

Hiring veterans

How to tap into the growing labor pool of service members to benefit your business **Interviewed by Adam Burroughs**

A projected 175,000 service members will be exiting the military in the next year. When they return to civilian life, these young veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will face an unemployment rate of 23 percent, contributing greatly to the Department of Defense's annual unemployment compensation payments of more than \$900 million. However, at the same time, there are 1.7 million high-wage, high-demand jobs open in the U.S. today that match the skills of service members, representing more than \$136 billion in gross wages.

"Many service members do not fully grasp the value of their training and experience in the work force and end up underemployed or unemployed as they struggle to find work," says Laurie Bradley, president of ASG Renaissance.

Smart Business spoke with Bradley about how hiring veterans can benefit your business.

Why are veterans seemingly being overlooked in the marketplace?

Part of the reason is because it's very difficult to translate military experience into a civilian resume. For example, an infantryman with 20 years of experience in the Army might state on his resume that he 'operated weapons and tanks and dug ditches.' He needs to convey these skills in terminology recognized in the civilian world of work, such as 'supervised, trained and evaluated 35 personnel, and supported more than 2,500 troops in four countries. Core competencies include personnel management, logistics and operations.' This will help the reviewer match these skills to possible employment opportunities that may include logistics or personnel management.

Once you overcome the language barrier, you can recognize some of the softer skills people have learned in the military, for example, being entrepreneurial, which is crucial today. Service members understand how to be part of a team and have respect for a team, which can translate to any job. They also have cross-cultural work experience and have worked in very diverse environments, traits that many employers seek. The stereotype of service members just following orders and not thinking is outdated. It's a new military today that operates in ever-changing environments.

What are some industries that would benefit from veterans and their skills?

The skills of service members translate well into any industry. You want people who are



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not only able to learn a product or a service but also who have good communication skills and are adept at skills transfer. Our military really demands that people think on their feet and react very quickly, making the right choices in a very short timeframe. In the fast-paced business environment we all compete in today, that is a great attribute to have.

What are the benefits of hiring veterans from a marketing perspective?

The message of being a veteran-friendly environment is significant. Having a veteran-friendly message in your hiring materials helps improve a company's image, because you don't have to look far to find someone who is or who knows a soldier. It really supports a message of inclusion and speaks to the fact that a company has been thoughtful in its hiring process as it looks to source talent across a broad spectrum of potential candidates.

From a tax perspective, new rules provide for an expanded tax credit for employers that hire eligible unemployed veterans. The credit can be as high as \$9,600 per veteran for for-profit employers or up to \$6,240 per veteran for tax-exempt organizations.

To qualify, the employer must file a request with the local state agency for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. This applies for veterans hired on or after May 22, 2012, and before Jan. 1, 2013.

Laurie Bradley is president of ASG Renaissance. Reach her at (248) 477-5321 or lbradley@asgren.com.

How can companies better integrate veterans into their businesses?

Start with a great outreach program. Be clear in your hiring message and have the ability to translate military resumes to determine if you have a fit. Companies should consider installing a customized onboarding program that includes a partner or coach to help the new hire navigate the civilian employment world.

The program should be sensitive to the varying needs of veterans, including those who have only been out of the service for a few months, or ones who have been back in the market for a year or more. In general, it's important to make sure your onboarding process includes cultural acclimatization to the civilian work force. Civilian corporate culture is not as black and white as the military and language and communication styles differ. Former military personnel can be formal and direct, whereas civilian communication styles can be much more nuanced. The U.S. military has a top-down system for making decisions, while many civilian companies have a more bureaucratic process.

Where can companies find veterans?

There are job boards and employment services that cater to military personnel in transition, such as Hire A Hero, careeronestop.org, or contact your State's Director for Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET).

Are there reasons a company might not hire a veteran?

Concerns range from post-traumatic stress syndrome to skills transfer and the gap between military and civilian work styles. Some employers are uncertain how to provide work site accommodations for those with physical injuries, but there are a host of resources to navigate these concerns.

Just as with civilians, you have to evaluate each person on a case-by-case basis. Employers need to spend the time in the hiring process to determine if there is a fit.

If you know that there is a pool of talent that has the skills to do the job, why wouldn't you consider putting that to work? Those who served our country are ready to transition those skills and dedication to service into the civilian world of work. Ultimately this translates into a win for both the employer and the veteran. <<

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