

A Debt to be Paid: Employing our Veterans

By Preston Ingalls

Part 1



What has 4 decades as an employer taught me about hiring and managing veterans? That it's the smartest move I can make in terms of a stronger workforce and ROI.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 21 million men and women, or 9 percent of the civilian population age 18 and over, are veterans.

Finding decent employment, as a veteran, is not a given just because they served their country. In 2014, the unemployment rate of veterans varied by state, ranging from 1.4 percent in North Dakota to 8.5 percent in Maryland. The good news is that it has gotten better in 2014 and 2015. The unemployment rate for veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time since September 2001—a group referred to as Gulf War-era II veterans—declined by 1.8 percentage points over the year to 7.2 percent in 2014.

However, among men age 25 to 34, Gulf War-era II veterans had a higher unemployment rate (7.5 percent) than did nonveterans (6.3 percent). BLS reported that among women, the unemployment rate for Gulf War-era II veterans (8.5 percent) was higher than the rate for nonveterans (5.9 percent) in 2014. 35-to 44-year-old female veterans had a rate of 9.0 percent, which is almost double the rate of 4.8 percent for their nonveteran counterparts.

According to the *Stars and Stripes* (an online independent news and information site dedicated to the U.S. military community, comprised of active-duty service members, DoD civilians, contractors, and their families), nearly two-thirds of new veterans say they faced a difficult transition to civilian life. While the bleak economic environment is partially to blame, a survey on post-military employment explains that they also seem to be speaking a different language than the business leaders who might hire them.

In the applicant screening process, I will give extra points to anyone that is a veteran. It's not necessarily because I'm a Vietnam Vet that can relate to them more than non-vets. The simple fact is hiring vets makes more sense because of the unique qualities they bring to the table. I refer to these as the "Two-Zero Hero" or 20 reasons to hire a vet.

TWO-ZERO HERO: 20 REASONS TO HIRE A VET

1. Mission First: Vets have been conditioned to focus more on the mission at hand than personal goals and objectives. They have learned, through training and coaching, to see the immediate and long-term missions as paramount over their own needs.

2. One Team-One Purpose: Since teamwork is reinforced over and over in all aspects of military life, Vets understand the benefits of collaboration and cooperation in accomplishing objectives. They have also experienced the esprit de corps and camaraderie that develops in the form of devotion and loyalty to a group supporting a common goal or objective. It is one thing to support a common purpose eight to five, but in the military where your waking hours are spent with the same people on and off duty, you develop a close social bond. So the buddy with whom you work closely in performing your duties is the same one with which you share quarters and socialize. That contact forms a tight bond that creates a formidable team.

3. Expedited Learning Curve: Vets have the proven ability to quickly acquire new skills and knowledge. How else could you take an 18-year-old who once flipped hamburgers for a living and train him to service complex equipment worth millions and make decisions that could affect the lives and welfare of many others in a few short months? The fact that they possess transferable skills proven to achieve success is just one of the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Preston Ingalls is president and CEO of TBR Strategies, LLC, a Raleigh, North Carolina-based maintenance and reliability firm specializing in the construction and oil and gas industries. Preston can be reached at pingalls@tbr-strategies.com, or visit www.tbr-strategies.com. Take the time this month to pay respects to those in our military that defend our freedoms 24/7. Give thanks to those who wear the uniform. Reach out to your local churches and city councils to find ways to support the red, white, and blue.

reasons we have the largest and finest military in the world.

4. **Disciplined Approach:** Vets are conditioned from the beginning of their training to follow a disciplined, self-controlled regimen. Where many nonveterans may eventually learn this lesson, their veteran counterparts are repeatedly trained and reinforced in restraint and constant focus.
5. **Procedural Awareness:** Vets have gained a distinctive perception on the value of accountability and activity consistency in far higher proportions than their civilian counterparts. Because they have seen constant proceduralization and standardization of tasks during their military jobs, they understand how policies and procedures produce uniformity, safety, and higher productivity.
6. **Leadership Slant:** Vets understand practical ways to manage and achieve goals and targets in even the most difficult and complex situations. They are trained to lead by example as well as through influence, direction, delegation, motivation, and encouragement. This training is formalized, for the most part, and reinforced through constant coaching and practical on-the-job-training.
7. **Count on Me:** Vets know what it means to do an "honest day's work." They may have complained about the activities while performing them, but the majority recognize that integrity translates into qualities of seriousness, reliability, and trustworthiness. "I count on you; you count on me."
8. **Pressured Performance:** Vets have the ability to know how to accomplish tasks on time despite apprehension, stress, or adversity. They understand the importance of dedication of effort and persistence.
9. **Can Do-Will Do:** Because Vets are conditioned early in their training to triumph over adversity, they have learned to safely push themselves beyond perceived limits. That confidence comes from a hard-won record of resolve to overcome challenges and barriers through

sheer will. The confidence gained from pushing beyond physical, emotional, and mental constraints creates a "can do" spirit, difficult to replicate in time spent only in a civilian career.

