

Chapter 8

Supporting Military Families: Learning from Our Past to Create a New Future in Business

Sherrill A. Curtis, Vivian Greentree, William Baas, and Bob Cartwright

8.1 The Evolution from Reactive Patriotism to Strategic Engagement

This chapter explores the integral role of employers in supporting military families, and its evolution over the recent, unprecedented, 16 years of war. It is a chronicle of the authors' discoveries, research, and insights, based on their extensive human resource and business management experiences within the public, non-profit, and private sectors. Each author has either personally experienced, or connected one-on-one or in groups, with transitioning military members and their families regarding the variety of topics addressed within these pages. Their collective experiences include: military service; military to civilian career transition; serving as a reservist while holding a full time position in the private sector; pursuing GI Bill benefits; military spouse; member of a Fortune 500 talent acquisition team; creating award-winning best practices and employer training programs to source, hire, and engage veterans and military spouses; career coaching and job seeker training for over 2000 career transitioning service members and their families; and delivering over 40 years

S.A. Curtis, ACC, SPHR, SHRM-SCP (✉)
Curtis Consulting Group, LLC, East Rutherford, NJ, USA
e-mail: sherrill@curtisgroupllc.com

V. Greentree, Ph.D.
First Data, Washington, DC, USA
e-mail: vivian.greentree@firstdata.com

W. Baas
Comcast Corporation, Philadelphia, PA, USA
e-mail: Williambaas@comcast.net

B. Cartwright, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
Intelligent Compensation, LLC, Pflugerville, TX, USA
e-mail: bob.cartwright@intelligentcomp.net

of human resource, workforce management guidance to hundreds of large, mid, and small-size businesses representing a broad range of industries. It is our aim that business leaders will use this information to create career transition experiences and workplaces to better serve future generations of service members and their families.

To our nation's credit, since the attacks on 9/11, the employer perspective has expanded from understanding how to support military and veterans in transition, to include support for military families. Noteworthy for the X, Y, or millennial generations of readers, it was not until 1973 that the USA converted to an all-voluntary military force. This significant change set a different tone for those serving, as well as for the country. Today, those who enlist to serve do so, at least in part, because they feel compelled to be a part of the defense effort for our country. We have come to realize that *how* our country treats these volunteers, *and* their families, through every aspect of support efforts, benefits, and services, impacts the longer term viability of the USA remaining an all-volunteer military force. And, perhaps nowhere is that more clear than when a service member transitions from active duty and looks to find a career with a civilian employer.

The ongoing development of positive dialogue within corporate America ultimately sparked a perspective shift from compliance and doing the right thing to proactive engagement and creation of shared value—because it was also the right thing to do for the health of the business. Ten years ago, even five years ago, the unemployment rate for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, female veterans, and Gulf War II era veterans was higher than the national average as reported by the Department of Labor (DOL). Ideas and solutions emerged to not only impact the employment rate; but also to create a talent and human capital case for hiring veterans and their spouses. A new energy developed around military hiring programs. Organizations that were considering military talent acquisition programs asked: “Are we effectively doing all we can to tap into this key talent pool?” Employers assessed the attributes veterans bring to the workplace such as: teamwork; ability to deal with stress, ambiguity and change; ability to be both a leader and a follower; drug free; reasonable salary expectations; and security clearances. Their response was: “This is the type of employee I want to have in my organization!” Organizations began to step up to deliver civilian sector employment opportunities for this diverse, ready-to-succeed talent pool whenever possible.

Business mantras of “We Support Our Troops” developed into a more thoughtful, measured, and proactive approach of support through targeted employment programming enhanced benefits and programs designed for active military, transitioning service members, and their families. From J.P. Morgan Chase creating the 100,000 Jobs Coalition (now Veteran Jobs Mission), to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's development of Hiring Our Heroes (among other efforts nationally and locally, both virtually and in-person) the private sector effort to hire veterans was in full swing.

During the latter part of the war's first decade, strategy dialogues evolved to include: organizational branding, website presence, non-traditional talent outreach methods, interview and performance management training, job design flexibility,

and more effective administration to close the gaps in benefit programs. Essentially, employers shifted from “it’s the right thing to do,” to “we are creatively structuring our efforts to ensure veterans are a successful part of the organization’s sourced talent pool.” Employers began to work in coordination with the public sector to reduce the veteran unemployment rate, concurrently committing to specific veteran-hiring objectives. They also set aside talent wars by collaborating together asking solution-focused questions such as: “How do we share talent? How do we act as a responsible part of the American employment landscape?”

As positive outcomes accumulated, employers intensified their strategies and efforts by challenging themselves with probing questions: “What more can we do? How can we increase our role? How can we retain veterans we hired at our organization?”, and “What do we need to do to be leaders in this space?” Many organizations with long-standing veteran employment programs, representing household names and icons of industry have understood how to source, hire, and engage this talent pool for years. However, those just starting up their military programs had to reconfigure a host of internal reporting systems and in some cases, create entirely new ones. As they became more aware of this newly available talent pool through a national focus on veteran unemployment rates, these employers began to adapt their talent planning, outreach and support methods along with benefit programs, learning from, and mirroring, the best practices of those who were already doing it right.

Organizations began offering training programs for transitioning military and leveraging government-funded Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) incentives. We saw a rise in the creation of Military Affinity and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), as well as expanded use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) within HR departments. Award programs were created to highlight “above and beyond” compliance efforts by employers who chose to close the benefits and service gaps for veterans, and especially guard and reservists; extending their outreach to support military spouses and families (e.g., the Families and Work Institute’s Work Life Legacy Military Award).

