

Helping Military Veterans Overcome Job-Search Challenges



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The U.S. Department of Labor recently reported that the unemployment rate for Iraq- and Afghanistan-era veterans was 10.3 percent in March 2012, higher than the current overall 8.2 percent national jobless rate.

When military veterans try to enter or reenter the U.S. work force, they face several obstacles that career services practitioners can help them overcome. The basis for effectively working with veterans is deep and engaged communication, says Lisa Rosser, a veteran of the U.S. Army, founder of The Value of a Veteran, and author of a guide to recruiting military veterans.

“The biggest challenge is that [veterans] don’t have a real frame of reference as to the types of jobs that are available that match their skills developed in the military,” Rosser says. “They also have difficulty describing their skills to employers.”

Rosser says a veteran who has spent 15 years in the military might have trouble describing all the skills and responsibilities of a platoon sergeant, and explaining how that role translates to the civilian workplace.

Rosser suggests conducting a series of meetings with individual military veterans and taking discussions beyond merely the veteran’s occupation.

“Career services professionals will need to draw out the veteran’s level of responsibilities and accountability,” she says, adding that 81 percent of the jobs in the military have a civilian equivalent.

For example, if an infantryman says that he learned how to fire different types of weapons, the counselor needs to dig deeper and learn about his experience to help the veteran understand and articulate that he also developed project management, problem solving, and process improvement skills that are valued in the civilian work force. And, depending on the veteran’s military grade, he may have also developed and trained employees, provided extensive quality assurance inspections, had accountability for millions of dollars worth of equipment, and more.

“Part of the challenge with colleges and universities is that many times, the people giving career advice to veterans don’t have a good or full understanding of military skills sets and grades,” she notes.

In one recent case, for example, a military veteran had attained impressive security clearances, but “the career counselor told the veteran that this clearance didn’t need to be included on a resume. Of course, it was incredibly important to the veteran’s job candidacy, but because the counselor didn’t understand its importance, the veteran left it off her resume.”

Rosser recommends that to work effectively with military veterans, career services professionals should learn the military skills and grades.

“Keep cheat sheets, if necessary, and use other resources, such as behavior-based questions, to draw out the veteran’s responsibilities and transferable skills,” she suggests.

One free resource that Rosser points out is the [Occupational Network’s online military crosswalk](#), which allows users to search military occupations to determine knowledge, skills, abilities, and more, and give a clearer picture of a civilian equivalent occupation.

“On one hand, [these military veterans] are college students, but they are nontraditional college students,” she points out. “They are experienced in a setting where they had to develop valuable skills, many of which transfer very well into the workplace. That experience should not be discounted.”

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<<http://www.naceweb.org/s04112012/recruiting-military-veterans/>>.

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