



# An employer's guide to hiring and supporting veterans



Tens of thousands of troops have returned to the United States in the past several years after serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere overseas. As they re-enter civilian life, large numbers of these men and women are seeking employment, starting new jobs or returning to their previous employers.

Employers, in turn, are looking to hire returning veterans. Starbucks, for example, has hired more than 1,000 vets and their spouses from 48 states in the past year, and pledged to hire 9,000 more over the next few years. Salesforce.com recently urged 500 corporations to hire veterans.

Companies hiring vets face a unique challenge — how to help them successfully reintegrate into the civilian workforce. This paper examines why employers should consider hiring veterans, how to help them make a smooth transition, and how to assist veterans who may be facing challenges at work or home.

## Hiring vets is smart business practice

Some companies recruit military vets out of patriotism — recognizing the sacrifice made by those who served our country. Beyond that, there are many solid reasons to hire military veterans:

- **Diligence** — They tend to have a strong work ethic, deep sense of mission, ability to work under pressure, and commitment to meeting deadlines.
- **Leadership** — Even the most junior veterans have had leadership training and opportunities to hone their leadership skills.
- **Flexibility** — Vets are used to work environments where, at a moment's notice, they may be directed to a different assignment and location, sometimes under arduous conditions.
- **Teamwork** — As soldiers and sailors, they depended on each other to complete a task. After all, nobody runs a command center or pilots a jet fighter without the support of others.
- **Technical experience** — Many vets possess valued technical and security-based professional expertise — skills that are particularly desirable to employers such as defense contractors and government agencies.

Uber, the ridesharing startup, says it plans to heavily recruit on military bases. According to Emil Michael, an Uber senior vice president, vets who already drive for the company are highly rated by customers. "They're more disciplined, more curious, and drive longer hours. Our approach is to be responsible and take advantage of additional skills that military members bring to bear," he said.<sup>1</sup>

Here's why Starbucks Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Howard Schultz advocates hiring veterans: "The level of integrity, ethics, leadership skills, and value they bring to our society and our company is unparalleled. The veterans and military spouses we've hired have made us a stronger organization, and partners (employees) tell me they are so proud to work alongside a veteran. I hope we exceed 10,000 hires."<sup>2</sup>

Returning veterans also bring something else to the workplace. They tend to come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, which, in turn, creates greater workforce diversity and a broader set of viewpoints among employees.

Employers who hire veterans may be eligible to receive tax incentives or other forms of financial assistance. The U.S. Department of Labor offers Work Opportunity Tax Credits, and salary subsidies and training cost reimbursements may be available through the U.S. Veterans Benefits Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program.

## Corporate environment: Strange new world

Employers should understand that returning veterans may find the corporate workplace very different from what they are used to. For many, it is somewhat mysterious, if not frustrating.

The military has a clear chain of command. Expected behaviors are precisely delineated, and accountability is a core tenet. Since vets take an oath together, work and eat together, and dedicate themselves to a common mission, they tend to form close bonds.

Decision-making is different in the corporate world, and that deep sense of camaraderie is often missing, especially with the rise of telecommuting and digital communication. And, unlike in military life, civilian employees, of course, go home to their personal lives at the end of the work day.

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Corporate cultures may feel foreign to veterans. Some companies are largely entrepreneurial, while others are collaborative and encourage working across silos. Lines of authority are often blurry — team leaders may change from project to project — with unspoken rules and implicit agendas. Deadlines for assignments may be unspecified, a concept that is alien to a veteran's sense of urgency. And, while the path for advancement in the military is well defined, it is not always so clear in the private sector.

Finally, veterans have to adjust to the corporate world's different priorities: what is the return on investment, how can we increase revenues, grow market share or cut costs? Veterans' resumes may contain military terminology and acronyms that might not clearly convey the skillset they represent to the non-veteran. And language that might be common in the military could be inappropriate or misconstrued in a corporate setting.

Employers, of course, should not be expected to change their cultures to accommodate returning veterans whom they hire. But managers should be trained to understand the perspectives of those veterans and be ready to help them in their transition.

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### Characteristics of veterans cited by employers

- Diligence
  - Leadership
  - Flexibility
  - Teamwork
  - Technical aptitude
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### Helping vets adjust

*There are many ways to help returning veterans acclimate to corporate culture, including:*

- **Mentoring** — Many companies have found that establishing informal mentorship programs for veterans can effectively help their transition back to work. Typically, these programs, which are voluntary, pair a veteran with a more senior co-worker, preferably a fellow vet. The mentor can respond to the vet's questions — or point him or her to the proper resource for answers — about employee benefits, the unspoken rules of the office, personnel comings and goings, career advancement opportunities, and related issues.
- **Recognition** — As appropriate, employers should strive to honor military service. For example, before Memorial Day or Veterans Day, some companies distribute communications highlighting the commitment that veterans have to the United States or recognizing employees who have lost loved ones in war.
- **Being flexible** — Some veterans may need support in fulfilling responsibilities to the Reserves or National Guard. Understanding and appreciating their commitment will help enable them to adjust to corporate life.
- **Accommodating** — Veterans with disabilities may be legally entitled to support or workplace accommodations to be productive in their roles. For employers, making such accommodations is also smart business.
- **Educating** — Make veterans aware of the vast array of emotional, medical, and financial supports offered by local community groups, state and federal government agencies, and veterans service organizations, as well as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

Be aware: Some veterans may want to simply put their military experience behind them. Reminding them of their service, however well-intentioned, may trigger feelings of stress. Employers should be sensitive to veterans' feelings in determining the appropriateness of introducing mentoring, recognition or similar initiatives.



