and writing appropriate job descriptions. Visit woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/warriors-to-work

**Use University Career Centers:** University campuses typically have career services and can provide an interface between student veterans seeking employment and employers seeking qualified job candidates. University career centers can be an excellent source for employers to locate qualified military-connected job candidates with academic degrees that match open positions.

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# POST-EDUCATION COMMITMENT

## MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO THRIVE IN THE FOLLOWING DOMAINS:

- ⊘ **PURPOSE** (motivation to achieve goals)
- ⊘ **SOCIAL WELL-BEING** (supportive relationships)
- ⊘ **FINANCIAL WELL-BEING** (management of economic factors)

# 54%

of service members and veteran college graduates are thriving socially and economically, as compared to only 43% of their non-veteran counterparts.

Veterans strive for financial security and value fiscal responsibility. Financial security is associated with less stress and increased financial well-being.

Student loan debt and percentage of thriving is negatively correlated; Veterans generally borrowed less money, therefore have a higher level of economic security.

# 65% OF MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS BORROWED NO MONEY, COMPARED WITH 52% OF THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER SERVED

## VETERANS EXHIBIT A STRONG ORGANIZATION COMMITMENT OR SENSE OF CONNECTION AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ONE'S INSTITUTION

The military is particularly adept at socializing service members to various roles and expectations that must be successfully carried out to meet the demands of the organization. Early socialization in military training lays the groundwork for subsequent organizational commitment by fostering a sense of responsibility, unity, and cohesiveness among the group. One's capacity to transition between a variety of roles and expectations with ease is also increased. For the organization, these factors contribute to less burnout, greater job satisfaction, and higher productivity. Further, in situations where organizational commitment is high, research suggests that organization norms, customs, and ethical standards are more strongly internalized. In short, military culture strengthens integrity and responsibility. Additional studies consistently support findings that service members sustain these characteristics across civilian settings, including academic institutions. Consequently, military experience engenders greater loyalty and commitment to one's education as well as one's affiliated academic institution.

# **Talent** Deployment and Development

# ⌐**Talent** Deployment

## Focus Relentlessly on Alignment with the Marketplace

In order to develop and retain veteran talent, it is not only important to have a strong veteran hiring and accommodation strategy, but it is also important to have a plan in place to best utilize veterans' skills in the civilian workplace. In the context of the organization's veteran employment program, the objective of talent deployment should be to think and act beyond the traditional lens of a person-to-job fit, making purposeful and strategic choices about how to deploy veterans within the organization. Specifically, organizations can deploy veterans within companies to occupy work roles and situations so that their attributes and skills are leveraged to meet unique, strategic goals and objectives.

Thus, it is critically important that managers employ veteran talent consistent with opportunity. This is one of the most significant and strategic missteps we have identified in how some organizations approach veteran hiring initiatives. Employers traditionally hire with the intent and objective of introducing and leveraging military-learned skills and competencies within the organization but deploy veteran talent to work roles and situations where those differentiated skills and abilities are not relevant or even appropriate (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011). Based on both class-leading practices and approaches supporting this objective identified by research—and also on the practical lessons learned from private-sector partners—the following are strategies and prescriptions to best position the organization's veteran employment initiative that, if followed, will create value for the company (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c).

## Recognize the Importance of Meaning and Purpose for Veteran Employees

Veterans typically have a strong, intrinsic need to find meaning and purpose in their work, which often attracts them to military service in the first place. Continually and consistently reinforce how and why the veteran's assigned work role contributes to the performance objectives of the organization and the vision of the company.

