

Title: Bridging the Gap from Military to Civilian Workforce

*A White Paper developed for the Washington State Business Leadership Network (WSBLN)
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The United States is home to 26 million military veterans. Each of these individuals gave part of their lives, and often sacrificed their physical and mental health, in service to our country. Though they rarely ask for it, and generally believe they were just "doing their job," these great Americans deserve our thanks. They also deserve our support as exiting service members, transitioning from military to civilian careers.

Challenges Facing Transitioning Service Members

New veterans are daily added to our population. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 200,000 service members transition to veteran status annually. And with a current military population of 1.4 million service members on active duty and 1.2 million service members in the reserves, veterans will continue to transition to the civilian workforce over the coming years.

Veterans in particular need of our support are those who have been severely wounded or disabled in their service to the nation. Advances in medical support in the field now save lives that in previous wars would have been lost. However many of the service members whose lives are saved are left with severe wounds, burns, scars and disabilities – the ratio is 10 wounded or disabled to each one killed in battle. Over 22,000 service members have been wounded or disabled just since Sept. 11, 2001, as participants in the nation's War on Terror.

So how are our returning service members faring as they return from the military to seek jobs in the civilian workforce? A recent article posted on www.ArmyTimes.com reported, "The unemployment rate for 20-to 24-year-olds has increased in the last two years while the rate for non-veterans in the same age group has dropped. According to the Department of Labor, unemployment in this age range is 15.8 % for veterans and 7.9% for non-veterans. The jobless rate has risen as 42,000 veterans in the 20- to 24-year-old age group who served in Afghanistan and Iraq have separated from the military."¹ (Update: see GI Jobs article, "Veterans Will Take Help, But Don't Need Charity," Jan 2007. Argues several reasons why transitioning military may use unemployment benefits upon leaving the service.)

"Ensuring a smooth transition for those young service members, who bravely fought for freedom, should be a national priority," said Senator Larry Craig, R-Idaho, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman. "In a strong economy, as we have in most of the nation," he says, "these numbers just don't fit." Senator Patty Murray, D-Washington, agrees. She says she thinks veterans "are falling between the cracks," with many employers seemingly reluctant to hire combat veterans, especially if they are National Guard or reserve members who might be mobilized again for extended deployments.²

Veterans Who Have Succeeded in Making the Transition

Still many veterans of previous conflicts have demonstrated an ability to leverage their military experience into the corporate world. Navy veteran Charles Brown rose to become CEO of AT&T; Don Regan, CEO of Merrill Lynch, is a military veteran; retired Army General John Watkins, is now chief technical officer at Fairchild Semiconductor. But all too often even these proven corporate leaders began their corporate careers with a rough start.

¹ Rick Maze, "Lawmakers want employment help for young vets," <http://www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-carnews-1540305.php> (February 17, 2006).

² Ibid.

Charles Phillips, president of Oracle and a former Wall Street stock analyst and former Marine, described the bias he first encountered when transitioning to the civilian workforce. "People just did not want to even consider someone ex-military," he says. "I've seen it in my career since I've been on Wall Street and now in the software business. People will set aside a resume if it has military experience on it. They don't believe the skills translate at all."³

Tom Weisenfels graduated from West Point, served as an Army combat engineer officer, and fought in the 1991 Gulf War before going to Merrill Lynch, twelve years ago. Upon leaving the Army as a first lieutenant during the military downsizing in 1992, Weisenfels' experience mirrored that of Phillips. He sent out résumés and cover letters by the dozen and never received a call for an interview. Eventually he turned to professional recruiters who were able to get him interviews leading to a string of job offers including the one at Merrill Lynch where he is currently a vice president and senior financial adviser.⁴

Service Members Bring a Unique Skill Set to the Civilian Workplace

In her article, "The Military Advantage," Rebecca Zicarelli, contributing editor for *Veteran's Business Journal*, describes exiting service members as ". . . a talent pool of workers who are disciplined, skilled at overcoming obstacles and achieving objectives, understand teamwork, accept responsibility for their actions, communicate clearly, and live their lives with integrity,"⁵ a perfect description of the kind of employee that corporate America is constantly seeking.