### Serving those who served — EMC's commitment to vets

Few companies are as dedicated to hiring and supporting military veterans as EMC Corporation, a Fortune 500 information technology company based in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.

EMC is a founding member of the 100,000 Jobs Mission, a coalition of companies formed in 2011 for the purpose of recruiting and hiring 100,000 veterans by 2020. The companies report their hiring progress to the coalition and meet quarterly to share best practices. As of Sept. 30, 2014, the coalition companies had exceeded its target — hiring more than 190,000 veterans. So they doubled down — pledging to hire 200,000 by 2020. The coalition also maintains a website containing a rich source of information for employers seeking to recruit veterans (see Appendix).

With more than 65,000 employees globally, EMC has significantly increased its hiring of veterans in the United States since the 100,000 Jobs Mission began. Veterans, ranging from the Vietnam era to those recently transitioning out of the military, hold a wide variety of positions at the company — from entry level to senior management — including technology, sales, marketing, human resources and finance.

EMC has also expanded its focus on student veterans by offering internships, counseling and career options. Every summer, the company hires between 700 and 800 interns at its offices across the country. Many of these are veterans having served in the military, are using their GI benefits to go to school to earn degrees from two- or four-year colleges. EMC also works with Student Veterans of America, an association that provides student veterans with resources and helps them build chapters on college campuses.

Another initiative, VeTS (Veterans and Their Supporters) offers a community of support for newly transitioned service members. Open to all EMC employees and their spouses, this “employee circle,” as it’s called, offers peer mentoring and networking to its members. “The goal is to make new vet hires feel welcome and help them transition into a corporate environment,” said Lou Candiello, EMC’s senior manager for global talent acquisition.

His advice to other companies seeking to recruit veterans is this:

*“Start small and try to leverage already existing hiring programs in your hiring organization to include veteran candidates. Get executive sponsorship — perhaps a former vet with a leadership role who can push down the agenda and build momentum. Leverage resources like the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University, which offers a guidebook on best practices.”*

## Returning to civilian life can pose challenges

Veterans joining or returning to the workforce after military deployment may face challenges that include:



### Family changes

- Reacquainting with spouse and children
- Adjusting to changing roles and responsibilities at home
- Relationship difficulties, possibly separation or divorce



### Job challenges

- Finding a new job
- Returning to an old job that may feel boring or unfulfilling
- Missing the comradeship of the military unit and the excitement of deployment



### Financial worries

- Addressing debts incurred during deployment
- Costs of relocating for a new job
- Finding affordable housing



### Health issues

- Medical or emotional issues related to service, such as stress

## Emotional and mental health

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that may develop following a trauma — a shocking and scary event that someone sees or personally experiences. Some examples: physical violence, car accident, rape and natural disaster.

Going through trauma is not unusual — about 60 percent of men and one-half of women experience at least one trauma in their lives.<sup>3</sup> However, only a relatively small percentage of people experiencing a trauma actually develop PTSD (see “PTSD facts” at right).<sup>4</sup>

PTSD may lead to depression, panic attacks or use of drugs or alcohol. It can strain relationships or trigger difficulties at work. But by itself, PTSD does not make veterans — or anyone else with the disorder — more prone to violence.

Some sensationalized accounts in the media of returning veterans with PTSD may give the impression that most vets suffer from the disorder. That's not the case, although studies about the prevalence among vets vary widely.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, PTSD afflicts almost 31 percent of Vietnam veterans, 10 percent of Gulf War vets, 11 percent of Afghanistan War vets, and 20 percent of Iraq War vets.<sup>5</sup>

A RAND Corporation study found that 14 percent of service members returning from Afghanistan and Iraq meet criteria for PTSD.<sup>6</sup>

A more conservative figure comes from the Institute of Medicine, which estimates that 8 percent of current and former service members who were deployed in these areas have a PTSD diagnosis.<sup>7</sup> That's about the same percentage of the general population that will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

Studies also show that veterans are at risk for suicide. The rate of suicide among vets has risen 22 percent since 1999 (compared with a 31 percent rise in the United States overall). Today, roughly one-fifth of the nation's suicides involve veterans: 22 veterans take their own lives every day.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, employers should never assume that returning vets have PTSD or suicidal thoughts. Managers should, though, be trained in recognizing in any employee the symptoms that might indicate stress disorders or other mental health issues. They include: incessant foot-tapping, being “on edge,” inability to concentrate, use of inappropriate language, angry outbursts, aggressive behavior, spotty attendance and substance abuse.

