

Business Initiatives Help Veterans Find Jobs

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Servicemen and women separating from the military often find themselves in the daunting cycle of job hunting. Many find it difficult to translate their military skills into the civilian market, while others are stonewalled by employers unsure of what to do with vets.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual jobless rate for Afghanistan and Iraq War-era vets during 2012 was 9.9%. But there is good news. According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University, there is an estimated 600,000 advanced manufacturing jobs unfilled in the U.S. More than 82% of manufacturers report they cannot find people to fill their skilled production jobs. Furthermore, up to 2.5 million manufacturing jobs will open up within five years as older workers retire.

Mike Haynie, executive director and founder of IVMF, says that by 2020, the industry will need 10 million more new skilled workers.

In an effort to match veterans military skills with civilian jobs in manufacturing, four companies partnered with the Manufacturing Institute—a non-profit branch of the National Association of Manufacturers.

Alcoa, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and General Electric are pooling their resources to help 15,000 vets transition to manufacturing careers.

Combined, these four companies currently employ about 64,000 veterans.

Rick Stephens, a Boeing senior vice president and Marine Corps vet, said that Boeing has hired 3,000 veterans in the past two years (2011-12) using many of the same tools as this program.

"We believe this initiative could have a major impact on the hiring of veterans nationwide," Stephens said. "It's a proven approach for matching the skills of those who have served our country to the hiring needs of American businesses."

Known as *Get Skills to Work*, this program has three main components:

- **Accelerated skills training** prepares veterans whose military service doesn't immediately qualify them for available manufacturing jobs.

Through the Manufacturing Institute's *Right Skills Now* program, training sites will open across the U.S. in 2013. The first class of veterans was enrolled in January at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College.

"Working with our partners, we will help create real opportunities for veterans to get the skills they need to access in-demand manufacturing jobs,"

said Jennifer McNelly, president of the Manufacturing Institute.

- **Translating military experience** into civilian opportunities is made possible by a digital badge system supported by the U.S. Manufacturing Pipeline. This centralized online hub connects manufacturing employers with veterans based on one's military occupational specialty, as well as personality traits and work habits.

- **Creating awareness for employers** who want to hire veterans is done through the use of a toolkit, developed in part by IVMF. Employers will be provided with proven practices from more than 40 businesses that are skilled at recruiting, hiring and mentoring vets in the workforce.

"Veterans offer the technical, leadership and critical thinking skills that advanced manufacturing demands," said Paula Davis, president of the Alcoa Foundation. "Forming the *Get Skills to Work* coalition and coordinating with nonprofits to train, recruit and develop veterans is an exciting model that has the potential to change lives."

Visit www.GetSkillstoWork.org for more information.

And this is just one program under way to help veterans land on their feet in the civilian world.

Rail Industry Seeks Vets

According to the Association of American Railroads (AAR), some 500 companies and organizations in the railroad industry sought to hire about 5,000 veterans in 2012. These companies include freight, inter-city passenger and commuter railroads, as well as rail supply companies. As a growing number of current railroad employees look toward retirement, the number of job openings will begin to rise in future years.

"Today, roughly 23% of the railroad workforce is eligible to retire by 2015," Ed Hamberger, president of the AAR, said.

Ray LaHood, former U.S. Department of Transportation secretary, said that one quarter of the industry's current employees is veterans.

"Our veterans have the skills and real-life experiences that we need to help rebuild America," he told CNN last year.

LaHood highlighted the overlap in personal traits and skill sets of railroad employees with military servicemen and women. He added that veterans have "disciplined" backgrounds, with special capabilities and qualities that are uniquely suited to help keep freight railroads efficient and safe.

"It's a great mesh of their characteristics and leadership learned in the armed forces," Hamberger said. "It's a win-win."

In 2012, Norfolk Southern was named one of the most valuable employers for discharged military personnel by *CivilianJobs.com*. Throughout the past six years, the company has hired more than 1,300 veterans. Today, about 14%—or 4,260—of the total Norfolk Southern employees are veterans. The company also launched www.NorfolkSouthern-veterans.jobs, which allows veterans to search for railroad employment opportunities using their military job titles.

To find out what job in the railroad industry is best suited for you or someone you know, check out the AAR's military skills translator at www.aar.org/jobs/Document/SkillTranslator.pdf. Veterans also can visit the Veterans Transportation Career Center sponsored by VA and the Department of Transportation at www.dot.gov/veterantransportationcareers.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

85,000 Hired in One Year

Sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *Hiring Our Heroes* has coordinated an ongoing series of job fairs since March 2011. Some 400 job fairs have occurred in two years. Each is focused on helping veterans and their spouses find work.

