



Overcoming Internal Obstacles to Veteran Hiring

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Leading-edge enterprise companies need to hire talent with technical acumen and elite leadership capabilities that is ready to hit the ground running. Increasingly, these organizations are turning to military veterans to fill key leadership positions. Hiring veterans is not just a patriotic decision; it's a smart business decision, too. When companies hire veterans, they hire experienced leaders with a relentless drive to achieve, unprecedented composure under pressure, and the ultimate team player mentality. This powerful combination makes veterans the ideal hires for corporate America. Yet for some companies, a disconnect remains. These companies understand the value of veteran talent, but internal obstacles are hindering their ability to capitalize on this rich talent pool. While much research focuses on veteran hiring benefits, less work has focused on how companies can successfully manage this hiring process. This white paper draws on best practice findings and presents a clear roadmap to overcome internal hiring obstacles.

Veteran Employment: Behind the Numbers

In 2013, the unemployment rate for veterans who had served since 9/11 stood at 10 percent, with an estimated 246,000 veterans out of work. Even after adjusting for age and demographic factors, this jobless rate was still higher than for non-veterans. A [2013 White House report](#) found that veterans were struggling to obtain private sector recognition for their service experience and translate military accomplishments to their civilian resumes.

In response to these challenges, private companies joined with government initiatives and veteran organizations to address this challenge. From the Veterans Jobs Mission to the White House-led Joining Forces initiative, the public and private sector stepped up to the plate, recognizing both a moral obligation to help and understanding that hiring veterans is simply smart business. Led by JP Morgan Chase, the [Veterans Jobs Mission](#) has grown from 11 founding members to include more than 230 private-sector companies that represent virtually every industry in the U.S. economy. The Veteran Jobs Mission coalition members have collectively hired more than 400,000 Veterans with a goal to hire one million by 2020.

Thanks in part to these initiatives veteran unemployment has fallen to historic lows. The [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reports unemployment stood at just 2.7 percent in October 2017, the lowest level since 2001. Companies today are ready and willing to hire veterans. The challenge now is now *how* to go about this hiring process.



Bridging Internal Obstacles to Veteran Hiring: How Your Company Can Hire Top Veteran Talent

Challenge 1: Translating Military Experience to Civilian Skills.

Hiring managers understand that veterans are leadership ready. They know that hiring a veteran is like hiring an athlete who is bright, hungry, and capable. Where hiring managers may struggle, however, is with understanding the direct applications of military training to civilian jobs. While some military skill sets, such as IT and technical maintenance, have obvious applications in the private sector, other skills gained during service can be more difficult for prospective employers to fully appreciate in the context of civilian applications.

Additionally, many military jobs involve responsibilities that aren't reflected in their official title, like logistics or project management. Whether it's moving supplies through hostile territory or leading a combat mission, veterans know how to build, motivate and mobilize teams that deliver results. The problem is that their resumes do not always reflect this experience in clear terms that hiring managers can understand. It may not be immediately evident when reviewing a veteran resume how this experience will translate to the workplace.

The Solution: Look Beyond Titles and Consider Intangible Skills

Thanks to recent veteran outreach initiatives, transitioning veterans increasingly understand the importance of translating their military experience into civilian-friendly resume terms. In fact, one out of five veterans confesses to needing "a lot" of help with job search basics like resume writing, according to a [Prudential](#) study.

As a hiring manager, you can help support this process by looking beyond job titles and considering the intangible skills involved in day-to-day tasks. If your company uses an automated resume submission process that scans for specific keywords, you may be overlooking qualified talent. Consider offering veterans a separate online portal for resume submission so you can give their resumes a closer read. During the interview process, ask questions that dig deeper into their experiences and leadership potential. Finally, you may also wish to work with a military transition recruiter who can help translate military skills into their civilian applications, matching your company with proven leadership talent.

Challenge 2: Overcoming Misconceptions About Veteran Aptitude.

Military culture has long been synonymous with duty, honor, directness, and discipline. Unfortunately, some of these traits also have negative connotations in today's corporate world. Enterprise companies increasingly recruit employees based on their potential for innovation, creativity, and out-of-the-box thinking. There's a concern that if veterans are used to taking orders and following protocol, they may be hindered by a rigid way of thinking. Can they improvise and solve problems when no protocol exists?

