

Post-Military Employment

The Final Collective Task

By Dale Williams, Special to the NCO Journal

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More than 200,000 servicemembers are projected by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to leave the active service annually through 2019. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor shows that recent veterans from 18 to 34 years of age have a higher unemployment rate than non-veterans in the same age range. Veteran hiring programs and initiatives have been shown to contain value. However, unemployment and post-military job retention problems among recent veterans persist.

Many public and private sector employers have undertaken initiatives to attract and hire veterans transitioning from active service. Ultimately, however, the primary responsibility for obtaining post-military employment rests with the individual Soldier. Thus, an NCO's duty to care for a Soldier's well-being is fulfilled once the individual leaves active service — or is it?

In contemplating what additional steps may help Soldiers establish productive post-military careers, NCOs may consider employing a "Triple-A strategy," where the three "A"s stand for Acceptance, Assistance and Accessibility.

A leader must first make a conscious commitment to accepting responsibility to support a Soldier entering the civilian workforce. It is purely a personal choice, but acceptance of this responsibility involves taking a proactive position, or mindset, that indicates a willingness to help the Soldier beyond mandated transition requirements.

Once a leader decides to accept responsibility to aid a transitioning Soldier, the second step requires leader assistance during the Soldier's job-search period. The period occurs while the Soldier is in uniform. However, it is common for Soldiers to begin their job search on their own before entry into formal transition programs or after they leave the service. This aspect of the Soldier's transition requires that the leader has a basic understanding of the civilian hiring process.

The NCO should understand that though there are differences in specific hiring procedures among private sector employers, as well as among federal and other public sector employers, the overall hiring process follows a general pattern. First, consider and identify the type of employment the Soldier desires after military service. When the Soldier shares his or her post-military employment plans with his or her leader, the leader, in turn, is better prepared to assist with and monitor key points in the hiring process.

It may be said that a Soldier's relationship with an organization begins when the Soldier applies for the desired position, commonly through a company's website. The individual is viewed as an applicant once their application is entered into the organization's applicant tracking system for prescreening analysis. Depending on the system used, even highly qualified candidate applications may not make it beyond this stage of the

process if the resume is not formatted to match the essential job functions of the position closely. It is vital that applicants read the position description carefully and ensure that their experience, knowledge, skills and abilities align with the specifications of the job — without copying the job description word-for-word into the resume.

Although it may initially appear as simple as uploading one's resume, the application process often involves both uploading a formatted resume and manually entering the same resume information into specific fields on the company's ATS. The applicant should have an electronic copy of the resume opened and be prepared to copy and paste information from it into the company's system.

After the system has identified what its algorithm suggests are highly qualified candidates, applicants are selected for initial interviews. The interview validates information on the resume and further determines which candidates best meet the organization's specific needs. As many Soldiers' immediate supervisors are noncommissioned officers, the next step is where the NCO plays the most critical role: accessibility. After an interview, the remaining applicants may undergo testing, which may involve measures of aptitude, physical ability, personality and other pre-employment assessments.

Many employers also conduct background and reference checks of candidates they are interested in at this point. The leader should be accessible not only to their former Soldier but also the potential employer. Therefore, it is vital that applicants obtain and maintain accurate contact information (e.g., emails and phone numbers) of their former leaders or immediate supervisors. It is essential to establish a reach-back point of contact before transition between the Soldier and leaders who have something positive to say about the Soldier.

In the final stages of the process, companies often have narrowed the list down to a few candidates, sometimes holding a second or third round of interviews with additional company personnel present — potential supervisors or co-workers, for example — before making a conditional job offer. After the conditional offer is made, companies may sometimes require the candidate to undergo a physical exam or other post-offer assessments, making the job contingent on passing any final requirements. After that, the final offer is made. The final offer period is where many companies negotiate salary and benefits packages with the selected candidate, and presuming that there is agreement, the candidate is hired.

The current generation of veterans are the beneficiaries of unprecedented levels of collaboration between public and private sector entities in efforts to utilize the skills, knowledge and abilities that service members bring to the civilian workplace. Leaders who understand the selection and hiring processes are better able to predict where and how to assist Soldiers in their search for employment. For their part, transitioning service members who equip themselves with knowledge of civilian employment practices are better prepared to navigate paths toward obtaining the job they desire. Through effective communication between the transitioning Soldier and the leader, they can ensure that the final objective is successfully achieved.

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