

The Best Way to Honor Veterans Is to Hire One



Hiring veterans and helping them acquire the skills they need to accelerate their careers is patriotic and smart business.

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U.S. military veterans, transitioning service members and their families represent an essential part of today's multi-generational workforce, and we are eternally grateful for their service and selflessness. Veterans add unique value to today's workforce because they embody disciplined leadership, maturity and unwavering loyalty to the pursuit of excellence in their personal and professional lives.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, each year, roughly 200,000 men and women transition out of the

military and face the challenges of translating their military experience into civilian careers. The good news is that the annual veteran unemployment rate dipped to 3.5 percent in 2018, the lowest level since 2000, and is currently at 3.2 percent in September, but the bad news is the quality of the jobs doesn't often match the veteran's qualifications. According to a member survey conducted by the IAVA, 37 percent of respondents felt underemployed. Too often, highly skilled veterans are slotted into simpler roles or trade professions even though they could operate at a higher level with proper training. To help reduce the rate of underemployment among veterans, organizations must make a concerted effort to hire, upskill and reskill veterans to fully maximize the potential of these valuable resources.

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There are several successful initiatives in place that demonstrate a corporate commitment to veteran success. GE, in particular, has a long history of hiring veterans and enriching their professional lives through the GE Veteran Network, established in 2009. In addition, 23 years ago GE created the Junior Officer Leadership Program (JOLP), a leadership accelerator program that recognizes the high potential of military officers to become senior leaders within GE. Through the program, officers work in three eight-month rotations with a GE business. Participants are offered business-specific courses, mentoring and coaching. On average, JOLP participants have 9 years of military leadership experience and led an average of 84 people during their military service. Meanwhile, 75 percent of participants have obtained, or are pursuing, graduate degrees while 25 percent are still active in the Guard or Reserve. GE currently employs about 9,000 U.S. veterans, which means about one in every 13 U.S. employees at GE is a veteran.

Another exemplary program is the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. IVMF delivers

unique and innovative programs that focus on career and employment preparation and entrepreneurship education and training to veterans, transitioning active duty service members, National Guard/Reservists and all military spouses. To help learners prepare for an industry certification exam that they are pursuing, Syracuse partnered with Skillsoft to curate an extensive eLearning library complete with online courses, practice tests, supplemental resources and targeted mentorship tools aligned with more than 30 predefined learning pathways.

While many military-connected learners have foundational experience in HR, project management or IT as part of a previous role or time in service, the program helps its learners gain certifications to remain competitive as civilian employees. To date, more than 23,000 military-connected learners have completed 27,000 courses and earned more than 2,100 industry certifications through the partnership. Additionally, the program provides direct connections to more than 1,000 employer partners looking to hire veteran and military spouse talent and has assisted more than 16,000 of its current learners and alumni in gaining meaningful employment or enhancing their current employment through the completion of online training.

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Similarly, USO Pathfinder provides holistic transition assistance to active duty service members from one year prior to, and one year following, their transition from military to civilian life. The program also provides support for the military spouse, at any given point during the service member's career, to help as they transition to new duty stations and communities and establish new professional and personal networks. Through the creation of an individualized action plan, USO Pathfinder Scouts collaborate with individuals to identify their personal and professional goals

and build a roadmap to achieving those goals, identifying services and resources that are the best fit for their needs and geographic location. The USO Pathfinder program delivers digital and on-demand learning tools, in-person support and works with strategic partners to connect service members and military spouses to resources within these focus areas: employment; education; financial readiness; veterans' benefits; housing; legal; family strength and wellness and volunteerism.

One of the platforms used within the USO Pathfinder program is Skillsoft's Percipio. With this intelligent learning experience platform, the USO has the opportunity to connect 100,000 service members and spouses with valuable training resources, all free of charge. USO Pathfinder has served more than 33,000 individuals with an individualized action plan since program inception.

And as digital transformation continues to reshape industries everywhere, there is a huge opportunity for veterans and businesses alike to embrace technological change. For instance, data science is an area that is experiencing massive growth – Bloomberg estimates that job postings for data scientists rose 75 percent from 2015 to 2018. As organizations urgently seek to fill high-growth roles in technology and developers, they would be smart to develop on-the-job training programs geared toward upskilling our nation's veterans.

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Within your organization, it is important to remember that veterans have been responsible for the lives, safety and performance of dozens to thousands of people, so you know they can deliver on challenging assignments and handle the pressure of being held accountable. Additionally, many veterans have strong leadership and managerial skills as they tend to be given more fiscal and people management responsibilities at

younger ages than most civilian workers.

Whether building a network internally or helping direct veterans to outside resources, organizations that provide these career skills programs will be able to more effectively attract, retain and grow their veteran networks. By offering access to meaningful and impactful learning programs that promote career training, professional certifications and job placement support, veterans will have the skills needed to excel in the civilian workforce, contributing to the overall success of the organizations that employ them.

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