However, there was still a long way to go. Employers and military-affiliated candidates alike discovered that systems for accessing job opportunities, career transition, benefits, resource and service information, though well intentioned, were often inefficiently siloed and/or ineffectively delivered. In particular, confusion and frustration were strongly experienced during military demobilization, in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP; now Transition GPS), and during the civilian hiring processes. Communication and follow-through gaps, combined with the lack of understanding and military and civilian business culture differences, left many veteran job seekers frustrated. Concurrently, many potential employers were discouraged at the lack of coordination among federal, military, and state resources to help them tap into the veteran talent pool.

In the larger context of playing an active role in reducing the military unemployment rate, employers also realized they needed to continue to explore and extend supportive solutions beyond simply hiring. As the conflicts abroad continued, and one deployment turned into several (and longer) tours for many service members, the domino-style after-effects began to appear. Organizational leaders, especially

Human Resource professionals, continued to explore solutions through strategic questions such as: “How do we bring that need forward into our organizations and translate it into meaningful policies, programs, partnerships and collaborative initiatives?”; “How may we better connect with, and understand, the needs of our military-affiliated employees?”; and “How do we ultimately retain and provide a clear path for our military-affiliated employees?”. In response, Employee or Affinity Resource Groups (ERGs/ARGs) and employee surveys expanded to include questions and analytics aimed at understanding military-affiliated employees.

Questions at management team planning meetings began to delve deeper, addressing less comfortable topics such as: “How can we respond to pay and benefit gaps, especially for guard members and reservists?”; “What is the effect of hiring someone who may have Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), require deployment, or may need to relocate?”; and “How do we offer non-intrusive assistance to ease the stress of our employees with family members either serving overseas, or those with service-related disabilities?” As more questions arose, it became clear that developing the most effective solutions would require a multi-pronged, strategic approach incorporating new (or refreshed) policies, combined with training, communication, and personalized delivery options.

Benefits professionals revised their vetting processes for third-party Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers, requiring vendors to validate the availability of behavioral health staff trained on how to respond with cultural competence to military-related issues. These issues included: reintegration challenges (i.e., child behavioral issues due to multiple, periodic parental absences; and combat-related PTS issues for returning service members or for military spouses experiencing PTS transference) as well as company benefits and health care plan navigation, with an understanding of service-related disabilities, and knowledge of Department of Defense (DoD) resources such as the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). Interview and management training addressed legal issues related to asking applicants or employees about injuries, characterization of discharge, potential deployments, or if a military spouse might be required to relocate. For many organizations, this meant developing internal policies that go above and beyond legal requirements, and providing military awareness training to ensure that managers and recruiters understood their roles.

Employers learned that many variables in addition to compensation and benefits affect the fabric of military family life. Along with the more common fears about safety, there are other, more complex, issues faced by military families, ranging from: becoming a new parent with an absent spouse; child care; elder care; singly managing an out-of-state move while working; quickly finding a job in a new town; living far from a support network; and sourcing the right school system. The latter being especially difficult for military parents with special needs children. Other issues that can directly affect job search and performance relate to the social aspects of: establishing new friendships; creating a safety net of day-to-day support; and dealing with feelings of isolation. For military spouses, the combined effects of these military-related challenges can be overwhelming. Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families 2016 study cites the cumulative impact

of these issues on unemployment, career progression, and ultimately, economic security (Bradbard, Maury, & Armstrong, 2016).

Whether the employee is a veteran, guard member or reservist, or the working spouse of an active duty member, it is clear that like all employees, concern for the well-being of their family is paramount. Exemplifying this point is the sentiment of thanks expressed by guard members or reservists who nominate their employer for the annual Secretary of Defense National Freedom Award through the Employee Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program. Over and over again, nominators share sentiments such as knowing that their employers are watching out for, and staying connected with their families allows them to focus on their mission and goals for the country. Employer contributions towards creating peace of mind for the person serving are considered essential, and immeasurable. Award-winning strategies include a variety of replicable, low-to-no cost options for businesses of any size that provide continuity, and support, for their military-affiliated employees.

Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) stated well the twenty-first century employer goal regarding veterans and military families (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012, p. 6):

"Employers can help to provide veterans with stable households and families to return to after their service by supporting their family's economic and personal wellbeing. Supporting military families as they navigate complex benefit systems, restructured child and elder care, attend military separation and reunion events, and possibly care for injured veterans helps military members focus on their duties with the knowledge that they have stable homes, to which they may return."

8.2 Defining Twenty-First Century Military and Family Needs

Before defining support strategies or implementing programs, employers must first understand who comprises today's military, and the needs of military families. Modern warfare redefined the profile of a service member, veteran, guard member or reservist, and the military family. In contrast to previous generations of service members, twenty-first century service members are more likely to: deploy multiple times and for longer durations than their previous counterparts; be married; and have children. A key aspect affecting home life for today's military families is a different battle experience from that of prior wars. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD, 60–80% of soldiers who have blast injuries may also have traumatic brain injuries (TBI) resulting from continued exposure to blasts and IEDs (improvised explosive devices; Summerall, 2017). Additionally, the prolonged periods of multiple (and longer) deployments interfered with household routine and stability for military couples, and their family units. Research reveals the effects can manifest in behavioral and communication changes

for military children and relationship distress in adults, affecting social and professional interactions (National Center for PTSD, 2016).

