

VETERANS VALUE

John McDuffie, Undergraduate in Management Department, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Campus Box 78, P.O.Box 173362, Denver, CO 80217-3362, 303-556-3061

Philippe Chastagner, Undergraduate in Management Department, Metropolitan State University of Denver, Campus Box 78, P.O. Box 173362, Denver, CO 80217-3362, 303-556-3061

INTRODUCTION

Each day an individual decides to join the workforce and try to find their career path. Within the United States of America there are young individuals that choose the path of a military service. The reasons range from wanting to travel the world, find a purpose, serve their country, gain a trade, have new experiences, a better life, education funding, a family tradition, and more. Out of all of those individuals it is inevitable that one day the career of a military service member must come to an end.

It is not just the start of a new career though as they leave the one they had in the military but the start of a new life. With this transition and beginning come great consequences and effects. As of today we are facing the highest rate of veteran unemployment. This paper will examine: the facts and overview of today's veteran, employer concerns, the acclimation issues, employer stereotypes, matters of skills being transitioned, disabilities, the translation of military skills to civilian work experience, and program support. The value of today's veteran seems to be lost in our society and we must ask ourselves why.

THE FACTS AND OVERVIEW

Why the high unemployment rate for veterans? Jason Faberman and Taft Foster suggest there are four major reasons for the disparate unemployment rates between Gulf War II veterans and veterans of previous conflicts [3].

1. Gulf War II veterans are younger and less qualified than veterans of previous conflicts or non-conflict veterans.
2. Gulf War II veterans have fewer job skills which are transferable to the civilian employment market.
3. Any person entering the labor force during a period of economic downturn has fewer opportunities available to them.
4. Gulf War II veterans face employer concerns about physical and psychological trauma.

Each year the military separates between 240,000 and 360,000 service members, according to a 2013 White House report on measures to help veterans find jobs. Those numbers are expected to rise well into the millions in the coming years as the military looks to cut troop levels across the services to meet the fiscal challenges imposed by sequestration [6]. The unemployment rates for veterans of prior conflicts are comparable or lower than most groups in the labor market. Much of this is due to age. The youngest Vietnam Veterans are in their late 50's and the average Gulf War I Veterans are in their mid-40's. Most of these veterans have been integrated into the labor force for many years and have refined or adapted their job skills to the labor market.

Most Gulf War II veterans entered military service between 2002 and 2012. The United States faced a severe economic downturn during this period and job opportunities for unskilled labor were limited. Many younger and unskilled members of the labor market saw opportunity in the Armed Services. Advertising presented the aspiring recruit with the opportunity to learn a skill that would transfer into the civilian market. As of today this has proved more than anything to be completely untrue.

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have a difficult time returning to society and the workforce. There are several reasons for these problems, some are generational. Current returning veterans are members of an all-volunteer force. Their World War II, Korean and Vietnam counterparts were largely draftees. In many cases the assimilation of earlier veterans was easier and more widely accepted. These veterans were seen as returning from service they were required to perform. Most enlisted in a time of economic downturn. Many were married when they entered service. Many are well educated and many have post-secondary degrees. Even though Gulf War II Veterans faced some of the same issues of marriage and leaving a civilian life for that of a military one, it was a choice they made. Once current veterans have the opportunity to reintegrate with society, they will prove to be a valuable asset.

Since the 2008 recession, employers have been hiring the best employees they can get and it is an employer's market. Employers more easily understand an individual's civilian work experience than their military experience even if they were equivalent. Earlier veterans faced similar problems as today's veterans. Economic downturns after WWII and Vietnam increased the jobless numbers among veterans although earlier veterans fared better than non-veterans at these times. Those early veterans were better received and were afforded more opportunities in the workforce. As a result, earlier veterans were more easily assimilated in the workforce and society. Today's employers have an ample supply of experienced job applicants available to them.

ACCLIMATING AND ADAPTING

Veterans are trained and forced into a military culture from the first day that they join their military branch of choice without the ability to leave or "back out" because they signed a binding contract with the government. In turn they immediately are learning to leave behind their civilian life. This involves everything from learning new behaviors, body language, habits, ways of dress, and combatant aspects. For Gulf War II veterans this was an even greater acclimation process because so many were forced directly into combat type situations upon joining the military.