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# Best Practices for Deploying Veteran Talent in the Workplace

## RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

o Offer a page on your company intranet where veterans can access resources, such as the company's recruitment schedule, relevant articles, and employment help

o Provide a private LinkedIn page for veteran employees

## EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

o Offer employee resource groups/networks at specific locations within the company

o Ensure employee resource groups are led by employees

o Set specific goals for employee resource groups, such as improving the work environment and connecting employees and community

## COMPANY LEADERSHIP, BUY-IN, AND SUPPORT

o Provide dedicated leadership, budget, and technological infrastructure for veteran employee services and supports

o Ensure leadership buy-in of the need for veteran employee resources, such as employee resource groups

o Measure the impact of initiatives

## EFFECTS ON COMPANIES

o Initiated healthy dialogue on best ways to integrate veterans within the company

o Higher overall retention rate for veteran hires

o Increased awareness of the value of hiring veterans

o More opportunities to volunteer in/serve the local community

o A more veteran-friendly workplace culture

## EFFECTS ON VETERANS

o More opportunities for veteran employees to network with senior leaders

o More support for veteran employees and their families

o Increased engagement

o More development opportunities, including leading projects and teams

o Increased self-identification of veteran status

o Leading practices identified

o Opportunities provided for veteran employees to participate in community service projects

o Online tools offered for veteran employees to locate available company resources

o A secure forum provided for veteran employees to receive advice on transitioning into the workplace

o Recently hired veteran employees offered mentoring and coaching

o Employee resource groups that are employee-led and can encourage veteran participation and engagement offered

Note: Adapted from *Veteran Jobs Mission Leading Practices*, by R. Maury, N. Boldon, and N. Armstrong. Copyright 2017 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.

# Talent Development[11]

## Provide Early, Frequent, and Informal Performance Feedback

Veterans are accustomed to frequent and specific feedback on their performance and will likely expect this type of engagement from their employer. As such, military-connected employees will likely be receptive to performance feedback, and they may flounder without it. Veterans frequently report a lack of understanding related to workplace norms and customs, organizational reporting structures, and the benchmarks for performance evaluation and recognition. Thus, employers can set veteran employees up for success by explaining those policies and procedures in a transparent and proactive manner while setting up informal checkpoints and feedback sessions in advance of formal evaluations.

In addition to feedback, organizations can also offer pathways to certification for developing or augmenting job skills while honoring military experience and/or certification. Organizations can also generate opportunities for on-the-job training. Such opportunities allow for feedback but also provide opportunities to learn and enhance existing skills. Finally, organizations can recognize excellent performance or goal achievement by simply providing recognition to any employees for work well done.

## Be Able to Say What's Next

Share with the veteran opportunities for further development and training and certification, and what may be opportunities to expand, move, repurpose, or refocus as needed. Many companies have indicated retention may be a challenge; however, for those who have conducted exit interviews, many of the veteran employees indicated they were moving to other companies for promotions, better fit, more responsibility, and increased compensation. This reflects a need for companies that want to retain veteran talent to be clear on promotion pathways, opportunities for new challenges, and employee development. For example, this clarity might include a time frame and a specific outline of what is required for promotion.

## Identify Exemplars

Veterans will naturally seek and act on opportunities to emulate organizational exemplars or mentors. Supervisors can help veterans identify appropriate mentors by being transparent about who and why certain peers and colleagues are high performers. Mentoring, sponsorship, and regular opportunities to connect to business and employee resource groups (ERGs) for those exemplars are examples of how employers can institutionalize these opportunities. In addition, employers can connect veteran employees to senior leader sponsors through the groups. Affinity groups have the potential to extend the reach of existing recruiting efforts, as they may encourage engagement among current veteran and military employees while also strengthening recruiting efforts to the extent that current veteran employees can bring more veterans to the organization.

## Understand that Potential and Readiness Are Not the Same

Take the time to develop and mentor high-performing veterans to ensure they have the right mix of experience, skills and personal qualities to assume additional organizational responsibilities and leadership. Identify opportunities for education support, student veteran engagement, mentoring and informed decision-making for prospective student veterans.

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[11] Adapted from an upcoming book chapter, "Why Hire Veterans?," by J.M. Haynie from *How to Hire and Retain Military Veterans: A Guidebook for Business Leaders and Human Resources Professionals* (Eds. Nathan D. Ainspan and Kristin N. Saboe). Copyright 2018 by Oxford University Press.