Multiple relocations, short-term and some long-term activations, profoundly affected military families. Careers of military spouses were often put on hold, while their job search process became tenuous as many worried about biases because of their potential for future relocations, breaks in their employment, or frequent partial employment changes (i.e., altered schedules). The military spouse employment transition between states was especially difficult in instances of specialized certifications and licenses that were not transferable from state to state, requiring additional time and expense to secure the requirements in the new home base state. Additionally, childcare challenges complicated military spouse employment efforts. Such challenges included limited access to on-installation childcare, quality of accessible care, and available hours of coverage. The gender profile of the modern-day military also shifted as the number of women serving on active duty increased. The increase in women serving also increased the number of dual-military households. As of 2015, women made up 14.5% (213,000) of the active duty Armed Forces; and 190,000 women served in the Reserves and National Guard (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, 2016). Conversely, many men took on the role of the civilian working spouse, often with childcare responsibilities.

Women veterans, as a growing percentage of veterans looking for civilian employment, represent an opportunity for employers looking to increase the number of women in their leadership roles. In 2015, women veterans seeking civilian jobs also leveraged educational opportunities at a higher rate than male veterans, resulting in 33.8% achieving at least a Bachelor's Degree, as compared to 28.1% of non-veteran women (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). This shift provided an expanded, highly qualified, talent pool for employers seeking to increase the presence of women on their teams and in key leadership roles. However, in spite of the education and experience levels of women veterans and female military spouses, underemployment remains high. IVMF survey results, published in 2014, reports "90% of female military spouse respondents of active duty service members were underemployed" (due to their) higher levels of education (33%), experience 10%), or both (47%)" (Maury & Stone, 2014).

When analyzing what is needed to address these expanded needs of a more diversified military population against existing services and resources, employers must reflect on long range issues including: "What may we eliminate, build upon or create to reset the strategy for successfully serving our military-affiliated employees—now and in the future?"; "Does our leadership reflect diversity?"; "Do our talent screening processes and hiring initiatives consider education and experience relative to the inclusion of female military veterans and spouses?"; "Do we have the right confidential EAP services and in-person coaching or group support programs in place?"; "Are we creating opportunities for connecting and professional progression?"; "How is our physical environment set up to be inclusive of those with disabilities?"; and "Is job design, replacement and succession planning allowing flexibility for the relocating family, deployed family member or at-home spouse?".

Ultimately, organizations that provide creative solutions to these challenges will win the talent that drives success over their competition.

8.3 Responses and Strategies

Overall, two fundamental sets of resources were necessary to support the success of military families in the labor market. The first was purposeful employment programs and the second was benefit programs offering sustainable solutions for optimum health, including both behavioral and physical health, as well as overall well-being for every member of the military family.

By 2012, employers could choose from a plethora of veteran hiring resources ranging from web-based virtual recruiting services to traditional in-person job and career fairs. In addition to job postings from the 100,000 Job Coalition (now the Veteran Jobs Mission) members, many veteran hiring resources offered touch points between employers and veteran job seekers by industry or by state. Job fairs were produced by for-profit and non-profit organizations, as well as national organizers (i.e., Hiring Our Heroes, delivered through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation), technical and trade organization training programs (i.e., Helmets to Hardhats), and the Yellow Ribbon Program for the college bound.

Though these efforts were intended to support career transitioning veterans, challenges arose that impacted the ability to create meaningful connections between prospective employers and job seekers. Organizers struggled with drawing high levels of veteran participants. Employers strove to meet qualified, ready-to-start candidates and veterans experienced frustration when directed to visit a company's website. Recruiters were not able to translate the veterans' skills into specific civilian job skills. Initially, job fairs did not include military spouses as targeted candidates. Over time, employers aiming to improve their support of military families recognized that effective hiring strategies should include targeted sourcing, benefits, and work options (i.e., telecommuting and flexible schedules) that are attractive to military spouses.

The experiences of job and career fair stakeholders improved over time, after addressing some of the earlier challenges that affected job seeker participation and development of meaningful connections. Such challenges included: buy-in from military leadership regarding the importance of longer networking lead time necessary for service members to source civilian careers; training organizational staff and third-party recruiters about military-equivalent skillsets and experiences to include in job descriptions; and education for all parties that aligned expectations of what can be accomplished at a job fair. In order to foster mutually beneficial interactions with veterans, Human Resource professionals developed a broad range of integrated solutions that addressed needs related to veteran hiring, engagement, overall health, and well-being. Employers also introduced education and training for their existing workforce about the characteristics, skills, and value of veterans, and military spouses, as job seekers and co-workers.

Education for both sides of the interview desk heightened awareness and understanding for both employers and transitioning service members of their respective cultural differences based on realities and data rather than myths and perceptions. One particular area that impacted trust between employers and veteran job applicants was misaligned expectations during the civilian hiring process regarding how it differs from the military process that follows explicit protocols. This expectation gap included misconceptions among transitioning service members that civilian employers are like the military when it comes to clearly defined career progression paths. Many job-seeking veterans participating in career coaching or transition workshops expressed their frustration with experiences of: being “left in cyberspace” after submitting a resume; not receiving timely employer communications in response to inquiries or follow-up; or being told to visit a company’s website by organization representatives at job fairs. Conversely, employers, career coaches, and job developers also reported experiencing frustration when liaising with veteran job seekers who became unresponsive to e-mail or phone communications, or who could not be available within three months for a start date.

Because these are business etiquette issues, which vary by industry and company, for both employers and applicants, communication remedies are best aligned to each organization’s larger talent acquisition model. Organizations with the bandwidth to commit dedicated staff adjusted their recruiting practices and on-boarding processes to provide consistent, personalized candidate communications, and follow-up. Facilitators of briefings, job search seminars, and workshops educated veteran job seekers about the differences between the military and civilian job search processes. Many organizations created required, periodic training for line managers, supervisors, and anyone in a hiring or performance management role. Such training provided learning opportunities about how to effectively interview, manage, and engage military-connected talent in the workplace.

