

BATTLEFIELD to BOARDROOM

America's Top Companies Actively Seek to Hire Service Members

The Department of Defense estimates that 220,000 service members will exit the military this year and the majority will enter the civilian workforce. They represent a renewable pool of job seekers second in number only to college graduates. Many have retired after twenty or more years in the service and are ready to begin their second career; others decide to leave after fulfilling their service commitment. Although they have never before been required to complete a job search, compose a resume, or interview for a position, these men and women are doing so successfully and being welcomed into America's top companies with arms open wide.

Ferguson Enterprises, Inc. has experienced substantial nationwide growth during the past few years and embarked on a program to expand and diversify its workforce through military recruiting including experienced, diversity and college graduate candidates; allowing the benefit of balancing military experience within these groups. Brink's U.S. typically fills over half of its available positions with veterans. In 2004, veterans composed at least 15 percent of the new hires at Electronic Data Systems, Honeywell, and ArvinMeritor, significant given the fact that less than 10 percent of the country's population are veterans.

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So why all the interest in hiring those that are leaving the military? Naïveté may lead one to conclude that companies are rewarding veterans for their service. The reality is that veterans are being sought out for their leadership qualities, hands-on experience and other intangibles that distinguish them in the civilian workplace, such as loyalty, work ethic and integrity.

After an intensive training program following college graduation, a military officer is responsible for direct supervision of thirty to three hundred people and millions of dollars in equipment. Enlisted technicians have years of handson experience and generally require little on-the-job training. These personnel have been required to lead and make decisions under extreme stress and dangerous circumstances, resulting in adaptability, quick thinking and multi-tasking ability. Linda Hood, Human Resources Manager for Novo Nordisk in Clayton states “Our company seeks to hire former military personnel because the vast technical training they acquired while in the military is a very good fit for the types of jobs that we have. We also find that the structure of military life has helped them to learn the importance of self discipline and dependability, essential traits in today's workplace.”

The military represents a very diverse workforce, providing a diverse pool of candidates from which to hire. The transparency of a military candidate's background is guaranteed as all branches of the military use a standardized evaluation system, providing a proven and well documented record of candidates' work history, performance and references.

All exiting service members are given free final relocation by the military and the option to put their household goods into storage for up to one year, useful if they will participate in a training program in a region of the country other than where they will ultimately work. This saves the hiring company thousands of dollars in relocation costs as well as creating a candidate pool beyond a local search.

It can be difficult for a company to begin recruiting military individuals. Often the job seekers are deployed overseas or at minimum, not living in the region of the country in which they would prefer to begin their career. Military job titles and job descriptions do not easily translate into civilian terms and are frequently misunderstood by most human resource departments.

Companies looking to hire military candidates may turn to a military placement firm to provide suitable prescreened candidates to interview for available positions. The firm will work on a contingent basis to conduct a national search for candidates and provide several interview methods such as hiring conferences, onsite at the company or direct placement. According to Mike Starich, President of Orion International, based in Raleigh, NC, “We are here for two main reasons. First, to be the top provider of leadership and high-character technicians to America's companies. Secondly, to provide our honorable service members with what is in short supply when they exit the service – we listen, consult and

treat them with the honesty and dignity they deserve.”

MilitaryStars, also headquartered in Raleigh, hosts nationwide career expos to help transitioning military and veterans find employment in corporate America. These expos have grown in popularity to the extent that last year ten were held; this year the number will grow to eighteen.

As more and more companies discover the talented population of individuals leaving the military, the competition for these candidates continues to intensify. Now is the time to revise recruiting plans to include these veterans and enjoy the competitive edge that rivals are already benefiting from.

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