To ensure veteran success in the workplace, employers need to prepare beyond hiring and recruiting initiatives and should consider veteran employees in their onboarding, retention and development, and disability accommodation processes to lay a foundation in order to successfully deploy, develop, and capitalize upon veteran talent and veteran success (Maury, Stone, Bradbard, Armstrong, and Haynie, 2016). The more prepared an organization is for *employing* veterans—as opposed to simply hiring them—the more the organization can reap the rewards from this valuable human capital resource (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c).

## Employee Assistance Program to Include Veterans

Many employers who have successfully hired and retained veterans have worked veteran-specific policies and resources into their human resources department's employee assistance program (National Council on Disability, 2007).

The disabilities of any veteran might include a variety of physical and mental conditions, and if the veteran has elected to disclose this information, employers are required to accommodate the veteran's needs, whether physical or mental health related. Veterans need only disclose if and when they need an accommodation to perform the essential functions of the job. Applicants never have to disclose this information on a job application or in the job interview unless they need an accommodation to assist them in the application or interview process.

If disclosed, employers need to know what those needs are and what to do. The cost of accommodating a disabled worker is often less than $500, with many accommodations requiring just flexibility or creative use of existing materials (IVMFb, 2013). Some of the common disabilities that may require additional accommodations are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), amputation, hearing loss, and vision impairment.

Employee assistance program counselors typically provide assessment, support, and referrals to additional resources for various issues such as substance abuse; emotional distress; major life events (e.g., birth, death, and accidents); health care support; elder care; work/family relationships; and financial/legal assistance. Confidentiality is maintained in accordance with privacy laws and ethical standards.

Note: Adapted from an upcoming book chapter, "Why Hire Veterans?," by J.M. Haynie from *How to Hire and Retain Military Veterans: A Guidebook for Business Leaders and Human Resources Professionals* (Eds. Nathan D. Ainspan and Kristin N. Saboe). Copyright 2018 by Oxford University Press.

**What follows is a list of steps employers can take to ensure that veterans succeed before, during, and after they are hired.**

**Accommodate employees with disabilities.**
Accommodating the needs of veterans, or any person, with a disability helps an employer create an environment in which all employees can perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. These accommodations also create a welcoming environment and set the tone of the organization's culture, policies, and structures, which, if positive, can lead to long-lasting employment (IVMF 2013a; IVMF 2013b). By establishing policies ahead of time that will accommodate veteran employees, organizations reap the added benefit of creating loyalty among civilian employees as well (National Council on Disability, 2007).

**Allow for a flexible schedule**. Allowing the employee to have a flexible schedule is a reasonable accommodation. Whether the person has PTSD or TBI, uses a wheelchair, or had limbs amputated, for example, a flexible schedule gives the employee the time needed to perform daily activities (e.g., attend to personal needs, cope with stress). A flexible work environment includes flexible scheduling, a modified break schedule, time to call or leave work for doctors appointments or counseling, the option to work from home or a flexi-place, or even distance travel for access to health care (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c).

**Help to enhance concentration.** The employer can help the veteran employee with concentration by reducing distractions in the work area. Providing space enclosures, sound-absorption panels, or a private office can accomplish this, as can allowing for the use of white noise or environmental sound machines, allowing employees to play soothing music via computer or music player, providing uninterrupted work time, and supplying organizers to reduce clutter. Additionally, studies show that increased natural lighting or full-spectrum lighting can also help increase concentration, along with schedulers, organizers, and e-mail applications. Dividing large assignments into smaller tasks or restructuring the job to include only essential functions are also helpful concentration tools (IVMF 2013b; IVMF 2013c).