As awareness of the importance of retention began to emerge, employers worked closely with the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a DoD program developed to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve and Guard members and their managers. ESGR representatives provided employer training on the rights of members of the National Guard and Reserves, along with guidance for creating effective employer processes to manage leaves of absence related to periodic training, deployment, and readiness to return to work. Employers that demonstrated compliance could sign a Statement of Support signifying their commitment to guard and reservist employees. The ESGR offered training and personalized assistance for members of the National Guard and reservists experiencing difficulty navigating compliance regulations with their employer. They also offered training and support to Human Resource and line managers to ensure they too felt supported and had accurate information to ease the stress of deployment and reduce potential non-compliance experienced by employers with regard to military leave.

Diversity and inclusion programs for managers and staff were updated to include awareness and understanding of the military community. These programs also highlighted the value added by military talent to private sector organizations. Issues

addressed included: effects of multiple deployments, reintegration, relocations, managing daily life with a background of anxiety while a spouse is deployed, and alignment of expectations around pay, benefits, and job performance. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) vendors refocused their self-education efforts about Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-provided and state-enhanced benefits in order to refer military-affiliated employees to appropriate resources.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) were another way organizations that began to offer peer support, networking and professional development opportunities for military-connected employees. These groups also provide valuable training and information on topics such as: career progression, professional development, and managing transition challenges and daily stress.

National non-profits established program goals that resulted in an increased impact of their services delivered at the local community level. Their wide variety of resources and programs served as an additional resource fulfilling unmet needs by the government as well as employer provided benefits and services. That outreach strategy leveraged the scale of services, while maximizing connections between local resources and military-affiliated employees, which also contributed to building community capacity.

The use of Federal Personnel Exchange Programs, such as the Army's Training With Industry (TWI), grew, producing positive results and shared value for both private sector organizations and active duty service members. Similar to an internship program, Exchange Programs place active duty service members in Fortune 500 organizations for a specified period of time. Upon program completion, service members return to their military role for a minimum 4-year period. These programs help service members gain skills in the civilian sector while giving an employer an early look at talent and exposure to leveraging the skillsets these service members bring from the military. Service members gain career-relevant day-to-day experience in the civilian workplace along with a greater awareness and understanding of civilian business culture. Private sector employers experience the value of a veteran's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

8.4 Results and Insights

Over time, we discovered how to better understand the value of military skills and experiences and then relate them to jobs in the civilian sector. MOS (Military Occupational Skills) translation, in relationship to job descriptions and resumes, became part of the ongoing employment discussion that led to increased understanding for interviewers and applicants. Incorporating the translation of military experience into the job description, accepting applicable military experience relevant to private industry experience within position descriptions, and resume development processes eased the task of matching candidates with military experience to appropriate civilian jobs. Online military skills translation solutions, coupled with

employer and military job seeker training, took time to develop, implement, then trust and utilize.

Both employers and military job seekers could more readily ascertain which military experiences and technical skills related to certain civilian jobs while also appreciating the soft skills veterans brought with them. Some organizations (i.e., United Parcel Service) connected with military veteran job seekers through their own websites and application processes by including a military transition guide or video shorts on their website that describe specific military transferable skills correlative with open positions. Free resources, many developed and provided by mainstream resume and job search sites, (i.e., military.com and LinkedIn), also resulted in substantially increasing the opportunity for veterans and employers to find one another.

When the Veteran Jobs Mission reached their original goal of 100,000 military hires much earlier than expected, they established more ambitious hiring goals. As the overall economy improved, and our nation experienced a decrease in veteran unemployment rates, competition increased to hire veterans and the dialogue expanded to discussions of retention, internal mobility, and even entrepreneurship. This created opportunities for some veterans to receive multiple job offers from some of the best-in-class organizations in the country. It also prompted the private sector to focus on providing meaningful career opportunities for transitioning military service members and their spouses in more holistic ways. This spirit of cooperation continued to expand beyond the original core of hiring programs to include emphasis on retention and entrepreneurship as organizations identified the value of veterans as co-workers, organizational leaders, and business owners in the marketplace. Entities such as the Coalition for Veteran Owned Business (CVOB) and Bunker Labs arose to provide resources for veteran entrepreneurs and provide access to corporate supply chains.

Veterans' success within the private sector continued to increase as organizations developed their military affinity group programs. Many programs included opportunities for military-affiliated employees to volunteer with community-based services or connecting with, and mentoring, newly hired veterans and military spouses within the organization. According to Comcast employee opinion surveys, veterans participating in military affinity resource groups are more engaged, less likely to look for another job, happier and more satisfied, much more positive than others when it comes to dealing with stress, ambiguity, and change. At First Data, surveyed employees rated "knowing that [the company] has a commitment to you as a military-affiliated employee and that [you] have advocates/support (including the Military Affinity Group)" as a top factor affecting their career success.

One of the more surprising aspects of private sector engagement in military hiring was the transcendence of corporate rivalry as the spirit of cooperation for sharing veteran talent and programming quickly spread. For example, Northrop Grumman's Operation IMPACT (Injured Military Pursuing Assisted Career Transition) focused on assisting severely wounded service members as they transitioned from the military to a private sector career. The Network of Champions (NoC—a group comprising private sector employers, non-profit organizations, and federal agencies with a

shared commitment to support veterans) expanded the service members' ability to locate career opportunities within the network's organizations.

8.5 Continuous Process Improvement

Over the past 16 years, employers have made considerable progress in improving support for their current and potential military-affiliated employees, while benefiting from service members' transitions into their organizations. There have been many successful efforts; some will benefit from further adjustment; others are not yet fully developed. Human Resource professionals in particular have the opportunity to play a key role in the development of strategies, policies, and programs that effectively and efficiently serve the career transition needs of veterans and military-affiliated families. However, as with any core value (i.e., diversity, sustainability), top down modeled buy-in combined with integration throughout the organization is vital to creating successful programs.