Thomas J. Donohue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, says that military veterans make the best employees.

"Veterans learn how to lead and be led," he said. "They learn how to deal with difficulties."

Through the job fairs, more than 14,000 vets and spouses have landed jobs.

The program went one step further and launched the *Hiring 500,000 Heroes* campaign to engage the business community in committing to hire 500,000 veterans and military spouses by the end of 2014. Thus far, more than 800 businesses of all sizes have pledged to hire 182,000 veterans toward this goal, with 85,000 hired since March 2012.

For a list of upcoming job fairs, visit www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes.

Wal-Mart to Hire More than 100,000 Vets

In January, Wal-Mart announced a plan to hire "every veteran who wants a job," as long as the veteran has left the military in the previous year and has an honorable discharge.

The program, which officially begins on Memorial Day, May 27, should see the hiring of 100,000 veterans in the next five years, the length of the commitment.

"Let's be clear: Hiring a veteran can be one of the best decisions any of us can make," William Simon, the president and CEO of Wal-Mart U.S. said. "These are leaders with discipline training and a passion for service."

Currently, about 100,000 of the company's 1.4 million employees in the United States are veterans.

The nation's largest private employer, Wal-Mart is not guaranteeing full-time employment to every eligible veteran. But at the very least, part-time, according to Gary Profit, a retired Army brigadier general who is senior director of Wal-Mart's military programs.

"If you're a veteran and you want a job in the retail industry, you have a place at Wal-Mart," he said.

Franchises Offer Veterans a Break

Operation Enduring Opportunity, sponsored by the International Franchise Association, aims to get vets jobs and into franchisee ownership. Specifically, 75,000 spots are available for veterans and military spouses and another 5,000 for disabled vets by 2014.

Since the program's November 2011 inception, some 64,000 vets and spouses have found careers in franchising, including 4,300 new franchisees.

Charlie Hall, owner of Mr. Rooter Plumbing in southern Colorado, found that hiring a veteran is beneficial to his franchise. In 2011, he hired Brandon Scherer, a wounded Afghanistan veteran.

"He's good with orders," Hall said. "He takes them and follows them to the end. He's doing well, and his injuries don't affect the job too much."

A study for the franchise association's educational foundation found that one out of every seven U.S. franchises is owned by a veteran. More than 66,000 veteran-owned franchise businesses in the U.S. provide jobs directly for 815,000 Americans, the study concluded.

Visit www.vetfran.com for a complete list of participating franchises and for more information on how they can help veterans find employment in a variety of industries. Some franchises waive licensing fees or offer discounts for veterans, as well.

Debunking Employer Fears

Last November, the Army's Warrior Transition Command (WTC) partnered with the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and Orion International to launch the *Hire a Veteran* campaign.

This initiative is for employers who are trying to find veterans, as well as what their legal responsibilities might be under the *Americans with Disabilities Act*.

According to a survey conducted by SHRM, 52% of employers say veterans are likely to struggle with the "transition from the structured and hierarchical culture in the military to a civilian work environment."

The survey further found that 43% of employers say post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are potential challenges when hiring people with military experience.

"We've realized that we need to help prepare employers and HR professionals and ensure that their concerns aren't a deterrent to employing these great veterans," Brig. Gen. David Bishop, commander of the WTC, told *Army Times*.

This initiative includes a 10-minute video for human resources professionals and employers and an online toolkit available for download at www.WTC.Army.mil.

Success stories of soldiers who recovered in Warrior Transition Battalions (WTB) and went on to find success in the civilian world are included as well.

One such story is that of Paul Roberts, who suffered second- and third-degree burns and TBI while in Afghanistan. While in a WTB, he prepared his resume and landed an internship with the Drug Enforcement Agency before getting a job offer from the FBI.

"The internship with the DEA taught me that even though I'm a little bit slower, I'm still a valued part of the team," Roberts told *Army News Service*. "My experience in the Army is what makes me valuable, and I still have the ability and desire to learn."

Jeff Pon, the SHRM chief strategy officer, said there are a lot of misconceptions regarding veterans in the civilian workforce, and he hopes this campaign can rectify some of those notions.

"The first step for employers is to understand that not all vets need accommodations, and if they do need accommodations, sometimes it is easily made," Pon told *Army Times*. "PTSD is severe in some and not so severe in others."

With 1 million personnel expected to transition from the military to civilian life in the next

five years, it's safe to say that these initiatives and others will continue to expand.