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# **HIRING TOOLKIT: Military Veterans & The Outdoor Industry**



Courtesy HydraPak

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**There are 22 million military veterans in the United States, and another 200,000 service members exiting the armed forces every year.**

Most of them have expert-level user experience with gear and a passion for the outdoors. Many of them have business and management skills that have been tested under pressure. Yet, only a handful of their resumes will land on your desk. But that's not for lack of ingenuity or experience. The military's rank- and pay-grade structure doesn't always translate to civilian jobs, and some vets can't speak openly about the details of their experience.

## **How do you know if an Ensign or a Chief Petty Officer is a good fit for your posted opening?**

It can be difficult for hiring teams that are unfamiliar with the military to understand the skill, responsibility, and accountability that come with military experience, but if you're consistently overlooking veterans' resumes, or downplaying military experience in favor of a more industry-specific job history, you could be missing a big opportunity.

Of course you can't investigate the details of every ex-military resume that lands on your desk, but taking a few minutes to read this toolkit may be the primer you need to recognize the potential in the next veteran applicant you consider. Because the military is also one of the country's most diverse employers, taking a deeper look at veterans' resumes might also get you one step closer to achieving your organizations larger diversity agenda as well.

If, as an industry, we can attract, retain, and advance the skills of our military heroes, our businesses will benefit from a workforce which can solve problems in new ways, drive innovation, deepen our connections to market opportunities, and enhance entrepreneurship.

## **THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY IS A FORCE— ITS WORKFORCE SHOULD BE, TOO.**



Courtesy Frank McKenna/Unsplash



Courtesy Vet Expeditions

# VETERANS: Who are they & what can they offer?

# WHO ARE JOB-SEEKING VETERANS?

The military is teeming with diverse individuals who have the professional skills to strengthen the civilian workforce—information technology, warehouse and operations expertise, and logistical knowhow to transport Army operations across the world. Get to know the talent pool of professionals you may be overlooking.

Median age of post 9/11 veterans (the youngest and most eager to start a new career adventure):

# 35

## Education

# 32%

Have a Bachelor's or Advanced Degree.

# 46%

Have college-level education

# 612,000

Veteran population attending college in 2016.

## Diversity % Of Vets Who Are

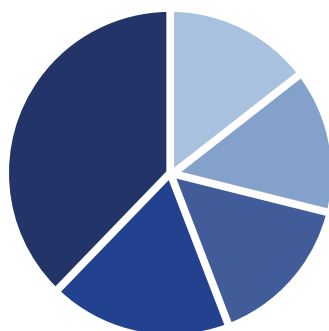
African American  
**15%**

Hispanic  
**12%**

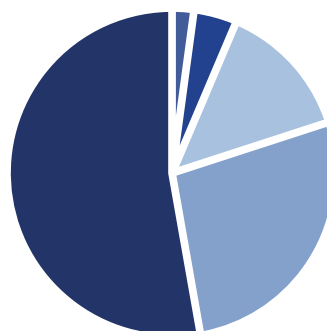
Female  
**17%**

Under the Age of 35  
**48%**

## Professional Skills Where do veterans work after military separation?



MALE



FEMALE



\* All Statistics are for the post-9/11 veteran pop—the demographic most likely to be looking for a new career path.

# WHAT DIFFERENTIATES VETS FROM OTHER POTENTIAL HIRES?

Former military personnel are more than just manpower. Boot camp, life in the barracks, and deployments under challenging circumstances results in life skills that other job-seekers may not have honed. Hire a qualified vet, and you can bet that their commanding officers have built more than just muscle.



## Entrepreneurial Spirit

There are 2.5-million vet-owned businesses generating \$1.1 trillion annually. Capturing a fraction of that entrepreneurial spirit would support innovation, growth, and a competitive advantage in the outdoor industry.

## Leadership Skills

At every level, soldiers are supervising while taking orders. Which means experience motivating and supporting colleagues across different levels of unit organization and multiple functional areas.

## Cultural Experience

Meeting diversity goals means having employees who can work with cross-cultural teams. In addition to time overseas or working with locals while deployed, the military is one of America's most ethnically-balanced employers.