This section offers a variety of options for employer engagement in developing and delivering the right-fit solutions to fulfill the goal of providing meaningful career opportunities for veterans and their spouses. From simple, quick actions to deep dive, long-term commitments, there are options and solutions to fit every organization from small to medium and large.

8.5.1 Preparing to Hire and On-Boarding

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) survey research indicates that the first three to six months of employment are the most critical; with organizations losing an average of 17% of their new hires during the first three months of employment (Maurer, 2015). Seasoned human resource professionals understand the impact of these statistics on productivity, engagement, and retention. By proactively developing and delivering comprehensive, well communicated, and measurable pre-hire and on-boarding processes, the organization can yield high dividends. This approach is especially beneficial for military-affiliated talent, and even more vital for employees having their first civilian-career experience.

Job Descriptions and Translating MOS

Utilize the myriad of free online translation tools to correlate job descriptions with skill sets developed during military service. Initially focus on current open jobs, followed by high yield positions, then expand to translate the remaining jobs. Similar to utilizing education to experience equivalents for civilian jobs, organizations should define and include the "military experience equivalent" in a job

description, citing the required military role, level, and years of experience. This diversity and inclusion approach allows service members with the relevant type and years of experience, without a degree, an opportunity to successfully compete in the recruitment process.

Provide Interview Training

It is crucial that anyone with responsibility for interviewing, or participating in hiring decisions, understands how to evaluate military experiences and skills that correlate with the organization's job functions. Having this knowledge and understanding will ease the interview process for both the interviewer, and the veteran, ensuring good fit hiring opportunities are not missed.

Taking into consideration the number of jobs, positions, and hiring team size, Human Resource professionals may choose to: 1) review an MOS translated job description one-on-one with a hiring manager or supervisor; or 2): implement a formal group training with a hiring team. Both approaches ensure a consistent understanding of the MOS translation in relationship to the job description's list of preferred knowledge, skills, and abilities. Human Resource professionals also have opportunities to clarify MOS definitions, address any inaccuracies, and explore potential interview questions (using correlative military terms) with hiring managers/teams before beginning the interview process.

Be Alert for Opportunities to Build the Talent Pipeline Aligned with the Organization's Geographic Footprint

For example, consider if participating in national hiring events will fulfill the organization's hiring goals as well as state-specific efforts. Increasingly, many states hold state-of-the-veteran convenings that bring together in-state resources such as non-profit partners, state leaders, and community-based resources. These events may be worth attending in states where employers have large employee populations. Establish local talent pipelines by developing relationships with military installations, colleges, state level workforce agencies, and student veteran organizations (SVOs).

Military Family Friendly Branding

Put your brand front and center for military talent to take notice. In addition to the Careers page, include the commitment to hiring, promoting, and supporting the needs of military talent and their families on the About Us, Values, or Philosophy page(s) of the organization's website. Include success stories (creating the "similar to me" approach to attract candidates) along with profiles of current military-affiliated employees.

Small to Mid-Size Employer Talent Outreach

In spite of their best outreach efforts, the ability to source military talent remains an elusive goal for many small to mid-sized businesses. They are often limited by staff bandwidth and resources to extend their outreach methods in contrast to corporate giants when sourcing military-affiliated talent. Though smaller than the Goliath's of the business world, there are a few simple free options employers of any size can utilize to prepare for hiring, share job openings, and source potential candidates.

- (a) Leverage free online resources—For example, the Employer Roadmap, developed by USAA and Hiring Our Heroes, offers a host of free resources, including workbook pages, job description builders, and action plans based on company size.
- (b) Foster relationships with veteran representatives or program coordinators at the following organizations to build a strategic talent pipeline for outreach success:
 - (i) Local economic development, government, and community agencies. These include: DOL's American Job Centers, local VA Vet Center, universities, and non-profit organizations that serve veterans and their families;
 - (ii) Military installations within the target hiring area—connect with the transition assistance program manager; and Onward to Opportunity (program managed by Syracuse University's Institute for Veteran and Military Families). Request inclusion on their list of local employers.

Non-profit Support: Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), Military Family Service Organizations (MFSOs), and College Groups

Employers that reach out to program representatives in their communities and local universities can easily build a presence and connection, while creating shared value for the organization's current military-affiliated employees. Consider creating talent connection opportunities by offering these non-profits: meeting space; food and beverage service for their meetings or special events; volunteers; door prizes; free printing of event materials; and in-kind donations of products or special career or job coaching workshops through your military affinity group.

Partner with universities or community colleges that offer in-state tuition for veterans and/or military dependents, distance-learning, certificate programs, or other targeted military services. Confer with those contacts to create student veteran and military spouse internships, and new graduate rotational programs. Student veterans represent an especially valuable talent pool within the military hiring space. The college environment experience offers student veterans the benefit of easing their military to civilian transition, giving them a jump start to successfully assimilate into a civilian work culture. Through Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapters and student veteran resource centers across the country, employers may access veteran college students and graduates and begin to build their veteran talent pipeline by offering internships to student veterans, prior to their senior year, and fostering relationships with the student veteran resource centers on college campuses. For

example, Comcast hires over 500 student veterans annually for summer seasonal positions. By featuring student veterans in their social media storytelling, Comcast attracts more potential talent to connect with and add to their veteran pipeline.

Be sure to include information about all educational opportunities and programs in the organization's new military hire welcome kit. Periodically, re-evaluate the changing nature of education programs receiving GI Bill eligibility. These steps will not only support the military-affiliated new hire to pursue education, it can be seen as a workforce development tool, increasing their value to the organization as they increase their specialized skills and education.