Tom Weisenfels says of veterans, "People from the military have a higher internal drive for excellence. We see that they're self-policing. They have less of a disposition to blame outside events or organizational issues for lack of success. They typically are self-driven and have a higher moral compass. In military terms, given a mission, they set out to achieve it without a whole lot of oversight."⁵

[HireVetsFirst.com](http://www.hirevetsfirst.com) describes itself as ". . . the comprehensive career website for hiring veterans of America's military." The [President's National Hire Veterans Committee](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2005/01/20/05-01-20-president-national-hire-veterans-committee), which was created by the Jobs for Veterans Act (Public Law 107-288), designed this website to help employers find qualified veterans, and to help veterans make the best use of a national network of employment resources. The site lists the following "10 Reasons to Hire Vets:"

10 Reasons to Hire Vets

1. **Accelerated learning curve.** Veterans have the proven ability to learn new skills and concepts. In addition, they can enter your workforce with identifiable and transferable skills, proven in real world situations. This background can enhance your organization's productivity.
2. **Leadership.** The military trains people to lead by example as well as through direction, delegation, motivation and inspiration. Veterans understand the practical ways to manage behaviors for results, even in the most trying circumstances. They also know the dynamics of leadership as part of both hierarchical and peer structures.
3. **Teamwork.** Veterans understand how genuine teamwork grows out of a responsibility to one's colleagues. Military duties involve a blend of individual and group productivity. They also necessitate a perception of how groups of all sizes relate to each other and an overarching objective.
4. **Diversity and inclusion in action.** Veterans have learned to work side by side with individuals regardless of diverse race, gender, geographic origin, ethnic background, religion and economic status as well as mental, physical and attitudinal capabilities. They have the sensitivity to cooperate with many different types of individuals.

³ Rebecca Zicarelli, "The Military Advantage," from *Across the Board*, published by The Conference Board, http://www.conference-board.org/articles/atb_article.cfm?id=296 (January-February 2005).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

5. **Efficient performance under pressure.** Veterans understand the rigors of tight schedules and limited resources. They have developed the capacity to know how to accomplish priorities on time, in spite of tremendous stress. They know the critical importance of staying with a task until it is done right.
6. **Respect for procedures.** Veterans have gained a unique perspective on the value of accountability. They can grasp their place within an organizational framework, becoming responsible for subordinates' actions to higher supervisory levels. They know how policies and procedures enable an organization to exist.
7. **Technology and globalization.** Because of their experiences in the service, veterans are usually aware of international and technical trends pertinent to business and industry. They can bring the kind of global outlook and technological savvy that all enterprises of any size need to succeed.
8. **Integrity.** Veterans know what it means to do "an honest day's work." Prospective employers can take advantage of a track record of integrity, often including security clearances. This integrity translates into qualities of sincerity and trustworthiness.
9. **Conscious of health and safety standards.** Thanks to extensive training, veterans are aware of health and safety protocols both for themselves and the welfare of others. Individually, they represent a drug-free workforce that is cognizant of maintaining personal health and fitness. On a company level, their awareness and conscientiousness translate into protection of employees, property and materials.
10. **Triumph over adversity.** In addition to dealing positively with the typical issues of personal maturity, veterans have frequently triumphed over great adversity. They likely have proven their mettle in mission critical situations demanding endurance, stamina and flexibility. They may have overcome personal disabilities through strengths and determination.

Military Training is Key

A key to the veteran's preparation for employment in the civilian workforce is their training. The federal government spends \$17 billion annually in training service members – including \$2 billion on college and job training, \$600 million on rehabilitation services, and \$250 million on employment preparation training. Over \$1 billion in annual spend is focused on preparing veterans for employment. These services are provided largely through three federally-funded programs, Transition Assistance Program (TAP,) U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) funded grants, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E.)

John Watkins, retired Army General and CTO at Fairchild Semiconductor, says of military training, "There's no difference between the application of military leadership and corporate leadership, the difference is in the training. It begins with a recruit's first day in boot camp, when the soldier is learning to lead by learning to follow. By the time we promote a young officer to Lt. Colonel we have put him through both academic leadership training and real-world experience where the officer had to take a group of people and mold them into a cohesive unit with the purpose of winning and not really caring who takes the credit for it."

Retired Army General Mike McDuffie, now Telos Corp's chief marketing officer, says, "The whole training dynamic in the military is to put people in difficult situations – pressure-filled, near-combat conditions, with lack of sleep, lack of food, cold and rain – to see how they react to it. . . . It winnows and shapes leadership ability in a crucible of stress, accomplishment and camaraderie.

"Just like a successful business, it's a situation that requires efficient, effective teamwork and good communication. But the military team differs significantly from the business team in one key way – these aren't matters of profit and loss, dividends, market share, and executive compensation – they're matters of life and death. These are stretch assignments in which personal survival is subjugated to the mission and the success of good teamwork. Teamwork in the military requires absolute trust, McDuffie says, and absolute trust is possible only when it is rooted in integrity and ethics."

