



## Military Cultural Awareness for Hiring Managers



### As a Hiring Manager, Why Should I Recruit Veterans?

A Veteran's military experience has equipped him or her with a unique set of values and skills. These characteristics distinguish Veterans from their civilian counterparts, and can make them valuable members of your team. Below are common traits associated with those who have served in the military.

- ▲ **Quick Learners.** Men and women in the military are often forced to learn new tasks very quickly under high pressure. This can result in the development of an accelerated learning curve, which means less time training.
- ▲ **Tolerant.** Veterans understand diversity. During military service, they were required to work with and for whoever happened to be serving with them. This experience gives Veterans a greater sensitivity when it comes to cooperating with individuals from different backgrounds.
- ▲ **Tenacious.** Veterans have experience performing their duties in less-than-perfect situations. This means they have most likely achieved success under adverse conditions. Having already overcome adversity during their military career can make Veterans great employees because they are less likely to give up when challenges arise.
- ▲ **Understand Leadership.** Veterans have witnessed the dynamics of leadership in action and understand how to manage people in order to achieve results,

regardless of circumstance. In addition, Veterans have a healthy respect and understanding for leadership, whether they were a leader or a follower during military service.

- ▲ **Team Players.** Although there are significant differences between the command and control culture of the military and the more collaborative culture in the civilian workforce, Veterans bear a huge sense of responsibility toward their colleagues. This trait makes Veteran candidates natural team players.
- ▲ **Efficient.** Veterans have likely performed effectively under high pressure on numerous occasions during their military career. The ability to handle pressure translates into workplace efficiency as military personnel are used to getting a job done correctly, quickly and expediently—with limited resources or assistance.
- ▲ **Appreciate Receiving Feedback.** Veterans are used to receiving direct feedback from superiors. Military personnel learn to absorb what they are told regarding their performance without taking it personally. As a result, Veterans know how to handle feedback well and appreciate being told how their performance aligns with expectations.

Before focusing on a Veteran's individual background, consider the personality traits that former military service personnel possess and how they match what you are seeking in a future employee.

## The Challenges of Recruiting and Interviewing Veterans

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, the number of newly retired military personnel entering the civilian workforce continues to rise. Integrating these Veterans into the civilian workforce presents a variety of challenges, not only for them, but also for the hiring managers and human resources personnel interviewing Veteran job seekers.

Veterans are under significant pressure to quickly and smoothly transition to civilian life. However, they face numerous challenges that increase the difficulty of their career search. In particular, Veterans may not know how to translate (either through interviews and/or resumes) their military experience, skills and training to civilian roles. At the same time, employers may not understand how military experience, skills and training translate to their specific job openings. In addition, employers may be subconsciously biased against hiring Veterans because of a perceived lack of cultural “fit,” despite feeling it may be the right thing to do.

Hiring managers and human resources professionals can help bridge these gaps in understanding and find ways to reap the rewards of Veteran experience, while offering Veterans a chance to shine.

Listed below are a few issues that may arise when Veterans interview for civilian career opportunities, as well as tips on how interviewers and hiring managers can overcome these challenges or misperceptions.

- ▲ **Identifying Skills.** The Veteran you are interviewing may have little or no experience with the civilian job market. As a result, it may be difficult for them to identify how their military skills or training is relevant to the role(s) they are pursuing. As an interviewer, asking the right questions or phrasing questions the right way can go a long way toward making their experience and/or fit clear.
- ▲ **Translating Skills.** An interviewing Veteran may in fact know that their military experience or skill is a strong match to the job they are pursuing, but they may lack the vocabulary to explain that fit. This issue is something you as a hiring manager should look to work through together during the course of the interview.
- ▲ **Assumptions about Experiences.** You may assume that a Veteran has served in combat and may be negatively affected by it. In reality, approximately 10 percent of Veterans have experienced active combat duty, so refrain from interviewing Veterans differently because of these assumptions.
- ▲ **Not Team Players.** Due to the hierarchical, top-down structure of the military, it is commonly believed that Veterans don't make good team players. However, while military culture differs from civilian culture, military

service is all about teamwork. From the time a person begins basic training, members of the military work in groups. Veterans can be the ultimate team players.

- ▲ **They Lack Technological Savvy.** Veterans may seem like they've been cut off from civilian office technologies because they may not have worked in a traditional office environment. However, the military uses word processing software for after action reports, and presentation software for mission briefings. In addition, Veterans may have broad knowledge of technical trends that could be useful within your organization.

Veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce may face challenges demonstrating how their military experience relates to the career opportunity they are seeking. However, as hiring managers and HR professionals, being aware of these issues can help you bridge this gap as you integrate talented Veterans into your organization.



## Developing Military Cultural Awareness

Given the challenges and issues listed in the previous section, it is imperative that hiring managers have a basic understanding of the complexities of military organization when interviewing or recruiting Veterans. Military culture is based on the unique tradition, mission, structure and leadership of military history. Further, military culture maintains distinct sub-cultures (known as Branches of Service) that have unwritten sets of rules, viewpoints, perspectives and operating procedures. Understanding military culture is important when recruiting and/or working with Veterans. Some of the main characteristics of the military organizational culture include:

- ▲ Highly structured and authoritarian way of life with a mission-focused, goal-oriented approach—both explicit and implied

- ▲ Strict sense of discipline, tending to adhere to rules and regulations
- ▲ Strong work ethic with high regard for physical and mental strength
- ▲ Code of conduct and organizational culture that reflects well-defined and strongly supported moral and ethical principles
- ▲ Decisive leadership that expects loyalty of subordinates and allies

Each military service has its own history, mission, culture and terminology. Listed in the chart below is a brief description of each branch of the military. It is important to remember that each person is an individual, so ask the person how he or she would like to be addressed.