Spouses and children of service members offer opportunities to attract and retain workers who feel aligned with their employer's values, something that is very important, especially to Millennials, in today's workforce. Investing in the education of military families, even on a small scale, can make the difference between a future job versus a career or profession for a young adult or military spouse.

Keep Updated on Government Policy Changes that Incentivize and Facilitate Military Hiring

As government systems make tax incentives like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) easier to apply for and receive, more employers will leverage the financial opportunity to support hiring efforts. Tax incentives are just part of the ongoing dialogue, however.

Employers wanting to have the veteran talent advantage can successfully compete for this talent pool by offering benefits that fill support gaps for military family members. Be prepared to talk about employer benefits programs with military-affiliated hires, highlighting mandated and voluntary benefits with those most closely aligned with DoD-provided benefits, which typically cease when transitioning out of service. If offered in the civilian sector, they can add significant value to the veteran, or military spouse's employment experience. The by-product is that by supporting the military-affiliated employee's focus on their job, productivity may increase, adding to the bottom line.

Private sector employers should also become familiar with the employment opportunities offered through exchange, internship, and apprenticeship programs with different service branches. These programs have been underutilized because of historical lack of employer awareness about their existence; a difficult acceptance process resulting from confusion regarding qualifications; and program variations between branches. However, as coordination at the national level continues, there is great promise for an increased pipeline in the future.

Relocation Support

Organizations may readily apply a standard relocation program, typically offered to a transferring employee or new hire. However, for military families, consideration should be given to the potential frequency of relocations that increase stress for

spouses as they attempt to find viable, meaningful employment, often without a support network in place within their new community. Specific types of support may range from guidance about relocation expectations; touring the new city/town; coordinating neighborhood searches with local real estate professionals; and providing information about schools and childcare options. Extend the assistance further with referrals to the local Department of Labor (DoL) Workforce Development representative to connect with the relocating military family member.

Welcome Kits

In addition to the usual benefits, payroll, and voluntary Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) disclosure forms, customize new hire kits for military-affiliated hires to include a variety of relevant information and resources connecting the new hire with subject matter experts on military-related issues. Examples include: a personalized welcome letter; military affinity group leadership and military affairs team contacts; and local veteran service organization (VSOs) point of contact information. Consider including free resources from research organizations such as Purdue's Military Family Research Institute. Another example of an educational resource is the Institute for Veteran and Military Family's Veteran Certificate Transition Program (VCTP). The institute provides 36 different certificate programs to post-9/11 veterans and their families.

8.5.2 Post-hire Support

Leverage the potential to increase engagement, retention, and promotion rates of military-affiliated employees by proactively integrating their perspectives when creating policies, programs, or vetting third-party vendors. As with any other diversity and inclusion strategy, consider the impacts derived from offering services and benefits options that support military-affiliated families, such as:

Employee Assistance and Wellness Programs (EAPs)

When selecting a carrier, ensure vendors offer behavioral health professionals trained in identifying and navigating the effects from combat for the veteran, as well as the effects on the military family. They should be experienced with specialized knowledge regarding re-entry and have a track record of providing appropriate supports for the military community. Consider including program coverage for what are now more commonly offered, as well as emerging promising practices such as yoga, meditation, and equine therapy that support reduced stress (and address issues related to Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for military-affiliated talent).

National Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)

Establish partnerships with the American Legion (AL), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and others who have a long history of assisting veterans with processing their Veteran's Administration (VA) medical claims. The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) assists military families with educational issues for their children. These are just a few of the organizations that could be useful for your company. A local point of contact for VSO and MFSO organizations in veteran on-boarding welcome kits is a great way to proactively connect new hire veterans to local resources in the area, specific to their military needs.

Military Spouses and Caregivers

Throughout the job design and policy development processes, seek input and feedback from military spouses to ensure their perspective is considered. This input may be gleaned either from military spouses or caregivers within the organization, or through external employer partners and service providers.

An example of the need for flexible job design and transition assistance is when an employee who is military spouse must relocate, based on their active duty service member's Permanent Change of Station (PCS) military orders. In this circumstance, a variety of policy options adaptable to all sizes of employers can extend support during the transition:

- (a) Determine whether business needs can be met if the current job function is performed in the military spouse's new location (i.e., remotely/virtually or if another office exists in the new location)
- (b) Assess the potential to re-assign the employee to another job function, based on individual and organization needs
- (c) Assist the employee with aligning skills to internal open positions for which he or she may apply and compete
- (d) Tap into external employment opportunities with organizations in the new community, aligned with the commitment to support employment for military families

When possible, offer flexibility through job sharing, telecommuting, and work schedule options that increase the potential of military spouses or caregivers (of active duty, Guard or Reserve service members) entering or continuing in the workforce. Through thoughtful, well-planned job design, organizations will have the opportunity to hire military-affiliated talent, anywhere in the country, and/or retain that talent even when relocations occur.

Support of the National Guard and Reserve

To compete for Guard and Reservist talent, employers must be prepared to conduct periodic reviews of benefit programs to ensure they are keeping pace to support their employees who continue to serve. Organizations with the most competitive benefits package for Guard members and Reservists will be more likely to claim that talent pool by not making them choose between service and self. When conducting a cost-benefit analysis, utilize the ESGR as a resource to receive and compare the Guard and Reservist benefits, along with best practices of other state and national organizations.

Fill Talent Gaps

Small business owners should proactively plan to navigate potential talent gaps during periods of deployment, in order to minimize the impact to their business. Options include: job redesign, job sharing, and temporary replacement staffing. For large organizations with a handful of active duty service members, Guard members or Reservists, workflow during leaves of absence may be easily managed due to the size and scale of their operation. However, the impact on small to medium businesses may be much greater, as even the temporary absence of one employee can threaten the viability of that business.