Many Gulf War II veterans served a period of at least four years in their military career. In the civilian sector a person is able to work for an organization and leave it behind once they are outside of their hours of operation. With the military this is different as military personnel are involved with the organization even outside of "work" periods. A four year period for any individual to work for an organization has a definite impact on a veteran's post military life.

This complete immersion into the military culture makes it somewhat difficult to then unlearn and integrate into the civilian world. Some employers understand this and are concerned how well a veteran will integrate into a civilian organization. Few employers are willing to take the steps to understand the military culture. Conversely, the ability to adapt to the military indicates for some veterans their ability to re-assimilate into society. Military personnel are trained and taught their entire service period to acclimate to any situation and to their surroundings. Acclimating is a primary skill that all military personnel learn and carry with them due to the immense training and constant changes they process through during their service period. The key factor for employers is to allow a veteran time to acclimate into civilian life and a new organization. Acclimating, though, is not the only employer concern.

Returning veterans have plenty of traits that should make them attractive to employers: discipline, leadership, and even specific training in areas like health care or information technology. But they also typically have less civilian work experience. And for many companies, [that makes a big difference](#) — when the economy is weak, employers are less likely to take risks when hiring [5].

TRANSITIONING SKILLS INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

The ability to transfer military experience into civilian employment depends on that veterans training. Some have little problem transitioning military job skills to the civilian job market because the same skills are transferable such as heavy equipment operators and air traffic controllers. Other skill sets are not so easy to define in the civilian market such as infantryman, mortar man, armored vehicle operator or radio operator.

Some military experiences develop “soft skills” that the veteran does not understand how to translate into civilian employment or that have a negative connotation such as infantryman or sniper. For example, all officer and all enlisted personnel receive significant training on management, communications, team work, motivation, scheduling, rewarding, evaluation, and leadership. But most infantry team leaders do not know how to translate these leadership and decision making skills to an employer in a context that the employer can understand.

EMPLOYER CONCERNS

Three employer concerns that may prevent them from hiring veterans: the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) effecting job performance, the cost of reasonable accommodations for disabled veterans, and the transfer of military skills to the civilian workplace [1].

The current type of warfare uses improvised explosive devices (IEDs) leading to veterans with traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, disability rates are much higher among veterans. In 2011, some 28 percent of all Gulf War II veterans reported a disability related to their time in the armed service — and those vets face a jobless rate of 12.5 percent [5].

The rate for recent veterans without disabilities stood at 8 percent, though it is not clear if this difference is statistically significant [5].

However, employers are unaware that the costs of accommodating disabled veterans are relatively small and average only \$500 per veteran [4]. When asked whether workers with PTSD or TBI were more likely to have violent outbursts in the workplace, and whether it was costly to accommodate these workers, more than half of respondents say they do not know [1].

The reality though is that these types of disabilities affect a very small seven percent of post 9/11 veterans [4]. In addition, the veteran is usually already being helped by Veterans Affairs for most physical limitations and mental disabilities such as a TBI or PTSD. Therefore, most employer accommodations can be accomplished with simple communication, awareness, and flexibility.

THE STEREOTYPES

The public and employers have various stereotypes about veterans: many are trained killers, will be inflexible and argumentative, most have PTSD, do not have civilian job skills, and they will not assimilate into the organization's culture [4].

Many employers regard all members of the military community as trained killers. Nothing is farther from the truth because over 80% of all military personnel are in support rolls such as supply, maintenance, medical, intelligence or administration. Another misconception is that veterans are inflexible and argumentative. This stereotype is completely wrong as veterans are used to taking direction from their supervisors and are loyal and respectful to those in authority and their team mates.

Many employers fear working with veterans with physical or psychological trauma issues. The popular perception seems to be that veterans with combat related injuries will become volatile without any warning. While some veterans have PTSD, many have sought government assistance and are dealing with the issue.

Although veterans are shown with many negative stereotypes to employer's views they have many positive stereotypes that outweigh the negative. On top of those listed earlier the other main factor that a veteran can carry upon him/her is the ability to grow, learn quickly, and creative thinking.

