

Veterans: An Asset To Any Workforce

DESCRIPTION

Canada's military men and women are known around the world for their leadership skills, teamwork and dedication. They are highly skilled in areas such as planning, communication, management, and the trades. Without question, they would be an asset to any workforce; it is not always appreciated by the business community how big an asset someone with military experience can be. Each year, approximately 5,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces leave the military. Many of them struggle as they attempt to make the transition to meaningful and sustainable civilian employment.

BACKGROUND

The ability to quickly retrain and re-deploy workers, when either market forces change or technology disruptions occur, will be paramount to Canada succeeding in the economy of the future. One of the keys to success will be to strategically identify the specific work-related skills of individuals who find themselves in transition and match them to jobs or short-term retraining opportunities. Veterans bring valuable skills and experience from their military service to the workforce.

A Federal Government study conducted for the Veterans Transition Advisory Council found that, out of 850 employers, most have "little to no understanding of the skillset veterans or former military personnel have."

Once individuals join the military, soldiers receive some of the world's best training, worth on average between \$500,000 and \$1 million in government funds and resources. But all too often that expertise is ignored once the veteran or former military personnel leaves the military to pursue civilian employment. Soldiers who led battle groups in Afghanistan come home with management skills and crisis experience that could put them directly into mid-level management positions or higher; however, many human resource departments channel these battle-hardened vets into entry-level positions.

The same study showed a disconnect between civilian life from military experience. They discovered that close to half (45%) of employers agree that hiring a veteran reflects well on a business. And a significant number see veterans as disciplined and reliable individuals who can perform well in high-stress situations. But 35% do not think that their organization needs to make any special effort to recruit veterans, and nearly half (49%) had no opinion on the issue. Only 16% of employers agree that a corporation should make a special effort to recruit veterans.

Employers and companies can benefit from hiring veterans. Military personnel are often cross-trained in multiple skills and have experience in varied tasks and responsibilities. Many veterans have learned what it means to put in a hard day's work. They also appreciate the challenges and satisfaction of a job well done. Much of this experience can translate to their participation in the workforce making the veteran an asset on the job.

Strengths the veteran or former military personnel can bring to the workplace include:

- Working well in a team. Teamwork is considered an essential part of daily life and is the foundation on which safe military operations are built.
- Having a sense of duty. Responsibility for job performance and accountability for completing missions are something to take pride in.

- Experiencing self-confidence. Holding a realistic estimation of self and ability based on experiences is expected of each Service Member.
- Being organized and disciplined.
- Possessing a strong work ethic. In the military, the mission always comes first.
- Having the ability to follow through on assignments, even under difficult or stressful circumstances.
- Possessing a variety of cross-functional skills, such as extensive training on computer programs and systems, interacting with various people with different skills to accomplish a task, and coordinating and troubleshooting problems in novel and known conditions.
- Being able to problem solve quickly and creatively.
- Being able to adapt to changing situations.
- Being able to follow rules and schedules.

Many Canadian soldiers are unable to convert their advanced training into meaningful careers, even though the skill sets and experiences accumulated by soldiers would be highly valued by civilian employers.

The British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) developed a solution at their SITE Centre, which conducts prior learning related research and assessment activities and turns them into advanced placement education options. At BCIT, The Legion Military Skills Conversion program accelerates and advances the civilian careers of former and current members of the Canadian Forces. They do this by mapping learning outcomes rather than course equivalencies, so that those from non-traditional educational backgrounds are given advanced standing in education and training programs.

This is a great example where with polytechnics connections to industry, can be an integral asset to keep

workers in the labour market -- and our economy moving forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Government of Canada:

Work with Provincial and Territorial Governments to:

1. Revisit and ensure that the implementation of a Military Employment Transition Program provides the skills and opportunities needed of industry and partners with the chamber of commerce/board of trade industry, academic and industry associations;
2. Invest in a public campaign that clearly articulates the value of hiring veterans; and,
3. Partner with Canada's post-secondary institutions to implement a skill identification and prior learning assessment process with time-compressed courses for those looking to retrain.

NOTES

^{1, 2}

¹ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/francis-watt-putting-veterans-to-work>

² <https://www.ottawalife.com/article/how-a-program-retraining-canadas-veterans-offers-solutions-for-the-mid-career-worker?c=9>