Support Training and Deployments

A smooth reintegration begins with planning and coordinating with the service member and their manager prior to the activation. Establish a protocol that includes connecting with members of the National Guard and Reserve as they activate for deployment periods exceeding 30 days. Ensure that the manager, Human Resource partner, and employee are aware of their respective rights and responsibilities, and completed the ESGR offered training. Track activation periods from first notice through return to work status to facilitate the reservist's transition back into the workplace.

Utilize the Expertise of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)

This national, DoD-run program offers free guidance and training programs designed to educate employers, along with guard and reservists, on how to successfully navigate their respective rights and responsibilities. Ensure all human resource and payroll and leave management staff, along with managers responsible for guard and reservists, receive training on how to respond to, and manage active duty leaves of absence. Connect with the ESGR and establish open communications to learn about hiring events and demobilizations that may yield more talent for the organization's military pipeline.

Stay Connected During Active Duty Periods

A simple communication during times of separation ensures that the service member, military spouse, and family member(s) know there is a continuing employer commitment to their well-being. It is a great, no/low cost method, for maintaining a sense of continuity with co-workers for the deployed service member. This no cost/high impact action by Human Resources, the organization President, a direct manager, team, or military affinity group member, can foster employee loyalty, increase engagement, and improve retention.

8.6 Preparing for the Future

As each new chapter in the current war unfolds, there is a continuous need for collaborative efforts to deliver services, education and training to, and improve support and awareness among, a variety of stakeholders at both a national and local level. This requires authentic communication, purposeful programming, and a commitment to collaboration. Without these efforts we will continue to experience lack of match between employers, transitioning military, and their spouses seeking employment; myths and misperceptions in hiring/promotion practices affecting military-connected talent; stagnant or weakening employment opportunities for veterans and military spouses; increased economic insecurity within the military community, and, ultimately, incomplete solutions delivered in silos which, even at their best, will not achieve maximum impact. It therefore becomes increasingly important when looking at the “what and how” to consider “who” can contribute useful insights. Look for partners who can bridge knowledge gaps and assist with building viable, sustainable strategies—in all areas of the business. Consider the following:

8.6.1 Regularly Participate in Round Table Discussions, Strategy Planning Exercises, or Dialogues with Representatives Across All Sectors and Geographic Regions

The symposium that produced this book is a good example of a dialogue across all sectors specifically to stimulate ideas and transform them into measurable actions for the future conflicts. These types of events, when held on a regular basis, quickly establish the national dialogue and potential directions for the most pressing problems. For example, early in the conflict the focus was on employment. Now, with 5.5 M caregivers in the USA (Ramchand et al., 2014), the focus may shift from employment to supporting the needs of caregivers in employer benefits and work schedule flexibility. Or, collectively we could look to increasing program support

for veterans interested in entrepreneurship. Research indicates 25% of transition service members would like to start their own businesses (Fairlie, Morelix, Reedy, & Russell, 2015). Monitoring trends for issues such as these that affect the workforce and impact military families will assist to proactively prepare for the next shift in focus.

Relationships with other stakeholders can be very helpful when creating effective programs. They also provide an essential feedback loop for federal agencies tasked with providing transition programming for veterans and their families. However, invest time and resources where they will have the most impact for the organization. Before joining coalitions learn about other member organizations, and clarify membership expectations. Prior to supporting a non-profit, research and examine their financials, ratings, and impact statements. Be a conscientious contributor, knowing that the organization's leadership will expect measurable, defined impact concurrent with enhanced business operations that deliver effective outcomes. Also consider who will serve as champion, and the role of strategist, both with responsibility for communicating the purpose and metrics associated with each partnership and budget item. When choosing national, state, and local coalitions to join in pursuit of supporting military families and your military-affiliated employees, consider several factors:

- (a) What is this entity's purpose and does that purpose align with your organization's business goals in addition to your military-related programming? You will be better able to justify time and expense towards efforts that align with larger organizational goals than those outside your wheelhouse. For example, if you are a financial organization, joining a coalition around providing financial literacy services to military families or helping to get more military spouses into financial services is a more relevant investment than perhaps volunteering to build homes for veterans. Both are needed and worthwhile, however one has a more direct tie-in to your organization's expertise and business operations.
- (b) Do you want to outsource or in-source any of the services and/or trainings that this group might provide? There are many models for how organizations choose to provide training, on-boarding, and mentorship experiences, as well as sourcing and recruiting functions. It depends on size, expertise, resources, and a host of other considerations. Go back to your leadership and discuss what your enterprise-wide strategy is (or what you want it to be) towards diversity recruiting, professional development opportunities, and in-house training and curriculum programming before deciding on outsourcing that function within the military realm.
- (c) Does this group of organizations share best practices with each other regularly? Do they share their outcomes publicly and with transparency? Any expenditure of your resources and investment into the military community will continue to be scrutinized and judged against your own success metrics (increasing the percent of new hires who are military-affiliated, increasing retention of military-affiliated employees, company performance, etc.). Make sure you clearly understand the benefits of joining and investing your time and resources.

8.6.2 Leverage Military-Affiliated Employee Data to Set Strategies and Allocate Resources

Just as with designing relevant, cost-effective benefits and training programs, consider effective methods for incentivizing self-identification, data collection, and analytics to capture an accurate profile of an organization's military-connected talent. This is especially crucial for employers with federal contracts that must meet certain compliance criteria (i.e., The Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974—VEVRAA; and Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act—USERRA). Data collection combined with the ability to extrapolate meaningful reports for analysis, are integral components to the success of sourcing, recruiting, on-boarding, and retention functions. The concerns surrounding self-identification are often similar to those expressed by differently abled workers. One challenge is that many veterans and military spouses choose not to self-identify for fear they will not be hired, promoted, or given career-enriching assignments. However, over time and with corporate culture evolution, this challenge can dissipate as veterans, spouses, and reserve component members experience the commitment within their workplace to support military-affiliated employees.

