

Veterans Transitioning into the Civilian Workplace

In some industries, ex-military employees are transitioning into the civilian workplace in increasing numbers. Government contractors hire many veterans and the organizational culture often reflects some components of the military culture. These veterans are often retired and bring a lifetime of military bearing and culture to the workplace.

With many young adults leaving the military, a larger segment of industries are hiring veterans. This group offers employers a wide array of skills along with the dedication, commitment and focus of military life. Some unique skills veterans bring to the workplace may include;

- Working well in teams
- Sense of duty translates to responsibility and accountability to complete the job
- Self confidence and strong work ethic
- Follow through on assignments despite difficult circumstances
- Follow rules and schedules
- Quick problem solving and adaptability to changing situations
- Cross functional skills and coordinating with teams to solve problems

With all the skills veterans bring to the workforce it helps employers to understand the military experience as these men and women make the transition to a civilian workplace. The military experience is hierarchical and structured with clear delineations of responsibility by rank. The military chain of command is the system for accomplishing assignments and one does not circumvent this structure. Military leadership values directness and simplicity in the way orders are given. The military is mission oriented and veterans often display commitment to the mission and put the unit mission above the needs of the individual.

Some adjustments in the workplace can facilitate a successful transition to the civilian workforce. It is useful for managers to have a good understanding of military life, culture and norms. An adjustment in management style can smooth the transition of veterans and employees who value more structure may also benefit. Some of the following may ease the transition and are all good business practice;

- Be clear and direct in all communications
- Identify the "mission" the goals and objectives of the organization
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of the individual
- Be clear and direct about evaluation standards and promotional opportunities
- Be timely and direct with evaluations
- Mirror military learning by providing opportunities to observe the skills to be learned and providing feedback to the veteran employee learning the skill
- Mentor programs to veterans in transition

These ideas just scratch the surface and your EAP is a valuable tool to help the organization, managers and individuals in the transition process. The VA also provides great information and resources at <http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/>.



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