



Why hiring a military veteran could be your best business decision yet

By Lida Citroën, Principal, LIDA360, LLC

With the nation in recovery, investment in resources is growing. We see new commercial construction underway, roads and highways under repair, and consumer spending on the uptick. With all this new growth, companies are starting to loosen the stronghold on hiring freezes initiated when our economy was plummeting. Yes, as hiring managers and recruiters across the country seek to find talent, a highly untapped and ready workforce awaits employment. Currently there are roughly 163,000 unemployed post-9/11 veterans and more than 600,000 unemployed veterans overall. These individuals are the beneficiaries of more than \$130 billion of investment in training, education, and skill building from the U.S. government.

Hiring former military personnel could be the best business decision a company (and a hiring manager) makes.

Why aren't hiring managers recruiting veterans?

There is a disconnect between veterans and civilian hiring managers, and it goes both ways. Veterans overwhelmingly leave military service unprepared and unarmed with the tools to position themselves as viable candidates to civilian companies, and hiring managers are unskilled and untrained in

how to recruit military veterans for jobs outside of service.

The challenges include:

- **Reading the resume** — Hiring managers often lack training to read and understand a military resume. What does being an E-6 mean? Did a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force hold more management responsibility than a Major in the Army? What does it mean that you did Command and Control Battle Management Operations in the Air Force, and how is it relevant for the position I'm recruiting for?

- **Inability to sell themselves** — In the military culture, the focus is on mission, unit, and the person next to you, not on you. Self-promotion and self-focus are unacceptable and discouraged. Therefore, when veterans leave service, they struggle when answering questions such as, "Tell me about a success you had that you are most proud of." To the veteran, this would mean being disloyal. To the hiring manager, not getting an answer is frustrating and suspicious.

- **PTSD** — Civilian media has not done an adequate job of educating the public about PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and the numerous other challenges former military live with after service. We intuitively believe that someone who has "seen the unthinkable" and lived in conditions of violence, hostility, and stress

for a long period of time will undoubtedly have emotional effects long after the situations change. But what does that mean for a hiring manager looking to add a new team member to their company?

- **Skills not transferrable** — Without a clear outline of which military skills translate to which civilian job responsibilities, it may be unreasonable to expect that hiring managers with no military experience can understand how someone who worked front lines in the infantry can lead their IT staff through a new project. Or, how a combat medic is qualified to hold a sales position in their pharmaceutical company.

- **Fit in the organization** — Hiring managers seek skills, experience, and talent in recruiting new employees, and they look for cultural fit as well. Each candidate is evaluated for the value they bring and can offer to new and existing teams, how well they will assimilate into the organization, and where they will lead. The perception that a military veteran is used to barking orders, meeting high-stress timelines, and putting feelings aside for execution on mission can deter recruiters from evaluating a veteran candidate.

What can the veteran employee bring to the organization?

Veterans see their work as a career, not a job. To them, a job is

the place you show up, perform work, and earn a wage for services. A career, on the other hand, is where you commit your whole self, build a foundation of skills, talents, and experience, and add value to the organization, the mission, and the team at every step.

After years of service, sometimes multiple deployments to violent and stressful environments, and sacrifice of family and friends, veterans transition to a civilian career with little more than a week or two of preparation. It is no wonder that veterans struggle with articulating, positioning, and marketing their value to civilian employers.

I have worked with several hundred former and transitioning veterans to help them articulate their value proposition so hiring managers will be able to clearly see the benefit of engaging and hiring them. Similarly, I aid corporate recruiters and hiring teams in understanding the unique skills and attributes our former military bring to the workplace.

Key reasons why hiring a veteran could be your best business decision yet

• **Problem solving** — The military teaches its personnel to think beyond what they can see, touch, and smell. The training veterans received in service is the ultimate in problem solving — anticipate and prepare for anything or the consequences could be deadly. While most veterans will not face life and death problems in their next career, they are trained to think creatively and to not be deterred by obstacles. Where their civilian counterpart might stop in the face of a challenge, the veteran will persevere until a resolution is identified. For employers that seek independent thinkers, solution-oriented team leaders, and focused employees, veterans are the ideal candidate.

• **Loyalty** — When attrition accounts for a great deal of corporate revenue loss, and the costs to replace one employee are very high, having a workforce that is selective and then loyal is of high value. Veterans committed their lives to their former employer, risking it all and sacrificing much. They are taught that loyalty is admirable and that walking away from challenge is not an option. This makes them tremendous

assets to organizations that seek leaders to help manage risk, high performing teams, and critical initiatives where loyalty and follow-through will produce valued results.

• **Trainability** — When an individual joins the military, typically at a young age, they do not enter with the training needed to perform at exceptional (and lifesaving) levels. They learn how to be an expert through the training, drills, real world situations, and those around them. When exiting the military, these same individuals are again very trainable and capable of learning new skills, talents, and abilities. This is an advantage for a company seeking to fast track the on-boarding and contribution of new employees.

• **Credentials** — After service, many veterans enter the job market with advanced credentials and clearances. For companies in industries where a background check or gov-

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ernment security clearance — such as banking, information technology, and healthcare — are requirements, this is a direct cost savings.

• **Adaptability** — The military trains its personnel to survive in various rigorous and unpredictable environments. They are moved from location to location, often in foreign countries where rules and protocols do not exist. Military personnel are often in scenarios where they are outside the norms they understand, where everything from the language to the subtleties of cultural differences are foreign to them. The level of adaptability and survival skills necessary to stay focused on the mission and protect your assets and troops is extraordinary. This translates to adaptability on many levels in business — the veteran could be an ideal candidate for a position with vague goals and boundaries, where cross-functional objectives compete for resources, or where

global pressures require quick responses, while keeping long term vision in mind.

• **Family** — When a service man or woman deploys, they say goodbye to the support system that gives them strength. While on tour, that service person learns to rely on a new family — those serving along side. The transition to a civilian career means reconnecting with family and integrating to a new world. To veterans, this is a natural time to bond with co-workers, other veteran employees, and their community, much like they learned to do when in service.

• **Mentoring** — The day a new recruit enters the military, they are met with a peer who walks them through the process — from where to get supplies, to what to expect in boot camp and where they should sit in the mess hall. Mentoring is a huge part of the military culture and veterans carry this belief with them after service. Companies seeking team leaders and employees who will enlist support for their goals and encourage other employees are smart to hire veterans.

Businesses investing in human capital are wise to learn how to recruit, onboard, and retain veterans. The small investment in training a hiring and recruiting team on how to read military resumes, interview veterans, and recruit veterans online is returned in a workforce that contributes at levels that exceed expectations. ■

About the author

Lida Citroën is the author of Your Next Mission: A personal branding guide for the military-to-civilian transition and Principal of LIDA360, a consulting firm that helps create effective market positioning through the use of brand strategies. She regularly presents at conferences, events and programs, teaching transitioning veterans how to understand their unique value and market them to future employers.

Citroën is an active member of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) and works closely with General Peter Pace's program in Philadelphia, Wall Street Warfighters Foundation (WSWF). For more information, please visit, www.yournextmissionbook.com and connect with her on twitter, @LIDA360.