

A young man with short hair and a slight smile, wearing a military camouflage uniform, is holding a white rectangular sign in front of his chest. The sign contains the title of an article and the author's name. The background is plain white.

**CAREER
COUNSELING
AND HIRING
STUDENT
VETERANS**

By Pattie Giordani

Find out how professionals in the field help student veterans translate their military work into civilian terms and obtain jobs in the civilian work force.

Hiring returning military veterans isn't just altruistic; it's good for the organization and therefore good for business. Student veterans often have the skills that are highly sought after in the civilian work force, along with valuable leadership experience. The impression that military veterans have low skill sets or only combat skills is a false one, says Lisa Rosser, a U.S. Army and Army Reserve veteran and founder of The Value of a Veteran, a consulting firm that provides military veteran recruiting and retention strategies.

"Eighty-one percent of military jobs have a civilian equivalent," Rosser says. "Veterans are trained—and highly trainable. They have transferable skills, such as managing and leading teams, and supervising and motivating people. The average 22-year-old out of the military has far more experience than an average 22-year-old college student."

Rosser's firm offers training and consulting to colleges on improving support for student veterans and employing organizations on developing a military recruiting program. And more and more employers are using the firm's services.

"Our business with employers has been on the rise since late 2010, but this year the increase has been explosive," she says. "Employers are starting to pay more attention to hiring military veterans—and not just HR, but also hiring managers and supervisors."

On the other hand, colleges and universities aren't requesting her firm's services at the same pace. "They do a good job of helping student veterans while they're on campus, but there's a need to help them stay on campus and complete their degree," Rosser explains.

Career Counseling Student Veterans

Career counseling this special population can be a challenge since veterans have worked in a specific job in the military work force and may not be able to translate that experience into civilian terms.

"Say there's a vet who was a tanker mechanic who says he doesn't want to be a mechanic all his life," Rosser says. "Obviously he has mechanical aptitude, so counselors should advise him on what else he can do with that aptitude in the civilian work force."

Student veterans also need assistance in putting resumes together that tie together military and college experiences, she says.

"They have to be able to take what they did in the military and blend it with what they're studying, and then showcase that in a resume. Career services could connect with employers to encourage them to look at the college's student veterans."

Many times student veterans don't connect their military experience to civilian jobs until it is pointed out to them. Rosser was presenting a workshop at an organization and asked a new employee who had been an infantryman how his military experience prepared him for or related to his civilian job. His reply? Not much.

"I pointed out that he was a corporal who led a team of five people on combat missions in Afghanistan," she says. "He was responsible for their lives and the mission. Now he's successfully working in the stores, managing inventory and providing good customer service. Then he saw the relationship between leadership in the military and leadership in the civilian work force."

Eighty-one percent of military jobs have a civilian equivalent.

Rosser says that career and other advisers should not let student veterans discount their military service. "I see too many of them trying to bury it or leave it off the resume, accompanied by comments such as, 'I was just an infantryman.' Do assume that there's a lot of value. You are doing a disservice to the student veteran and the employer if you don't."

Stephen Abel, Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired) and director of Veterans Services at Rutgers University in New Jersey says his office is responsible for student veterans on all three campuses, Newark, New Brunswick, and Camden.

"There are about 1,300 veterans receiving VA education benefits, another 200 to 250 veterans, who, for whatever reason, are not using VA education benefits," he says. "We have 100 active duty military, 120 to 130 family members of vets using their parents' education benefit, 82 of whom have a disabled parent vet. We also have 200 National Guardsmen who don't qualify for VA benefits and 200 ROTC cadets, who sometimes use our services."

Although the Veterans Services office is not a career services office, they do work closely with the campus career services office. "We also talk in general terms about careers with Rutgers' student veterans," Abel says. "But what we focus on is making connections that could be helpful for them; we try to reestablish relationships with corporations and businesses."

The office established a three-tiered mentoring program for student

veterans. “The first tier is for those who are brand-new on campus; we pair them with an upper-class student veteran. We call that ‘veteran-to-veteran’ mentoring,” he explains. “The second tier is mentoring from staff, faculty, and/or alumni; and the third tier is mentoring from American Corporate Partners.”