Managers should also be trained to understand the resources they have, especially their EAPs, so they can offer support to returning vets — and for that matter, any employee — who may be having emotional, financial or relationship issues.

## EAPs: Something for everyone, especially veterans

Returning veterans and their dependents have unique needs. An EAP is a good place for them to seek counsel and assistance. EAPs cover a wide range of issues that affect any employee's — including a veteran's — ability to be fully present, productive and creative at work. EAP management consultation services can help managers who are trying to support employees who are veterans, too.

**For employees:** EAPs offer employees a wealth of information, tools and resources for:

- Personal and family relationships
- Loss and grief
- Childcare and eldercare
- Education planning
- Financial and legal matters
- Career development

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### PTSD facts<sup>4</sup>

- PTSD affects about 7.7 million American adults.
  - PTSD can occur at any age.
  - Women are more likely to develop PTSD than men, and there is some evidence that the potential for the disorder may run in families.
  - PTSD is often accompanied by depression, substance abuse or other anxiety disorders.
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**For managers:** EAPs can assist in identifying veterans experiencing challenges and offer solutions. Some of the most common reasons a manager may contact an EAP are to:

- Coach an employee to take steps to correct or improve work performance or behavior
- Help an employee access appropriate mental health or other supportive resources
- Learn about accommodations that may be required by state or federal law
- Provide substance abuse assessment, referral and monitoring
- Intervene when a threat of violence (toward either self or others) occurs
- Get advice on how to connect employees with EAP resources for themselves or their families

EAPs have resources even for issues that are, on the surface, unrelated to the workplace. For example, a vet earning nominal military pay and living in subsidized housing on a military base may have returned home to find that she has accumulated substantial debt. Now, re-entering the workforce in a big city, she has to find a rental apartment at market rates and start paying off those bills. Through EAP, a registered financial counselor can help her develop a financial plan that consolidates her debt, and a work/life specialist can help her in locating affordable housing.

Such services are part of EAPs because employers recognize that building a resilient workforce requires that employees have resources to handle the sources of stress in all parts of their lives — personal as well as work.

### Tips for communicating with returning vets

Here are some guidelines for managers when communicating with veterans who have returned from deployment. EAP management consultants can also help managers and supervisors who have veterans working for them with ideas for addressing specific situations.

#### Do

- Treat employees with dignity, respect and courtesy
- Be generous with your time
- Listen closely: they have experience you may not have
- Provide clear, constructive and timely feedback
- Offer assistance, but don't insist or be offended if your offer isn't accepted
- Be clear about the limits of your authority or ability to respond to an employee's needs or requests
- Make sure employees are aware of EAP services available to them and their families

#### Don't

- Assume that poor job performance is military-related or connected to a stress disorder such as PTSD
- Ask about an employee's personal life or if he or she is seeing a mental health professional
- Allow inappropriate behavior or poor job performance to fester until it becomes a crisis
- Tell an employee he or she isn't meeting performance targets without specifying what exactly needs improvement
- Assume that stress disorders last indefinitely; some people with PTSD get better in six months, while others may have it for much longer<sup>9</sup>

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— Emil Michael, Uber senior vice president

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## Conclusion

With returning veterans flooding the job market, many employers are stepping up their efforts to recruit and hire these men and women. Veterans bring a unique set of traits, skills and experiences that can benefit companies' bottom lines.

Most vets transition back into civilian life with relative ease. Some grapple with the emotional effects from their military experience. Managers can help smooth that transition by being attentive to the needs of returning vets and supporting them by offering resources as needed.

## Additional resources

### **American Corporate Partners, Veteran Mentoring Program**

[www.acp-usa.org](http://www.acp-usa.org)

### **U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration**

<http://www.dol.gov/vets>

### **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/reintegration/guide-pdf/SMGuide.pdf>

### **U.S. Veterans Benefits Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program**

[http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp\\_resources.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp_resources.htm)

### **Directory of Veterans Service Organizations**

<http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.asp>

### **The National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs**

<http://www.nasdva.us>

### **Joining Forces**

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces>

### **Military OneSource**

<http://www.militaryonesource.mil>

### **Wounded Warrior Project**

<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>

### **100,000 Jobs Mission**

<https://www.veteranjobsmission.com>

### **Institute for Veterans and Military Families**

<http://vets.syr.edu/>

### **Optum**

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

## Contributors

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UnitedHealthcare Military & Veterans provides health care benefits to nearly 3 million million military service members, retirees and their families. Visit [uhcmilitarywest.com](http://uhcmilitarywest.com) to find out more.

Optum Employee Assistance Programs serve about 9 million employees and their families from about 950 organizations. Visit [optum.com/eap](http://optum.com/eap) to find out more.

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## Footnotes

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