**Provide opportunities to work effectively with supervisors**. The relationship between employees and their supervisors is critical to the successful engagement and job performance of all employees, and employees with disabilities are no different (Wagner and Harter, 2006). Providing such things as positive praise and reinforcement, written job instruction, a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation, and clear expectations along with strategies to deal with problems before they arise allows for open communication and establishing long-term and short-term goals.

**Have an awareness of the benefits of technology in the workplace.** The increasing importance of computers and new information technologies has provided special benefits for workers with disabilities by helping compensate for physical or sensory impairments (e.g., using screen readers and voice-recognition systems) and substantially increasing their productivity. A study by Krueger and Kruse (1995) found that people with a spinal cord injury who had pre-existing computer skills at the time of the injury had a faster return to work enhanced earnings compared to people with spinal cord injuries who did not have these skills (National Council on Disability, 2007).

**Help to provide work/life balance**. Workers with disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to have at-home jobs or several types of part-time and flexible job arrangements. Though such jobs often have disadvantages, and it is clear that workers with disabilities should have full access to standard full-time jobs, the growth of several types of flexible and contingent jobs is promising for enhancing the employment of many people with disabilities, including veterans, who may benefit from these arrangements (National Council on Disability, 2007).

**Have an awareness of the growing attention to workplace diversity.** Most large corporations today have diversity programs, and a growing number are including disability as one of the criteria for a diverse workforce (National Council on Disability, 2007), and they are taking steps to creating a receptive environment. For example, prior to the arrival of a new employee with a disability—or shortly after arrival—Microsoft provides opportunities for co-workers to have their questions about disabilities addressed in an open and safe environment. Additionally, the Office of Disability Employment Policy, along with

the U.S. Department of Labor, funded a cooperative agreement with Syracuse, Rutgers, and Cornell Universities to develop and validate a methodology for case studies of disability and corporate culture. Further, in an effort to accommodate growing workforce diversity, many managers put forth efforts to implement universal design (the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design). Half of surveyed U.S. managers foresee universal design implementation for 1) improving worker productivity and satisfaction, 2) promoting flexibility in employment, and 3) reducing legal risks and workers' compensation claims (National Council on Disability, 2007).

**Ensure effective onboarding**. From the moment a veteran is hired, there should be a process in place to begin acclimating him or her to the company. Many employers have a buddy system, pairing a new employee with a current employee who can help him or her navigate the transition. It is always beneficial to identify a learning partner or buddy for the new hire so he or she has an available resource other than the supervisor (IVMF 2013a; IVMF 2013b, see Onboarding). The learning partner serves as a guide, providing assistance and camaraderie as the new employee becomes acclimated to the organization culture. This relationship is particularly important for veterans who are re-entering civilian life in corporate America. To the extent possible, leverage existing veteran employees in a mentorship role with new veteran hires, because they understand the unique socialization challenges of re-entering the civilian workplace. Such opportunities exist through the Military Support Programs and Networks (M-SPAN) initiative at the University of Michigan. Through the Buddy-to-Buddy Volunteer Veteran Program and the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program, the university supports, assists, and provides resources. The philosophy behind the initiative is simple—military service is unlike any other human experience. No one knows more about the issues facing a soldier—in combat or on the home front—than a fellow soldier (M-SPAN, January 2017).

By establishing a system ahead of time, an employer may have more success in ensuring that the employee—veteran or civilian—is brought up to speed as quickly and smoothly as possible.

**Create a structure for feedback.** Create a structure in which employees are evaluated at intervals of 30, 60, 90, and 120 days.

o At the end of Day One, managers should have a brief, informal check-in with the new employees. This simple act demonstrates they care; they want to hear from the individual and help set the stage for future communications.

o After one week on the job, it is beneficial to have another check-in.

o At the 30-day benchmark, the new hires should be fully acclimated and acquainted with their job responsibilities. Discussion should focus on accomplishment of short-term goals and laying the groundwork for longer-term objectives. It is also a good time to assess the employees' satisfaction.

o At the 90-day benchmark, the new hires should have a thorough understanding of objectives and be well on their way to achieving results. Providing feedback on their contributions, strengths, and areas for improvement goes a long way in retaining the employees.

o At the 120-day benchmark, it is helpful for managers to conduct a full review of the employees' goals, progress, and accomplishments. Revisiting the feedback shared during the 90-day discussion will help managers assess whether the employees are on track and making progress in the areas identified (IVMF 2013a; IVMF 2013b, see Onboarding).