10. **Safety First:** Vets have a heightened awareness of the significance of

health and safety standards. This dedication translates into the safeguarding of self, others, and property. ■

Check out the next issue of MCS for the next 10 reasons to hire a veteran and learn why veterans are struggling to find jobs in the civilian world.

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A Debt to be Paid: Employing our Veterans



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Part 2

What has four decades as an employer taught me about hiring and managing veterans? That it's the smartest move I can make in terms of a stronger workforce and ROI. The simple fact is: Hiring vets makes more sense because of the unique qualities they bring to the table. I refer to these as the "Two-Zero Hero" or 20 reasons to hire a vet. We covered the first 10 reasons in the last issue. Let's take a look at the **NEXT 10 REASONS TO HIRE A VET:**

- 11. Diversity and Blend:** Vets have worked at close quarters with diverse races, genders, religious affiliations, and ethnicities, as well as different mindsets and physical capabilities. That exposure broadens their respect for different backgrounds, enabling them to bridge gaps to form strong teams toward a common goal.
- 12. Globalization Alertness:** Vets are acutely aware of international implications pertinent to business. Most have traveled to places that the majority of the population will never see or experience. Consequently, they develop a blend of awareness and worldwide outlook that is focused on success.
- 13. Superior Technology Aptitude:** Vets have been exposed to some of the most sophisticated equipment and processes available. Consequently, they have a greater appreciation for the application of technology than the average person, which makes it easier to embrace new technology.
- 14. Flex to Change:** Constant deployments, new roles and responsibilities, and the flux and dynamic change of military situations condition the vet to appreciate and accept fluidity in the workplace. This makes them more apt and able to accept change than a non-veteran.
- 15. Decision Makers:** Vets were trained to gather as much information as possible from a variety of sources and to make quick decisions on their feet. They learn the value of facts and data, but also value the sharpness of their intuition in making decisions. Ultimately, they understand the burden and consequences of making decisions and don't shirk the responsibility.
- 16. Risk Wranglers:** Vets have learned to embrace a certain level of personal risk-taking to accomplish a job, while respecting the threats and implications of those risks.
- 17. Fire in their Belly:** Vets have learned to apply a sense of urgency to their tasks. While quality of execution is important—speed of execution is as well. This has enabled the vet to learn the power of swiftness in accomplishing tasks.
- 18. Dedicated:** Vets have learned to embrace dedication to their team, their unit, their branch of service, and their country. They are used to being challenged and encouraged to demonstrate initiative. They have enviable work ethics and have managed to work long hours under grueling work conditions.
- 19. Incentive Bump:** We, as employers, benefit in many tangible ways when hiring vets. One of which is through the tax credit reward for hiring vets. The credit can be as high as \$9,600 per veteran for for-profit employers or up to \$6,240 for tax-exempt organizations.
- 20. Our Obligation:** After chartering them as warriors and sending them off, we, as a nation, have an obligation to acclimate them back into society. We owe them.

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Preston Ingalls is president and CEO of TBR Strategies, LLC, a Raleigh, North Carolina-based maintenance and reliability firm specializing in the construction and oil and gas industries. Preston can be reached at pingalls@tbr-strategies.com, or visit www.tbr-strategies.com.

The Two-Zero Hero List is by no means a complete list of the reasons why we should hire vets. Unfortunately there are many reasons why veterans are still struggling to find jobs, which are explored below.

THE STRUGGLE

One reason vets struggle to gain employment as a civilian is the **difficulty converting military experience** to a potential job need. Civilians won't know how to translate all the military jargon and acronyms into something they can relate to. Unfortunately, many veterans haven't learned how to translate their experiences into comparable civilian application. Employers that are often unclear as to the conversion of skills and experiences may revert back to a more comfortable position of passing over a veteran prospect.

Another issue is **stereotyping by perspective employers**. A common misconception about veterans is that many of them have post-traumatic stress disorder. In fact, several years ago, 46 percent of human resource professionals surveyed by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) cited PTSD and mental health issues as challenges of hiring employees with military experience.

PTSD is shared by about one fifth of veterans. My group, Vietnam vets, had the highest at 30 percent. But PTSD is commonly treatable. Many of the vets I have employed over the years had it and took meds to control it and never exhibited any disrupting characteristics.

The SRHM study found that many HR people believe that veterans, used to following orders, can't take initiative and are too rigid. This is not true. Vets were conditioned to take orders but were also trained to think on their feet when orders were not always there. In fact, considerable training was focused on this ability to make quick decisions after gathering as much information as possible in short order.

Another concern, especially for Reservists and National Guardsmen, is **redeployment or activation**. Employers are concerned that redeployments will result in the loss of the time and training investment of vets. While the risk does exist, it's certainly one that can be worked around and accommodated.

DEBT TO BE PAID

We sent our men and women warriors

far off to distant shores to defend our principles, privileges, honor, and freedoms. They weren't asked if they believed in the mission or in the values they were defending. They stepped forth so others would not have to.

Now, they have performed their duties and have returned. We, as a grateful society, should make every

effort possible to thank them for their service and bring them back into the fold.

"Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys. Look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death!"

~Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*. ■

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