

My View: Why veterans should be considered your ultimate human resource



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IMAGE PROVIDED BY GETTY IMAGES (DANIELBENDJY)

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Most employers would agree that military veterans are on-time, productive, adaptable leaders and team players who strengthen their workforce. More employers are purposefully hiring veterans because the business case is well understood. According to the Society of Human Resource Management Foundation:

- 91% of employers say veterans have the same or higher retention rates as civilians
- 68% of employers feel veterans perform “better than,” if not “much better than” their civilian peers

- 65% of veterans have some college education, or higher, making Veterans more educated than their non-Veteran counterparts.

Department of Labor officials report that the total number of veterans looking for work is at historic lows. For nine consecutive months last year, veteran unemployment rates were below 3%. This is a result of many factors, in particular, veteran-hiring promotion efforts of nonprofit organizations, employer-led coalitions, private firms and Department of Defense programs. Leading examples of organizations that successfully connect veterans with job opportunities include the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, Hiring our Heroes, JP Morgan Chase's Veteran Jobs Mission Coalition, 50strong and DoD's SkillBridge. In addition, industry-specific programs including Helmets to Hardhats, Troops into Transportation and the Microsoft Software and Systems Academy offer veterans apprenticeships and other on-the-job training.

Unfortunately, veteran underemployment is unrelenting, with a rate 15.6% higher than nonveteran job seekers. Upwards of 30% to 45% of Veterans are underemployed, working in jobs inconsistent with their experience, training, or economic needs, leaving them feeling like they're not meeting their full potential or struggling to make ends meet.

The main causes of Veteran underemployment include:

- Veterans taking less-than-optimal employment due to inadequate preparation for the civilian career search coupled with the need to replace income immediately after separating from military service
- Employers' limited ability to translate and apply military job skills to civilian occupations
- Over half of human resource professionals needing training in veteran hiring
- Misunderstandings and missed potentials due to vast differences in military and civilian culture.

Use these strategies reduce at your business or nonprofit to alleviate veteran underemployment:

- Get to know veteran employees as individuals, identify how to support them and do it.
- Implement company-wide military culture training.
- Use military skills translators to anticipate and facilitate reaching the potential of veteran employees.
- Offer high-touch onboarding, professional development, coaching and career advancement pathways.
- Select a military and civilian mentor to support new veteran hires.
- Provide opportunities for camaraderie, peer mentoring and community outreach through Veteran Employee Resource Groups or similar workforce committee.

- If you are a member of a chamber of commerce, create a job shadow program to familiarize local transitioning military with civilian career options.

Veteran underemployment is, pure and simple, a missed opportunity for the employee and business. When companies misalign hiring with the development goals of their veteran employees, they often resign. Replacing this talent takes time, is costly and can be frustrating. Instead, consider adopting these strategies to fully employ Veteran employees. The results will be improved morale, increased retention, reduced turnover and a stronger workforce.

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