Monitor the entire sourcing to on-boarding process and collect data so you can identify problem areas—know what lines of business, geographical areas, and levels of management are most populated by military talent, know your percentage of new hires and your total military-affiliated population. It is helpful to be able to know at which point in your talent acquisition and retention process organizations and veterans face the most challenges. The data will show you the exact points of difficulty within your operations—is it the jump from applicant to interview? Or perhaps interview to hire? Knowing the exact points of difficulty will help you know where you need to get better and hone your strategy.

Create tracking measures around career progression so you can also know the retention rates, performance, and satisfaction rates, of your military-affiliated employees, again by line of business, geographical area, and level of management or other categories that help you interpret data for your usage. Understand current and trending key issues and concerns such as health care, behavioral health care, education, career progression, and personal development. This will enhance opportunities to be proactive, rather than reactive to the prevalent topics as demographic shifts, life, and world issues affect the needs of veteran and military spouse retention and career progression issues. If your organization conducts a yearly employment engagement survey, consider creating or tagging-on a military-specific segment for military-affiliated employees. It is not enough to hire veterans. Businesses must strive to create an organizational culture where military-affiliated talent will choose to stay, contributing their experience and expertise to our bottom lines.

8.6.3 Expand Military-Friendly Efforts by Including Veteran Entrepreneurship

When looking at the holistic picture of how an organization engages with the military community, consider the role of entrepreneurship. According to the recent figures, 25% of veterans transitioning out of the service are interested in starting their own business (Fairlie et al., 2015). Veterans are overrepresented in the entrepreneur population; they employ nearly six million people; and generate annual receipts of approximately \$2.1 trillion. Given that veterans hire veterans, this could be the next level of employer/veteran support sophistication.

Consider veteran-owned businesses in relationship to operations, sales, and third-party vendors. For example, in addition to military talent as part of a diversity staffing strategy, think of sourcing and procurement programs. Where do opportunities exist to expand the number of veteran and military spouse owned businesses in the vendor or Business to Business supply chain? Do vendor selection criteria include reference to contracts (possibly with a preference) for veteran-owned businesses? Does the organization sell products or services to small businesses, invest in entrepreneurs and small businesses, or have resources to promote business-to-business or business-to-consumer selling models? Is there a relationship with the Coalition for Veteran-Owned Business? Ultimately, organizations will select a vendor for optimum product quality, competitive pricing and service. Including “veteran-owned business” in the selection and vetting criteria keeps the dialogue up front and center, reinforcing the brand message “we support veterans and military-affiliated talent.”

8.7 Expanding the National Dialogue

As employers and a nation, it is important to continue the dialogue about supporting military families; one that challenges us to think about what to consider beyond “of the moment issues” when preparing for the future and how to effectively deliver long-term solutions. For example, how will the changing demands and career paths within the military re-align with the private sector? This has become one of the biggest discussions for today’s service members. Traditional career paths from the past are not necessarily going to work in the future. Where are the gaps, and how can the private sector address these trends?

Warfare has dramatically changed over the centuries. Technology plays a major role in those changes that affects incumbents assigned to new job functions. Employers should remain cognizant of support strategies and planning as part of the potential evolution for outsourcing certain jobs previously performed by military staff. An example where this shift could occur are job functions related to cyber information. Though the job function may be performed domestically, stress levels may be the same as if the incumbents were performing as overseas active duty staff. What choices might employers need to make with regard to providing benefits and support for them and their families?

It is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue on a community level to create community capacity. Yet it is also important to invite and foster solutions focused on relationships and scalability at the national level to address issues with second- and third-order effects that touch every community. For example, national convenings might have an agenda item such as: *What is the next iteration for the Veteran Jobs Mission? How can organizations share talent in instances of military relocation? What do successful retention and career mobility metrics look like?* Collectively, public, private, and non-profit stakeholders will decide who is best situated to create and curate a national resource or repository that transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses could opt into and organizations can avail themselves of—or if one is even desired. Would the inability to identify a champion within the government lead employers to seek private sector alternatives with national coalitions or civilian talent locaters such as LinkedIn, Indeed, Monster, or Zip Recruiter?

While we continue to solve smaller pieces of the larger picture, we remember that as employers and business enterprises, we must use our first, best resources to find the best value. We must do what we can do best, enabling commerce, building communities through private enterprise, and hiring the best talent in the country.

How do we develop the next generation to create the optimum collective impact? Several national initiatives, including Joining Forces, have been extremely effective in galvanizing employers nationwide. No matter the form it may take with each new White House Administration or national convening, this type of national dialogue and concentrated effort spurred employers to collective, collaborative action. It created a cohesive national voice, while appealing to the private sector value of driving ingenuity and innovation. Leadership from the White House or the government will always be needed, but businesses are equally vital to create lasting impact and successful economic health for veterans and their families.

When reflecting on how human resource professionals, other business leaders, and organizations with a common core value can support military talent and their families, consider the potential of each choice and action. Choosing collaborative, proactive approaches as exemplified in this chapter, can collectively create opportunities that improve the economic security, and stability of military-affiliated talent, and their families. Those choices also create the space for optimized health and overall well-being for military families. As a result, the organizations also can thrive, financially and culturally. The resulting intrinsic value for all is beyond measure.

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