HOW THEY ARE BEING HELPED AND HOW THEY SHOULD BE HELPED

The government has created a list of programs to try and help military veterans with their transition back into civilian life by developing job skills and securing civilian employment. Amongst these programs are education benefits such as the GI Bill, aid for disability, vocational rehabilitation, training assistance, and tax credits for employers who actually hire veterans. Veterans' employment outcomes in the civilian sector are an issue of ongoing congressional interest. A number of programs currently exist to assist veterans in obtaining or training for civilian employment.

The problem with the government programs is that they are limited, targeted or focus on certain areas for veterans. Veteran programs are at an all-time high, although most are poorly managed and underfunded. The programs are divided into three main categories based on how they serve the veterans in need and type of help it can provide:

1. General Veterans' Employment and Training Programs – These programs listed by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) are available to most veterans of active duty.
2. Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities – Additional programs that can be accessed by service-connected disabled veterans.
3. Veteran-Targeted Competitive Grant Programs – Grant funded competitive programs that are available only in certain areas, are limited, or only serve select targeted veterans.

There is regular congressional debate about expanding or otherwise amending these programs to better serve veterans [2].

However the disparity between the amount of training that a veteran receives for introduction into civilian life is only .2% of all the training that they receive in the military. What if service members were given even half the training time on civilian life as they were given to be a service member?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are many issues which must be resolved to rectify the current veteran unemployment situation. These include: lack of preparation for separation, limited ability to translate work experience, the lack of ability to readily assimilate into society are all ongoing problems which amplify the veterans employment problem.

Lack of preparation of Veterans before they reenter civilian life is a primary problem. Complete and accurate screening needs to be done to diagnose and define treatment for all service related disabilities. Veterans need to be aware of all vocational opportunities available to them before they separate. They should also be aware of all options for employment services and benefits at the federal, state and local levels including those available from non-profit organizations. Education for separating service members on how their experiences and training relate to the business world would also provide significant assistance to veterans.

Lack of support from the Veteran's Administration and the Military Services in documentation and translation of work experience to the business world are major problems for veterans, educational institutions and the business community. Since most military training does not receive post-secondary educational credit, it does not easily translate into the business world. This promotes a lack of understanding and acceptance of veterans by the business community, increased veteran unemployment and loss of valuable, talented and skilled employees. There is also a lack of incentives for American industry to hire and accept veterans as viable members of the community and workforce.

Many government incentives are temporary and are not well known. State and federal governments should extend tax credit programs for hiring veterans and subsidize employment training programs for new veteran employees. Many organizations are reluctant to hire veterans because of disability adaptation costs. In most cases these costs are minimal and may be covered by Veteran's Administration programs. Organizations have misconceptions about the volatility and stability of some veterans. Education could be used to combat these unfounded and unjustified stereotypes, aiding in the assimilation of veterans in business and society. The American business world has an opportunity to gain the value and hire the best trained, hardest working and most loyal workers available. Hire a Veteran, gain a greater value.

REFERENCES

- [1] Castellano, S. *The Value of Veterans*. ASTD Press, 2013.
- [2] Collins, B., Dilger, R. J., Dortch, C., Kapp, L., Lowry, S., & Perl, L. *Employment for Veterans: Trends and Programs*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42790.pdf> 2014.
- [3] Faberman, R. & Foster, T. Unemployment Among Recent Veterans During the Great Recession. *Economic Perspectives*, 37(1). 1. 2013'
- [4] Lewis, K. *3 Reasons Why Companies Don't Hire Veterans*. Fortune. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2013/11/11/3-reasons-why-companies-dont-hire-veterans/> 2013
- [5] Plumer, B. *The Unemployment Rate For Recent Veterans is Incredibly High*. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/11/11/recent-veterans-are-still-experiencing-double-digit-unemployment/> 2013
- [6] Watson, B. (2014). *Veteran Unemployment Rate Drops, But Still Outpaces the Rest of the Country*. Defense One. Retrieved from <http://www.defenseone.com/news/2014/05/D1-Watson-veteran-unemployment-rate-drops-still-outpaces-rest-country/83692/> 2014