Stumbling Blocks in the Transition Process

So why do we see such low placement rates among veterans, particularly disabled veterans, seeking employment? As Rebecca Zicarelli observes, "Soldiers who specialize in the arts of war – we see them patrolling the streets of Baghdad on the nightly news – have hard skills that don't easily translate to the corporate world. However their leadership skills translate laterally and when these abilities are rounded out with the business applications in programs like Coors' boot camp, the results can be stunning."⁶

Kevin Horigan, with PeopleSoft Inc., says, "More than 50% of today's veterans have advanced technology skills. The challenge . . . is in 'translation.' A soldier who has run an advanced weapons system is in fact one of the world's foremost computer skills experts." But when that soldier develops a resume based on his or her military experience, there is often a disconnect between the skills listed and the skills that a corporate recruiter is seeking in a potential candidate for an open position. The problem is not that the soldier doesn't have the skills the recruiter wants, the problem is that the soldier's resume doesn't show those capabilities.⁷

Wesley Poriotis, Chairman and Co-founder of Veterans Across America, points out "The military stresses leadership and management skills, but the private sector hires 'functionally' for all but the highest level of business-people."

Carl Barnhill, Chief Revenue Officer for Coors Brewing Company, and a former Marine, points out an interviewing skill that doesn't come easily to exiting service members. According to Barnhill, "Military people always talk about 'we' and 'team' and others who haven't been in the military talk about 'me' and 'I.' While this might imply that veterans made better team players than leaders what it really shows is that the military doesn't emphasize teaching its people how to sell themselves and their leadership skills."

American Corporations Working to Solve the "Translation Problem"

What can we do to turn the situation around? A number of American corporations are already leading the way in employing exiting service members.

Carl Barnhill, Chief Revenue Officer for Coors Brewing Company realized that his company needed a better pipeline for developing its future leaders. So Barnhill began recruiting Marines ready to enter the civilian workforce through military job fairs. Coors puts its recruits through an intensive twelve-week boot camp that teaches business basics – profit and loss and the art of sales – and which Barnhill describes as "either up or out – you either pass the test or you leave the company."

Those who don't "wash out" are assigned to Coors' toughest markets. "The people who have graduated from the boot camp are the best salespeople in our company," Barnhill says. "They typically achieve a 5% or 6% or higher increase in annual sales in those markets – and this is accomplished in an industry with an annual growth rate of less than 2%."⁸

Perhaps no business focuses on hiring from the military the way The Home Depot does. With more than 1,800 retail locations in the North Americas – and a new store opening every two days – the company faces a growing demand for people to manage its 300,000 workers. But Home Depot wants more than just managers, it wants leaders explains Dennis Donovan, executive VP of human resources. As a result, the company heavily recruits JMOs (Junior Military Officers.)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Home Depot CEO Robert Nardelli discovered that military officers make good leaders when he ran General Electric's transportation business in the 1990s. Today, more than half of the 700 people in Home Depot's Store Leadership Program are JMOs. Home Depot often recruits JMOs using military outplacement firms. "JMOs walk in the door with very effective leadership skills," Donovan says.⁹ To round out those abilities with business knowledge, the store's leadership program combines more than 250 hours of classroom instruction, four different job rotations, and mentoring by company leaders.

In 2003 the company hired nearly ten thousand vets to work in various capacities at its stores and the number topped that mark last year. "We hire men and women who have served in the armed forces because it makes great business sense," says Nardelli. "Time and again these associates have demonstrated great qualities that all employers want – from leadership to discipline to teamwork and enthusiasm; I have experienced countless examples of their commitment to excellence and pride in getting the job done."

"Hire America's Heroes" – A Roadmap, Not "Another Job Fair"

As the above examples illustrate, corporate leaders recognize and are beginning to address the problems that can result in low job placement rates among exiting service members. In May of 2006, 5 major corporations in the state of Washington came together and formed, Hire America's Heroes. The group incorporated as a Domestic Nonprofit Corporation on 5-8-07 and 501(c)3 filing is in process.

The State of Washington is home to 4 branches of the US Military: Air Force (McChord AFB and Fairchild AFB,) Army (Fort Lewis and Madigan Army Medical Center,) Coast Guard (Pier 36 in Seattle,) and Navy (Navy Region NW, Naval Base Kitsap, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, and Naval Station Everett.) In addition, the State is home to a National Guard organization located at Camp Murray and a military Reserve force. As of the close of 2005, Washington State supported a total active duty military force of 53,447. Washington's military presence brings more than \$8.5 billion in annual revenue into the State's coffers. Clearly, the military's presence in the State of Washington contributes significantly to the State's population demographics and to our overall economy. Exiting service members from Washington-based commands are our State's obligation and opportunity.