Military Service	Description	Proper Term
<b>Army</b>	Oldest and largest, main ground force.	<b>Soldier</b>
<b>Navy</b>	Second largest, main naval force. Major “communities” are surface (ship), submarine and aviation. By combining ship and aviation assets, they can project military presence and force anywhere in the world.	<b>Sailor</b>
<b>Marine Corps</b>	Historically supported naval campaigns with a shipboard and ship-to-shore infantry capability, but has focused on expeditionary land operations over the last couple of decades.	<b>Marine</b>
<b>Air Force</b>	Youngest service, main aerial and cyberspace force.	<b>Airman or Airwoman</b>
<b>National Guard and Reserves</b>	The oldest component of the Armed Forces of the United States; composed of Air National Guard, Army National Guard, Reserves and militias.	<b>Guardsmen/Soldier/Airman</b>
<b>Coast Guard</b>	Part of the Department of Homeland Security (formerly Department of Transportation); protects public environment in maritime regions.	<b>Guardian</b>



As a civilian hiring manager, it is easy to be influenced by commonly held stereotypes regarding military personnel and the challenges and experiences that they have faced during their service. The chart below highlights some of these issues and challenges, while focusing on how Veterans can become valuable members of your team or organization.

What are some common <b>stereotypes</b> of military culture?	What are some of the <b>challenges</b> that come along with the commitment to military life?	What are some <b>positive aspects</b> of military life?	How might the experiences and characteristics of Veterans position them to be <b>valuable</b> members of your team?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Too rigid and serious</li> <li>▲ Unable to think outside the box</li> <li>▲ Unwilling to learn a new culture</li> <li>▲ Roadblock to higher education</li> <li>▲ Training and jobs have little relation to the civilian world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Life threat (combat and deployment)</li> <li>▲ Loss (e.g., death of close comrades or loss of relationships, loss of aspects of oneself, loss of possessions)</li> <li>▲ Inner conflict (belief systems or values)</li> <li>▲ Wear and tear/lack of control over ongoing adversities</li> <li>▲ Strong stigma with receiving mental health care</li> <li>▲ Family separations and re-assimilation into the family</li> <li>▲ Frequent rotations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Increased sense of camaraderie and teamwork</li> <li>▲ Pride in serving the country</li> <li>▲ Support for continuous education</li> <li>▲ Insurance and retirement benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Ability to learn new skills and concepts</li> <li>▲ Strong leadership qualities</li> <li>▲ Flexibility to work in teams or to work independently</li> <li>▲ Diversity</li> <li>▲ Interpersonal skills</li> <li>▲ Ability to work efficiently and diligently in a fast-paced environment</li> <li>▲ Respect for procedures and accountability</li> </ul>



# Understanding How Military and Civilian Cultures Differ

Military and civilian cultures differ primarily in the amount of personal choice that individual members have to exercise certain freedoms. The chart below provides a comparison of military and civilian employment across several different areas.

## Comparison of Freedoms

	Military	Corporate/Non-Military
<b>Physical</b>	Members are required to be physically fit for combat, and the standards for staying employed in a military unit are based on height, weight and physical capability. Strict standards of grooming and appearance are also enforced (for example, hair length).	Most civilian organizations do not or cannot enforce physical standards.
<b>Political</b>	The military culture prohibits its members from participating in political activities while in uniform. Service members are generally discouraged from expressing political viewpoints while in uniform, when those viewpoints could affect working relationships, and when the expression of political views could be seen as being in conflict with good order and discipline.	Civilian culture advocates freedom of speech in all aspects of democratic activities.
<b>Relocation</b>	Regular relocation is a signature of military culture. The military member is told where to work and where his or her family can live. The military culture has an “Up or Out” philosophy which enhances the requirement to move where promotable assignments are located.	Civilian culture provides more freedom to choose to move without the threat of being fired.



## Organizational Structure

(Please note that some of the following comparisons are generalizations. For example, not all non-military organizations employ a matrix structure, but it is a good rule of thumb.)

Military: Command & Control Operations Model	Corporate/Non-military: Collaborative Model
<p>Although this is changing for some types of operations, the military has traditionally employed a hierarchical/vertical structure</p>	<p>Matrix structure (horizontal flow of information)</p>
<p>More exact rules of conduct</p>	<p>More implied or “understood” rules of conduct</p>
<p>Defined roles, rank and status (defined/assigned military occupational career fields)</p>	<p>Flexible/ambiguous roles and status</p>
<p>Consistency across units/organizations</p>	<p>Variations across teams/divisions</p>
<p>Clearly-defined career progression</p>	<p>Less-defined career progression/opportunity for lateral assignments</p>
<p>Veterans share a bond in beliefs, traditions, values, and the importance of rank and structure</p>	<p>Corporate culture imposes corporate values on the organization</p>

## Occupational Mobility

Military Ladder	Corporate Matrix
<p>Typically, a military member rises through the ranks based on a career ladder</p>	<p>Opportunities are less defined, and employees can jump from low-level to management simply based on merit or networking</p>
<p>Most often military members remain in the same career field</p>	<p>More flexible in allowing employees to transfer into new positions, provide the appropriate training and expect success</p>
<p>Some enlisted members will leave the military, earn a college degree and rejoin as officers</p>	<p>Non-military companies are less structured</p>