**Conduct stay interviews.** The stay interview is an opportunity to build trust with employees and a chance to assess the degree of employee satisfaction and engagement that exists in a department or company. The results of a stay interview provide insights about what the organization can do to improve and, in the process, help retain your remaining valued employees. The stay interview can be extremely effective to ensure that the employee is acclimating to the organization and position, and feels valued. Informal evaluations are also helpful in that an employee can voice his or her constructive criticism (IVMF 2013a; IVMF 2013b, see Onboarding).

**Mentor programs for development.** Mentoring or peer-to-peer learning is one of the most widely known methods of employee development. This type of learning seeks to develop an employee's capabilities by connecting him or her to the wisdom that already exists within an organization, which often resides with colleagues the employee interacts with on a regular basis. Effective behavioral learning incorporates modeling, practice, review, and refinement. Mentors show or offer suggestions on what to do, allow the learner to practice doing it, and then provide feedback so that the individual can refine future attempts (IVMF 2013a; IVMF 2013b, see Onboarding).

Once employee hiring and onboarding policies are revised, a human resources department can begin the search for veteran talent. Having an awareness of what it takes to hire and retain veterans will ensure job matching (matching the veterans' abilities to the required skills of the job) and, in the end, contribute to the success of the veteran in the workplace.

These examples of policies, processes, and structures are important for developing and maintaining all employees, but they specifically benefit veterans—with or without service-connected disabilities. The most important thing to remember is that these programs be established at the organization *before* the hiring process. Creating a foundation for employee accommodation and assimilation that includes resources and services for veterans as well as a feedback and evaluation schedule maximizes the potential of veteran employees by meeting them where they are at the beginning of their relationship with the organization.

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# Conclusion

**T**here are often multiple reasons why an organization chooses to recruit and hire veterans. Often, there is the belief that their inclusion as employees will bring some specific desired result; ideally, this is tied to an organization's business case. Past research highlights high veteran attrition, particularly among first-time veteran job seekers. Dissatisfaction among veteran employees often stems from their perceptions of how and to what extent the veteran's unique knowledge, skills, and experiences are being utilized. Conversely, when employers effectively hire, deploy, and develop veteran talent, their choices can have profound implications for the veteran, as well as his or her family. For example, research suggests a strong correlation between a wide range of positive outcomes and positive employer actions when the abilities of employees are put to their "first best use" within the organization. These outcomes include increased job satisfaction, enhanced organizational commitment and citizenship behaviors, increased levels of wellness and emotional well-being, and strengthened relationship and community attachments.

In this guide we have articulated how organizations can and should define their unique strategy for veteran and military hiring, proactively thinking about the hiring process from beginning to end within the context of a well-articulated business case. It is incumbent on organizations to consider the unique results they pursue, tying their efforts to their organization strategy while considering how the addition or inclusion of military-connected and veteran employees brings added value. Ideally, such a strategy benefits both the veteran and the employer.

When veteran and military hiring is conducted in a strategic manner, specific actions and resources can be more effectively and efficiently allocated toward recruiting, hiring, onboarding, retaining, and advancing veteran hires. HR professionals can play a pivotal role in communicating the value of veteran and military-connected employees by communicating to senior leadership the value of veteran and military employees, while also providing a communication bridge between veteran and military-connected job candidates and prospective hiring managers so that military-acquired skills are effectively translated to relevant roles within the organization.

> Conversely, when employers effectively hire, deploy, and develop veteran talent, their choices can have profound implications for the veteran, as well as his or her family.

