

Hiring veterans — Going beyond “Thank you for your service”

By Lida Citroën, LIDA360, LLC



When a job needs to get done, it needs to get done right. In no industry is that more important than in manufacturing, where accountability, accuracy, and flexibility are critical. For this reason, and many others, manufacturers recognize the value of hiring military veterans for line work, warehouse operations, supply chain management, and leadership positions.

When military members transition to a civilian career, they are not looking for a handout or charity. While veterans certainly appreciate hearing, “Thank you for your service,” they seek more. I have coached hundreds of veterans and active duty military members about to make the transition. The common aspiration I hear is that they want work that leverages their skills and talents and is meaningful. The “meaningful” part of their next career is dominant — at the end of the day, they look for a sense of gratification and satisfaction that their contribution produced a meaningful outcome for themselves, their employer, and the communities they serve.

The talents and values military veterans bring to the civilian workforce are plentiful and compelling. For instance, veterans possess leadership skills unparalleled by most workers. At a young age, a military member will have been given responsibility for hundreds of troops and often multi-million dollar pieces of equipment. Veterans are also highly resilient. They have been trained to adapt to rapid change, work in high stress situations, and stay calm in the face of danger. These skills mean veterans have learned to think on their feet, find resources when faced with challenges, and also use their experience to create solutions instead of waiting for someone else to fix a situation.

Let’s take a look at some of the strategies and tactics successful businesses are deploying to tap into this workforce of talent:

Get your company ready for veteran employees

When your company makes the commitment to hire military veterans, there are a few things you can

do to set yourself up for success. The goal is to position your business and your brand in the best possible light with this audience. Entering this process without thought and intention could lead to disappointing results and a bad perception of your company within the veteran community.

1. Ensure support for your veteran hiring initiative comes from the highest levels in the company. Without top-level support, it may be hard to solicit resources and positioning needed to build a sustainable and scalable program.
2. Find out how many veterans currently work in your company. This sounds simple, but some companies find veterans and military spouses are not self-identifying on job applications. Ask your employees if they have a military background. Even one day in uniform counts!
3. Work with your human resources teams to identify jobs that are right for veterans. Look at the skills, experience, certifications, and training for the jobs you are

recruiting for (or will be) and ask, “is there equivalent military experience that could qualify someone to do this work?”

Ready your recruiting and on boarding

Attracting military veterans to your company comes by establishing credibility in the veteran community. As mentioned above, most veterans want to work for companies that enable them to do meaningful work. This can be in any facet of manufacturing — from forklift operator and warehouse manager to logistics and supply chain chief. When veterans understand the mission behind the work (Why are we doing this work? Whose life is made better because of our product? How are we serving the needs of an audience?), they contribute at exemplary levels.

1. Look at your recruitment process: Is it adapted to military-specific resumes? If you primarily recruit online, are you asking candidates to indicate military experience?
2. Ensure you are positioning your company to be attractive to veterans; Focus on your values and mission as a company. Veterans are attracted to values (consider the values they ascribed to with their last employer). Position your company as “veteran friendly” on your website and in social media to build your brand position.
3. Train your hiring managers to know the questions to ask veterans (and what not to ask). Teach your teams about the cultural differences between the military and civilian worlds. For instance, in an interview, if a veteran is asked to “describe something you did that you are proud of,” this will cause them internal conflict. The military values collective praise, and if that candidate speaks about success in first person, it can feel like betrayal to those he served along side. Your hiring manager could easily interpret this as insecurity instead of loyalty.
4. Evaluate your hiring pipelines. If your business or facilities are located near military installations, this could be a great recruiting

option. Remember that some who leave military service return home, and that might be far away from their last station.

Others will look to stay in the community when they separate or retire, and recruiting them into your company could work very well!

5. When you have hired veteran talent, be sure to on board them in ways that support the opportunities and challenges they bring. For instance, creating affinity groups or support groups in the company for veterans ensures they will be able to find

Veterans are also highly resilient. They have been trained to adapt to rapid change, work in high stress situations, and stay calm in the face of danger. These skills mean veterans have learned to think on their feet, find resources when faced with challenges, and also use their experience to create solutions instead of waiting for someone else to fix a situation.

mentors and resources unique to their situation and circumstances. Make this a safe place for them to share and support each other during the job transition. Also, consider training and resources specific to the veteran employee, recognizing that everything from interpersonal communication to the promotion schedule in your industry is different from how it was in the military. Providing books, training, and coaches to help veterans pays dividends in their commitment and excellence on the job.

Enlist support

Earlier I mentioned taking inventory of your current veteran popula-

tion at your business. They can be invaluable in the development of a robust and sustainable hiring program.

1. Enlist the help of your current veteran employees. Focus groups, hiring events, and social media are great ways to tap into the experience of your veteran employees – today and in the future.
2. Consider getting your vendors and strategic business partners involved in your initiative. Maybe one of them has built a veteran hiring initiative and can help you pave the way. At a minimum, engage their brand in helping you position your company as desiring veteran candidates in the market place.
3. Tap into the resources of local and national veteran service organizations (VSOs). From veteran programs at trade schools, to organizations that feed directly into manufacturing jobs from military, there are VSOs and consultants ready to help you attract and on board your veteran talent.

Deploy a retention program

While extremely beneficial to the company, hiring and on boarding your veteran employees is time consuming and costly. You want to ensure your talent stays and grows their contribution to the company!

1. Consider veteran-specific recognition programs. Highlight the unique qualities of your former military employees. If they are comfortable with recognition, highlight their success in the company.
2. At every personnel meeting, remind your veteran employees of the importance of the work; tie their contribution to the mission of the business; and whenever possible, show them (literally) the impact their work is having on a consumer or market place.
3. Enlist your veteran employees in the recruiting and on boarding process. Helping their fellow brothers and sisters in arms is part of their military culture.

They will see this as a deepening
*see **HIRING VETERANS** page 12*

HIRING VETERANS

Cont. from page 11

of the company's commitment to veteran employees.

I have spent more than 20 years helping companies build and sustain valuable market positions through branding. Today, I can say with confidence that building a scalable and robust veteran recruiting, on boarding, and retention platform does wonders for employee morale, productivity, community goodwill, and the company brand. ■

Author Lida Citroën is the Principal and Founder of LIDA360, a branding consultancy firm in Denver. Lida Citroën, has made a career of helping people and companies create new or enhanced identities. She is donating her time, expertise and effort to help returning war veterans learn how to compete in a civilian, particularly corporate, career. Lida works closely with Philadelphia-based, Wall Street Warfighters Foundation and is a volunteer member of ESGR. She is also the author of the best selling book, "Your Next Mission: A personal branding guide for the military-to-civilian transition"

(www.YourNextMissionBook.com). Lida is often featured in MSNBC, Entrepreneur Magazine, US News & World Report, Kiplinger's Personal Finance, Fortune Magazine, Forbes.com, Harvard Business Review, and CBS Moneywatch. Lida can be reached at 800-314-5060 or Lida@LIDA360.com. Website: LIDA360.com

Reprinted with permission from the winter 2016 issue of . . .

THE ILLINOIS Manufacturer

The Illinois Manufacturer is the official publication of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association (IMA)

220 East Adams Street • Springfield, Illinois 62701 • 217-522-1240 • Fax: 217-522-2367

1211 West 22nd Street • Suite 620 • Oak Brook, Illinois 60523 • 630-368-5300 • Fax: 630-218-7467

Visit <http://www.ima-net.org/the-illinois-manufacturer/> for editorial and advertising information