

Supporting & Transitioning Veterans Into Your Organization

Military lifestyle greatly differs from civilian and corporate lifestyle, but if your company prioritizes supporting and leveraging veterans, you can turn their challenges and experiences into strengths.

Challenges

Employer bias. Some employers discriminate against veteran applicants, fearing they may have disabilities or mental illnesses that could interfere with job performance. They could also be wary about a gap on an applicant's resume.

Difficulty applying military skills to civilian life. Employers may not see how certain types of military training can be valuable in the workplace. Managing troops can be different from managing an office, so veterans and companies need to identify what skills and experience are applicable to specific areas.

Struggles with shedding military habits and identity. After years of intense emphasis on discipline and precision, returning to civilian life and working with those who have not served can be a challenge. Differences in work ethic and attitude can cause conflicts in an organization.

Applying military attitudes to workplace attitudes. Certain office environments can be competitive, but the military environment is largely collaborative.

Tips

Make employees aware of resources available to them to help them transition. These tools might be within or outside of your organization, including your company's Employee Assistance Program, your human resources office, financial counseling or outside organizations like the U.S. Veterans Reentry Project. Include these resources in onboarding and other material you distribute to encourage its use.

Consider creating a veteran employee resource group (ERG) or affinity program. Veterans ERGs can help former service members network with one another and surround themselves with those who have similar experiences to them. Seeing those who have successfully bridged the military-civilian divide and are achieving within the company can boost a newly-hired veteran's morale and help them set goals for themselves.

Make necessary accommodations for those who need them. Veterans may struggle with physical disabilities or mental illness as a result of their service. Be understanding of the disabilities you can't see as much as the ones you can. A large population suffers from PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Make your workplace accessible and provide information on mental health services and support.

Train managers and other employees to help them better understand the veteran population and help them recognize warning signs of veteran fatigue.

Connect veterans with mentors and sponsors. Mentors and sponsors can help veteran hires tap into their potential and help them progress throughout the company.

During onboarding, engage veterans. Because of the already challenging lifestyle transition and the fact that military culture differs from that of civilian life — including that in the office — it can be easy for veterans to feel isolated. Reach out to veteran new hires and offer support.

Take time to recognize and thank veterans at your organization. You can recognize them through small gestures, like celebrating military holidays or service birthdays, or giving them items to wear or carry that indicate their status as veterans.

Take the initiative to hire veterans. Make a plan and set goals to better reach out to the veteran community. Have your HR team and other leaders identify areas and departments where veterans' skills may lend themselves well. Connect with military institutions and organizations in your area to see if you can recruit talent from them.