

Military Employment Article

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WHY COMPANIES SHOULD HIRE VETERANS

"Military Candidates Should NOT be Expensive to Employers"

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CEO OF VETJOBS.ORG EXPLAINS WHY COMPANIES SHOULD HIRE VETERANS

By Matt Gonzales October 31, 2022

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Veterans Day, observed on Nov. 11, is a celebration to honor America's veterans for their willingness to serve and sacrifice to protect the United States and its freedoms.

But retired Rear Admiral Dan Kloeppe, founder and chief executive officer of veteran jobs boards VetJobs.org and MilitarySpouseJobs.org, says one of the best ways to honor former servicepeople is to hire them.

While veterans have historically had trouble securing employment, that tide is beginning to turn: Just 2.7 percent of veterans were unemployed in September 2022, according to the Department of Labor. That is down from 3.7 percent the same time last year.

Kloeppe, who retired from the U.S. Navy in 2004, praised organizations for their willingness to hire veterans. However, he says that some employers still harbor misconceptions about them that keep some former military personnel from finding jobs.

SHRM Online: Going from military service to the private sector is a big transition. What kinds of questions must veterans ask themselves upon leaving the service? And what kinds of obstacles do they face?

Kloeppe: Veterans endure obstacles before they even look for a job. A major obstacle for anyone leaving active duty is that they must decide where they want to live. Do they want to stay at the location where they were last stationed? Or do they want to return to their hometown? That is a big decision.

For instance, let's say you want to stay in San Diego. You have a house, and your kids go to a good school. But San Diego has a ton of veterans and finding a good job is really competitive. Picking a location where there is already a large number of veterans and the unemployment rate is high can be hard for you. So, there are a myriad of location questions that must be decided around the kitchen table.

Secondly, they must decide what field they want to be in. Will they choose the field that they served in the military? If they didn't like that particular job, do they choose something else when they enter the corporate world? That is a major decision and making that decision is time-consuming. Many folks don't make that decision until it's time to leave the service, which is a little late. They've got to think about that before they get out of the military.



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SHRM Online: Many veterans lack a college degree. Is that another obstacle they must combat to secure employment?

Kloeppel: Yes, one of the impediments that veterans face when looking for a job is their lack of a degree. But over the last few years, more and more servicemen and servicewomen are getting degrees. If you come out of military today, you probably do have a degree.

In the corporate world, in the last three years, that requirement of a candidate holding a degree is starting to diminish. A lot of companies now are taking that degree requirement out of job description in exchange for skill sets. That is an advantage for veterans who might not have a degree.

It can also be a difficult transition for a youngster who had deployed a lot. They might have entered the National Guard out of high school, when they were 18 or 19, and then went right into training and then to deployment. Then, when they return home, they train and leave on another deployment, and so on and so forth.

Then, the next thing you know, they're ready to get out [of the service], but they don't know anything except for what they learned in high school and going to war. They probably didn't even have a summer job. Their experience with corporate America is minimal. Veterans learn a language in the military, but corporate America has its own language. They must adapt to this new language.

Once they decide, now what kind of education, training or certifications do they need to get a good job in that field? One of the things we do at VetJobs and MilitarySpouseJobs is we have career specialists who help them make those decisions. What kind of field do you want to be in? What kinds of certifications do you have? We help them get what they need to find a job in that field.

I think having a mentor is important in anything you do, in any industry. We have mentors that talk people through the various jobs that are out there, whether it is in tech, cyber or manufacturing. It helps that someone talks them through it, what they like, what they don't like. Leaning on mentor support is critical for any veteran entering the corporate world.



SHRM Online: Are there any negative stereotypes associated with veterans in the context of the workplace?

Kloeppel: One stereotype that I ran into more when we were fighting in Iraq and dealing with IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and brain injuries: Companies were worried about the effects that IEDs might have on the brain. PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] is another big one.

But, let me tell you, I have a nephew who is an avid bike rider. He goes on races all the time. And he's experienced accidents on bikes that cause brain injuries and have given him similar episodes that PTSD does. Many bikers were never in military. And turns out, statistically, more youngsters and adults have brain injuries in bike crashes than in combat. But employers never ask if you've been in a bike accident. If you're worried about brain injuries or PTSD in vets, then that is misguided.

There's also a worry that the folks will have a hard time adapting to being back from deploying. But that is not as big a factor for a lot of veterans. Military folks move around often enough that they figure out how to adapt. Every unit is different, every commanding officer is different. They know how to adapt.

SHRM Online: What should employers know about veterans?

Kloeppel: I'd go back to that adaptability piece. Companies must know that veterans are adaptable. That is one of their greatest strengths, and it shouldn't be an area of concern. They also have tremendous soft skills that they gained from the military, like loyalty, integrity and honesty. Being able to pass a drug test. Showing up to work on time. Veterans tend to stay in jobs longer. They tend to progress up the ladder faster. They seem to try harder.

People of color who are veterans are particularly used to doing these things in the military to succeed. The Department of Defense led the way in having a diverse workforce. For veterans of color to succeed early in their career, they had to work harder to do it. When they come out in corporate world, they are used to it. I see them working harder and, as a result, succeed faster.



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SHRM Online: In what ways can employers support veterans?

Kloepfel: If you've hired veterans, it's prudent to have an employee support group for them. It should be made up of not just other veterans, but also civilians who want to create a better environment for vets. Companies who do that well have better retention rates and success rates than those who do not have such groups. And the veteran is just happier. They'll adapt quicker and work up the ladder quicker.

Some of things we've found that are problems: Companies oftentimes don't take time to build job requirements. They are not necessarily written by the person who needs that skill set. These veterans go into an interview and find out that the person hiring them is looking for something totally different than the job requirement suggests. That makes them not ready for the interview. Companies need to flesh out those requirements and ensure they're accurate.

Another thing they'll do is put in a higher salary offer in job requirement, and when they get in the interview, they talk about a lower salary. That is just being unethical. We try to help companies adapt their methodology to make sure they're giving a veteran a proper chance to get a job at good salary.

I've been supporting veterans through our companies since 2013. I remember numerous conversations where I had to talk other companies into the goodness of hiring vets. Lately, I think partly because of unfilled jobs, I have more companies calling me and saying, "We are so happy with the six vets you gave us last month; can we have 10 more?" That makes me happy because it proves the value of veterans in corporate America.