

Commentary: Here's why hiring vets is good for business

Military Times

By: [Margaret Harrell](#) and [Anne Marie Dougherty](#)

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***Editor's note:** The following commentary was contributed by Margaret Harrell and Anne Marie Dougherty, both of whom work for the Bob Woodruff Foundation. The content may be edited for clarity, style and length.*

Approximately [250,000 service members](#) transition to civilian life every year, and nearly half will seek civilian employment. This annual movement of uniformed people into civilian life is not due to wartime deployments; it's a steady flow of individuals who have completed military service. That's good news for American business.

And corporations now realize that it's a sound investment to hire veterans. The unemployment rate for veterans has been [holding steady at about 4 percent](#), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Veteran employment is not a national crisis.

However, veteran employment is still a missed opportunity for many employers and one requiring continual involvement from philanthropy and corporate America.

Recently, high veteran unemployment rates threatened our national sensibility and even potentially the strength of America's all-volunteer force. In this context, President Obama implored American business leaders to hire veterans, saying, "Today, we're saying to our veterans, you fought for us, and now we're fighting for you—for the jobs and opportunities that you need to keep your families strong."

And corporate leaders did indeed step up. However, [research indicates](#) that the public perception of veterans as needy, less-qualified and potentially risky employees made it a challenge for corporate leaders to persuade local hiring managers to hire veterans, even given the patriotic interest in doing so.

Fortunately for both businesses and veterans, those employers that stepped up to recruit and hire former service members came to a common conclusion: It's great business to hire veterans.

Those employers found that veteran employees have experience at both working in and leading teams; adapt and perform well in fast-paced, stressful environments; follow directions precisely, which is especially appreciated in dangerous work environments; are committed to completing their work; are resilient in unpleasant working environments; are accustomed to culturally diverse and global environments; and demonstrate integrity and loyalty.

This is not surprising when we remind ourselves that only the top quarter of American youth are sufficiently smart, healthy and legally unencumbered to qualify for military service. And that is before further military investment in their training and education.

In light of these extremely positive veteran employment outcomes, many employers and collaboratives have improved their efforts. For example, [Veterans on Wall Street](#), a consortium of more than 85 financial services firms, has shifted from simply attracting and hiring veterans, to promoting career development and retention throughout the industry. And the [Veteran Jobs Mission](#), a diverse, 230-company coalition, has committed to hiring 1 million veterans by 2020. Originally started as the 100,000 Jobs Mission in 2011, their success prompted a name change.

Despite these successes, there remains an urgent need for programs that assist with veteran employment. Not because veteran employment is a national problem, but because the transition into a civilian lifestyle, including employment, can be personally daunting.

Many transitioning service members describe the process of becoming a civilian as more stressful than war zone deployment. That's why BWF invests in first-class programs, such as [Hire Heroes USA](#), to help veterans identify and articulate their unique knowledge, skills and abilities to transition successfully to the civilian job market. Such support can help veterans showcase their merits to local hiring managers, who may not be fully educated on what this workforce can offer.

There remains another "final frontier" of veteran employment. Many employers focus on service members who transition directly to the civilian workforce. However, the majority of transitioning service members proceed instead to further education, creating a steady flow of graduates with good academic credentials and all the strengths from military service. [We know from Student Veterans of America](#) that these students score higher GPAs than their counterparts and are more likely to study business, STEM and healthcare. Even so, too few employers are focusing their veteran employment efforts towards college campuses.

We urge American corporate leaders to step up to veteran employment, not to resolve a national crisis, but to benefit from employing extraordinary individuals. But be advised: You must be a compelling employer to compete for these veteran employees.



Anne Marie Dougherty

Anne Marie Dougherty is the Executive Director of the Bob Woodruff Foundation, and an award-winning marketer, industry thought leader, and passionate champion for our nation's veterans and their families. Under her dynamic approach to leadership and management, the Foundation has grown from a small regional organization to a top-tier, nationally recognized brand and market leader.



Margaret Harrell

Margaret “Meg” Harrell is the Director of Programs and Partnerships at the Bob Woodruff Foundation. Prior to BWF, she was the Executive Director of the Office of Force Resiliency, for the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and was responsible for developing policies, providing oversight, and integrating activities pertaining to sexual assault prevention and response, suicide prevention, diversity management, equal opportunity, drug reduction, and personnel safety. She was also responsible for Department of Defense collaborative efforts with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.