Hire America's Heroes sponsors recognize that the problems which result in low job placement rates among exiting service members in our corporations are, by nature, systemic. If we hold "another job fair" we won't make a significant impact. Sponsor organizations need to be engaged in the process of placing exiting service members - to learn where there is breakdown and to develop improvements. Communication and coordinated action-planning among military organizations, corporations and the service provider community will result in genuine process improvements in our state's system – improvements that can be leveraged across the country and extended well beyond our own borders.

"Hire America's Heroes" – Organization Overview

Purpose

We seek to connect corporate America with the rich skills and abilities of military veterans. The purpose of Hire America's Heroes is to promote best practices and success strategies by which America's military service members, upon their exit from active duty are welcomed into America's corporate workforce. These best practices will cover: transition from military to corporate culture, recruiting topics, hiring practices, on-boarding practices, and retention strategies. While begun in the Puget Sound region in Washington State, Hire America's Heroes will support additional chapters, anchored by sponsor corporations, in major metropolitan areas around the United States.

⁹ Ibid.

History

Hire America's Heroes was formed on May 8, 2007, by leaders from five Seattle-based corporations intent on improving access to corporate jobs for exiting military service members. The initial Board of Directors had representation from corporate, military, government, and private law practice perspectives.

Activities

Hire America's Heroes is chartered to:

- *Arrange and conduct business conferences*
- *Plan business meetings*
- *Provide executive search and placement services*
- *Provide job and personnel placement service*
- *Organize and conduct job fairs*
- *Provide facilities for business meetings*
- *Arrange meetings and seminars*

Hire America's Heroes will engage interested corporations in symposia, networking events, and other activities designed to educate, promote and facilitate recognized best-practice processes and success strategies for sourcing, recruiting, hiring, on-boarding, supporting and retaining America's military service members and veterans.

Presenters will be selected from among corporations recognized as "best in class" for attracting, retaining, and providing excellent working environments for America's exiting military service members and veterans. Recognized members of government, the military, service members who have made a successful transition and other supporters may also present during these events in a show of support for the practice of hiring former service members.

Sponsor corporations may form committees within the structure of Hire America's Heroes in order to provide consultation and support to other corporations interested in adopting their best-practice processes and success strategies. Committees may also form to collaborate on implementation strategies, to track successful placement of exiting service members, and to share resources that facilitate sourcing, recruiting, hiring, on-boarding, support and retention of military veteran employees.

As Hire America's Heroes chapters are established around the nation, symposia and other educational events may be occurring simultaneously in various locations. Hire America's Heroes will provide guidelines to ensure quality standards and consistent event delivery. Adherence to these standards assures quality and protects the good name and positive reputation of Hire America's Heroes.

Value to Military Service Members

Hire America's Heroes does not work directly with individuals. Rather, we work with corporations and their recruiting teams as well as military transition coordinators at military bases to insure that they can network together. Specific benefits for individual service members include:

- Access to information regarding otherwise "hidden" job opportunities
- A network to help them find great civilian careers
- Enhanced corporate understanding for the value which veterans bring to the corporate world

Participation and Sponsorship

Membership in Hire America's Heroes is open to corporations who want to contribute financially, in the form of sponsorships, to the ongoing operations of the organization. Corporations wishing to apply for sponsorship in Hire America's Heroes submit an application to the organization's Board of Directors.

Hire America's Heroes Sponsors are expected to adhere to the following basic commitments:

- ❖ Develop and maintain a corporate commitment to recruiting, hiring, supporting and retaining military veteran employees.
- ❖ Active participation in at least one Hire America's Heroes committee.
- ❖ Provide Hire America's Heroes with Sponsor corporation's veteran hiring and retention metrics on an annual basis. Data used to report year-over-year percentage improvements of member companies as a group.
- ❖ Willingness to provide both a time commitment and financial support for optional activities available at the corporation's chosen Sponsorship Level. These activities will be selected by the corporation from the array available at a given Sponsorship Level and are delivered by Hire America's Heroes

Board of Directors (as of 5-8-07)

Following is Hire America's Heroes current Board of Directors:

President

Marjorie A. James
Volt Technical Resources

Vice President

Sean Kelley
Microsoft Corporation

Secretary

Toby Olson
State of Washington, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment

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Craig W. Gable
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State of Washington, Department of Veteran's Affairs

Board Member

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Board Member

James M. Collins
Weyerhaeuser

Board Member

Matthew Le Master
HellerEhrman LLP

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About the Author: Marjorie James is Chair, Board of Directors of Hire America's Heroes. . Ms. James is also Diversity Manager, Volt Technical Resources, a leading provider of workforce solutions (www.volt.com).

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<http://www.hirevetsfirst.gov> http://fortress.wa.gov/esd/portal/employment/index_html/veterans
<http://www.worksourceskc.org/pdfs/Resources/Vets%20Flyer.PDF.2006-05.PDF>
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