
From uniform to workplace: your next big victory.

Why America's veterans are great hires.

By Eli Amdur

Having accepted an invitation to address a group of veterans next month on the subject of entering (or re-entering) the workforce, I got to thinking about two things. 1) Veterans typically become great employees when they re-enter the workforce, and 2) they have, of late, encountered an inordinate amount of resistance by employers, leading to a disproportionate unemployment rate among them. That's shameful

Today's column, then, is dedicated – first and foremost – to the men and women who have served us in uniform; next, to anyone reading this who is in a position to hire them; and finally, to all the rest of us just because we need to be reminded. And it's also a preview of what they'll hear in my closing remarks at the end of a full day of seminars and workshops sponsored by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

There are 23.2 million veterans in the US, 10.7 million in the workforce. One of every 14 American workers is a veteran. Five out of eight veterans are under 65, and – while it's impossible to tell accurately which ones are looking for work, which ones are not, and which ones over 65 are or aren't – one thing is for sure. Unemployment is far higher among veterans than among the general population.

That, though, is not the driver of this week's column. If it were, I'd be listing all the web sites, job boards, and agencies I possibly could. But you can do that without me. Today, my purpose is clear and simple: to remind veterans of why they are exceptional hires and how to make employers aware of it.

“The job market is as tough a battlefield as any I've ever prepared for,” said Bill, a 29 year old veteran who served four years and did two tours in the Middle East. Shaking his head as we sat in my office, he added, “It's unbelievably crazy.”

We know that, but the operative word in his comment was “prepared,” something veterans know how to do as well as anyone. So prepare to present yourself to the workplace by assessing and using your strengths, something else you know how to do. Here are your strengths. Don't fail to reflect them in your cover letters, resumes, interviews, and all the networking you can possibly do. Keep in mind that this listing is based on characteristics that recruiters say are most important to them. You have them. You have to make sure you present them.

1. **Proven leadership.** Front line and battle tested, your leadership skills, which you developed at an early age, are superior to most of us civilians. You lead by example and through experience.
2. **Goal oriented.** You are highly skilled at setting realistic but difficult goals – and in reaching them. You've been well-trained in this.
3. **Mission focused.** You are accustomed to working in an environment in which everyone works together toward the mission at hand.
4. **Communication.** You understand the critical importance of simple, clear communication; of communicating well in all directions; and of communicating effectively in one-on-one, team, or large settings.

5. **Teamwork.** You know, better than anyone else, that teamwork is what responsibility to others looks like, and how much your teammates and you depend on each other.
6. **Work ethic.** Working long hours under demanding conditions. Seeing things through to their conclusions. Not complaining but bearing up. “Yeah, I’ll do that.” Sound familiar?
7. **Performance under pressure.** Monthly production or sales numbers, shipping deadlines, quarterly closings, last minute crises, etc. Piece of cake compared to what you’ve seen.
8. **Thinking on your feet.** Not only can you perform under pressure, you’re extremely well trained at meeting surprise challenges, adapting to change, and thinking quickly.
9. **Accountability.** You understand and respect the chain of command but are still willing to bring out new ideas when needed.
10. **Training.** This one is doubly interesting. You’re not only well-trained, you’re also good at being trained. In other words, you learn fast and you’re excellent at applying it. You’ve proven you can make an immediate impact, and that you can do it again.
11. **Specific skills.** Every one of you has learned at least one specific skill: heavy machinery, computer programming, a foreign language, supply chain, and so on. These are directly applicable to many opportunities.
12. **Triumph over the odds.** No matter how adverse the conditions, you know how to prevail. You are much better at this than the average civilian. You don’t fold or make excuses.
13. **Diversity, inclusion, and empathy.** You have worked in a highly diverse environment: race, ethnicity, gender, age, and – certainly – disability. You are sensitive to it.
14. **Safety, health, and operational standards.** Once again, you are infinitely more aware of this than most others ever will be. This means respect for self, others, property, and procedures.
15. **Integrity.** Don’t even need to discuss this one. It’s a given, but remind them anyway.
16. **Background checks and security clearance.** Exhaustive background checks for various levels of security clearances that over 90 percent of you have had far exceed those you’re likely to need for employment. This should give an employer confidence, not to mention significant cost savings, since your security status is transferable in almost every case.

All this said, I probably didn’t need to tell any of you any of this. The problem is, in the job market you’re left to your own devices. So, even though modesty is another one of your strengths, you have no choice but to be your own PR agent.

You – and no one else – will be the architect, engineer, and commanding officer of your next big victory.