American Corporate Partners (ACP) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting veterans in the transition from the armed services to the civilian work force. ACP offers veterans tools for long-term career development through mentoring, career counseling, and networking opportunities.

There is no cost to the veterans for ACP’s services, Abel says. “Many large companies are sponsors—they donate a certain amount per year and provide 50 mentors. When a vet signs up with ACP, he or she identifies a career field. ACP looks at the corporate partners to find a match. The veteran is paired with that mentor for a one-year period, with face-to-face contact as well as phone or e-mail dialogue.”

To help Rutgers student veterans obtain internship experience, an alumnus established a for-credit scholarship/internship that the Veterans Services office will oversee.

“It will be at a company in the area in the summer, will pay the tuition for the internship, and will give the intern a \$1,000 per month stipend,” Abel says. “Internship experience is an advantage to being hired once you graduate, that’s no different for student veterans.”

Rutgers’ Veterans Services office also does a lot of job and career fairs and partners with businesses in the area. “We also work with the GI Go Fund, a nonprofit that was started by Rutgers alumni after one of their close friends was killed in Iraq. Initially they were a small community group that gave financial aid to returning veterans,”



he explains. “As the unemployment rate for the current group of vets grew higher, they focused their efforts on career and job fairs in New Jersey; and now want to expand beyond New Jersey. We have partnered with them for veterans career fairs at our Newark and New Brunswick campuses.”

Hiring Student Veterans

There are many benefits to employers that hire military veterans. “They have the right skill sets—they’re a trained work force. They have the teamwork and leadership skills that employers want,” Rosser says.

Sally Nadler, college relations manager at PSEG says, “Recruiting and hiring returning veterans is part of

PSEG’s diversity outreach strategy, like our other strategic diversity partnership initiatives such as women engineers.” PSEG is a publicly traded, diversified energy company that also is one of the 10 largest electric companies in the United States.

Nadler says PSEG’s military outreach strategy involves outreach specialists and portfolio managers. “It’s all about relationship building, getting our brand in front of target audience, building our brand as an employer of choice,” she explains. “A cornerstone of our military recruiting strategy is partnering with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which is a military office on the base, TAP equates to a career services office on a college or university campus.”

PSEG finds it valuable to have a dedicated person to work with TAP officers and events at bases where the company recruits. “We target the Navy particularly—the nuclear Navy talent pool for such jobs as nuclear engineering,

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reactor operator, senior reactor operators, and training instructors.”

The company also works with colleges that help returning military veterans either connect with their current skills or complete their education to enable them to get higher level positions in the civilian work force.

“For example a qualified veteran can work as a reactor operator when he or she comes out of the Navy without an engineering degree—but an engineering degree is a desired qualification for a senior reactor operator,” Nadler says. “We work a lot with Rutgers University and Rowan University—run career events for them and we also work with the GI Go Fund in New Jersey.”

The company has a veterans’ employee resource group, PSEG Vets, that provides support and useful information to PSEG veterans, active, guard, and reserve military professionals. Members of this affinity group support the company’s outreach events and help at career fairs.

“PSEG Vets offers support to new employees as well, networking and connecting among other employees in the company,” Nadler says.

“In addition to the GI Go Fund, we work with other organizations, such as Helmets to Hardhats, which connects veterans to careers in the construction industry. We hire veterans for other jobs, not just nuclear engineering opportunities,” she continues. “Those jobs would include gas turbine mechanics in our power generation group and electronics technicians across multiple parts of our company.”

Specialized career counseling can assist student veterans decide on a field of study and translate their military experience into civilian terms, for use on resumes and in interviews. Hiring student veterans is “the right thing to do,” but it is also good for business: Student veterans bring with them real-world experience and, in many cases, strong leadership and teamwork skills. ■

Resources: Career Counseling and Hiring Student Veterans



American Corporate Partners:
www.acp-usa.org

Call of Duty Endowment:
www.callofdutyendowment.org

Families and Work Institute:
www.familiesandwork.org/site/events/veterans.html

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America:
www.iava.org

PSEG’s “Transitioning From the Military” webpage:
www.pseg.com/info/careers/military.jsp

The Value of a Veteran:
www.thevalueofaveteran.com

Vetcentral:
www.vetcentral.us.jobs/

The White House Veterans Issues webpage:
www.whitehouse.gov/issues/veterans

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