In general, planning and ultimately executing a successful military and veterans hiring initiative involves proactively familiarizing oneself with the business case. HR professionals and hiring managers who both 1) understand their business case and 2) ensure it is customized to fit the unique needs of their organization are better positioned to articulate their reasons to hire veteran and military job seekers and can subsequently strategically place the individuals within the organization who are positioned to make the hiring initiative a success for prospective employees and for the organization.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Veteran Recruiting and Onboarding Checklist

**When developing a program of HR practice to support the recruitment of veterans, consider the following:**

o  Secure executive-level support for the initiative.

o  Consider the most appropriate framework through which to organize the initiative within the HR structure of the firm. For example, depending on firm size, structure, diversity of business practice, etc., should the initiative be integrated into existing HR practice or a separate organization? Should the initiative fall inside or outside of diversity practice? Consider the pros and cons of these and other alternatives.

o  Create relationships with trade organizations and other industry collaborations focused on veteran employment. Examples include the Direct Employers Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Veteran Jobs Mission.

o  Participate in veteran-focused career fairs and hiring events when practical and appropriate.

o  Utilize existing veteran employees to help in recruitment efforts through formal referrals and mentoring of new veteran hires.

o  Develop educational programming, focused on hiring managers, emphasizing the firm-specific business case for hiring veterans.

o  Empower veteran employees and promote them within HR positions.

o  Create a military-specific recruitment website.

o  Develop and/or participate in industry-focused veteran initiatives, such as Troops to Energy Jobs, a pilot program developed by Dominion Resources Inc., or the Veterans on Wall Street (VOWS) program, founded by Citigroup.

o  Provide training and education about PTSD to all employees, including senior-level leadership and managers.

o  Engage in inter- and intra-industry collaboration to identify and utilize the most comprehensive resources in veteran recruiting and onboarding.

o  Collaborate and network with other companies across industry sectors to identify employment opportunities for veterans.

o  Utilize comprehensive military skills translators for more-effective placements within the company. Exercise caution that these tools are not used in isolation but instead as part of a broader set of metrics, positioned to identify links between a veteran's knowledge, skills, and abilities and a potential employment opportunity.

o  Provide "high-touch" support for veterans throughout the recruitment and onboarding process.

o  Capture data to aid in the measurement of process effectiveness and the relevance of veteran skills and talents, compared to career opportunities within the company.

o  Foster a veteran-engaged culture within the company, through programs and ceremonies that recognize the contributions of veterans and their families to the organization. Consider aligning with veteran organizations for awards and recognition.

o  Use social media to establish groups that discuss military and veteran experiences, open positions, mentoring, and more.

o  To the extent possible, leverage existing veteran employees in the firm's recruitment strategy and messaging.

o  To the extent possible, employ "high-touch" recruiting practices, positioned to confer insight into the potential link between a veteran's knowledge, skills, and abilities and the demands of the firm's unique work roles.

o  Reach out to universities and colleges and specifically ask career center managers to highlight student veterans seeking employment.

o  Provide paths for nontraditional veteran students into career hiring tracks, such as experiential learning and internship opportunities.

## Appendix 2: Training and Certification Checklist

**When developing a base of resources and programs to support the training and development of veterans in the workforce, consider the following:**

o   Develop a veteran's affinity group or similar network to provide a platform for veteran employees to interact with fellow veterans across disparate lines of business within the firm.

o   Consider rotational programs designed to assist veterans as they develop a holistic understanding of the firm and its mission, and to expose managers to veteran employees.

o   Many veterans are accustomed to hands-on training, so leverage opportunities for both on-the-job and classroom training.

o   Consider opportunities to leverage the GI Bill and other benefit programs afforded to veterans as a means to support additional training and professional development of veterans in the workforce.

o   Utilize veteran service organizations as a channel to coordinate internship opportunities for veterans.