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As companies who have hired military talent can attest, veterans are adept at bringing a high level of maturity and insight to strategic decision-making, whether or not clear company protocol is in place. Veterans are used to performing under pressure, quickly prioritizing information, rapidly assessing options, and taking immediate, strategic action. Years of military training have instilled in them an innate ability to be assigned a task and execute this task with minimum to no guidance. When there is no clear precedent or path forward, veterans make one.

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Addressing this misconception is important because it's indicative of a larger problem. Less than 1 percent of the U.S. population has served on active duty in the past decade. "There's a lack of understanding of the breadth of occupations and jobs that people hold in the military," says James Schmeling, managing director and co-founder of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University in an interview with [The Atlantic](#). If your hiring manager or company leadership has limited or no military experience, it's easy to fall victim to veteran aptitude misconceptions.

The Solution: Internal Education Initiatives to Combat Misconceptions and Support Transition

Internal company education initiatives focused on how veterans skills and experience translate to the workplace can help counter these misconceptions. It's not enough to just educate hiring managers; consider the different stakeholders who are involved in each stage of the hiring process. The [Veteran Jobs Mission](#) curates resources designed to help enterprise companies and small businesses improve their recruitment, hiring and retention process.

If you are concerned about a candidate's aptitude for problem-solving or change management, ask questions during the interview that are problem-oriented. For example, pose a problem and see how the candidate reacts. Excellent candidates – regardless of their military background – are those who respond using the STAR format (situation, tasks, action, and results) to assess and respond to the hypothetical problem.

Challenge 3: Sourcing the Right Talent.

With veteran unemployment rates falling to an historic low, sourcing the right veteran talent to match your company's current hiring needs can be tricky. Currently, companies identify prospective veteran employees through a variety of avenues, including job fairs, online job board postings, and referrals from other veterans. Unfortunately, these passive approaches are inadequate for making immediate leadership hires.

Online postings rely on veterans to find your company and contact you. You may have to sort through hundreds of resumes to find the hidden gems or risk an automated resume system overlooking an ideal applicant because the veteran's resume fails to translate his military experience into civilian terms. A job fair can also be hit or miss: you hope for the best but oftentimes end up with whatever walks through the door. And while word-of-mouth referral from other veterans can be helpful, a veteran's contact pool may be misaligned with your company's current needs.



The Solution: Attend a Military Hiring Conference and Partner with Specialized Recruiters

A military hiring conference is a cost-effective, time-efficient method to interview qualified veteran candidates who are pre-qualified for your open positions. Prior to the hiring conference, experienced military transition recruiters will pre-qualify candidates based on a company's current opportunities, including location, position and pay range. Your team then gets an entire day of face-to-face interviews with these candidates— all carefully vetted to match your specific hiring needs.

Depending on the urgency of your hiring needs, specialized recruiter partnerships can also be beneficial. Military transition recruiters represent the absolute best in technical skills and elite leadership, including Junior Military Officers, Senior Military Officers, and Non-Commissioned Officers. Military transition recruiters have a deep base of contacts. They're often in touch with officers up to six months before they officially transition to veteran status. This allows recruiters to quickly source “impossible-to-find” leaders, providing companies with a curated candidate list in just 48 hours.

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Experienced military transition recruiters follow a consultative approach that includes a comprehensive needs assessment. Recruiters will look beyond the immediate open position and consider your company's long-term strategy within the marketplace. What type of leadership is necessary for your business to capitalize on opportunities and protect against emerging threats? From pre-qualifying candidates to assisting with salary negotiations, a military transition recruiter can serve as a valuable ally and streamline the hiring process for your company.

Next Steps: Retaining and Cultivating Veteran Leaders

In addition to dedicated recruiting efforts, onboarding and retention initiatives are critical to optimizing veteran leadership potential. Evidence from [Veteran Jobs Mission Coalition member organizations](#) indicates that implementing and aligning retention strategies with recruitment initiatives positively benefits veteran employees and companies as a whole. Successful retention efforts may include employee education programs about military experience and programs for veterans with Reserve or National Guard obligations. Enhanced performance feedback programs can guide leadership development. Pair new veteran hires with mentors who will help them acclimate to company culture and further cultivate their leadership skills.

Each year, between 240,000 and 360,000 [veterans separate from the military](#). Do not let internal hiring obstacles prevent your business from accessing this rich talent pool. As veteran talent continues to be in high demand, companies are moving fast to hire these natural leaders. Companies must proactively address these internal challenges or risk missing out on this rich leadership pool.