o   Work with universities to adjust their careers websites, allow students to self-identify as veterans, and allow companies to add a veteran-preferred option on internship and job postings.

o   Promote internships, job shadowing, and site visits to better understand the opportunities that the company offers. Additionally, provide veterans with mentoring opportunities by veteran employees.

o   Share and leverage existing training programs with other firms and across industries.

o   Utilize programs and resources that are available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), such as the VA Work-Study Program and VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program, to support training opportunities for veterans.

o   Understand veteran apprenticeship opportunities afforded by the GI Bill.

o   Offer a variety of tools and resources, such as tuition reimbursement, self-study training modules, instructor-led classes, skills training programs, online learning opportunities, real-life work scenarios, and online simulations as opportunities for veterans to pursue advanced training and development.

# Appendix 3: Assimilation and Employee Assistance Checklist

**When developing a program of HR practice to support the assimilation of veterans in the work- force consider the following:**

o Develop and implement Career Watch programs, where veterans who are senior-level personnel serve as a mentor/sponsor and work with veterans who are junior-level personnel.

o Empower employees to leverage existing infrastructure and resources, focused on other employee populations, to support veteran employees.

o Train professionals within existing employee assistance programs (coaches, mentors, sponsors, counselors) on veteran-specific issues, such as deployment, PTSD, benefits, and others, to provide in-house veteran employee assistance services.

o Create position(s) that are military-specific, such as:

• Counselors with special training in veterans and military families' issues who can leverage existing resources such as the Veterans Health Initiative training program for clinicians within the VA, which provides useful study guides for non-VA providers, VA employees, veterans, and the public.

• Military relations managers, similar to a position created by Lockheed Martin, with the sole responsibility of helping those transitioning from the military to the company.

• Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) advisor, helping military employees to understand their eligibility, job entitlements, employer obligations, benefits, and remedies available to them under the act.

o Empower and support the creation of internal, military veteran networks and councils, which will provide mentoring and support for new veteran employees. Encourage these councils to connect and collaborate with other veteran networks, veteran service organizations, and other groups that provide added value to the veteran community.

o Develop an assistance program for National Guard and Reserve members and their families. This program should provide assistance and support during the time of deployment.

Note: Adapted from *Guide to Leading Policies, Practices & Resources: Supporting the Employment of Veterans and Military Families* by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families. Copyright 2013 by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University.

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**Deborah Bradbard, Ph.D.,** serves as a senior research associate at the IVMF, where she focuses on veteran and military spouse employment and military financial readiness and transition. Previously, she served as the director of research and policy at Blue Star Families and was one of the primary authors of the 2013 and 2014 Blue Star Families Annual Lifestyle survey, whose results have influenced policy on mental health, military spouse employment, and military child education. Her work on military families and military financial literacy has been cited by the White House, members of Congress, CNN, the Center for Deployment Psychology, and the Defense Center of Excellence. Dr. Bradbard frequently serves as a guest speaker for national conferences, educating providers, policymakers, and elected officials about the mental health needs of military families. Dr. Bradbard previously worked as a management consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton, providing subject matter expertise and developing hands-on products focused on a variety of military mental health issues, including PTSD, military sexual trauma, suicide, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury. Dr. Bradbard received her Ph.D. in counseling psychology from Auburn University.

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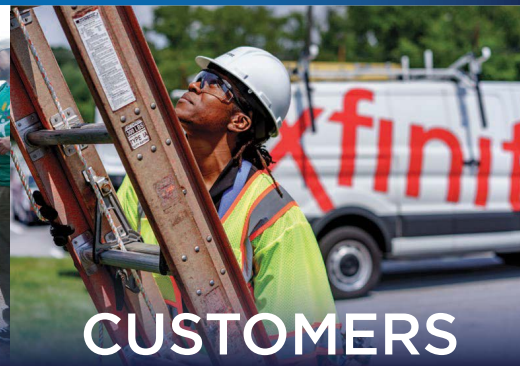
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