Courtesy Patrick Brinksma/Unsplash

## UNDERSTAND THE OFF-RAMPS

While every veteran’s experience is unique, there are a few natural breakpoints for service members considering civilian life. Understanding these milestones—and reasons why soldiers move on—will help you recognize the motivations and opportunities for an ex-military hire.

### ENLISTED SOLDIERS

The military’s manpower. Most have specialty training for field or support tasks. Most have not completed a 2- or 4-year degree.

MILESTONE	SERVICE LENGTH	PAY	RANK	COMMON REASONS TO LEAVE
<b>End of 1st Contract</b>	~ 4 years	E-4: \$30k	Up to E-4 (Senior Airman, Corporal, Specialist, Petty Officer Third Class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To attend college or graduate school</li> <li>- Want stability and to put down roots to start a family</li> </ul>
<b>End of 2nd Contract</b>	~ 8 years	E-6: \$41k	Up to E-6 (Technical Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Petty Officer First Class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of intellectual challenges (they may have hit their limit within the military training system)</li> </ul>

### OFFICERS

The “managers” of the military, must have a 4-year college degree.

MILESTONE	SERVICE LENGTH	PAY	RANK	COMMON REASONS TO LEAVE
<b>End of Active Duty Commitment</b>	~ 5 years (+3 in the Reserves)	O-3: \$66k	Up to O-3 (Captain, Lieutenant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To attend graduate school</li> <li>- Want to settle down with family.</li> <li>- Not enough staff positions to continue advancing</li> </ul>
<b>End of Company Command</b> (managing up to 250 soldiers)	~ 8 years	O-3: \$66k	Up to O-3 (Captain, Lieutenant)	

# BRIDGE THE CULTURE GAP

Showing discipline, respect, and a knack for following orders help cadets succeed in the military—but this can seem awkward in the outdoor industry’s casual workplace. Use this chart to help better understand some common boot-camp-learned behaviors.

VETERAN BEHAVIOR	OUTDOOR INDUSTRY NORM	BRIDGE THE GAP
Address strangers as “Sir” and “Ma’am”	Call everyone by their first name	Start your interview by introducing yourself as you’d like to be addressed.
Using acronyms and military-speak to talk about job skills	Using jargon to talk about the crag or activities outside of work (less so about work)	Ask for clarification when a nervous veteran reverts to military-speak during an interview. And rest-assured they’ll pick up the outdoor industry lingo in no time!
Seeming aloof during high-stress situations	Acknowledging stress and sometimes getting frazzled by it	Many veterans have been in actual high-stress situations, making decisions that are truly life-or-death, or even being in the line of fire. By comparison, the “safety” of a corporate meeting room can seem low-pressure.
Arriving 30 minutes early for a job interview	Arriving on time (or a few minutes late)	Leave company literature in your waiting area so that early-arrivals can study while they wait for your start time.
Sporting a tight haircut	Having a 5 o’clock shadow & a mop of hair	Being clean cut is a combat-zone hygiene strategy, not a personality flaw. Consider yourself a style and cultural guide to the outdoor industry’s culture.



## PRO TIP

### RESPECT MILITARY SERVICE? MAKE IT CLEAR.

Nearly 37% of vets feel that their military experience is undervalued by hiring pros, and 44% are concerned that their service would negatively impact a hiring decision.



# CAREER COMPARISONS

According to former Assistant Secretary of Labor, Ray Jefferson, 80% of private sector jobs have a correlating military one, which means that from firefighter to financial analyst, there's a veteran who has the skills and experience your company needs.

MILITARY ROLE	CIVILIAN ROLE	CORE COMPETENCIES
Operational planner	Product development manager or materials manager	Leadership and management experience, strong analytical skills, understanding of risk management, excellent communication skills
Ordinance depot supervisor	Warehouse or shipping manager	Leader, experienced people-manager, strong understanding of operations and demand planning, problem solver
Supply clerk	Retail floor or inventory manager	Organized and disciplined, accountable, responsible, strong understanding of demand planning, understands risk management
Information specialist	IT or e-commerce manager	Data specialist, strong analytical skills, organized and disciplined
Public affairs officer	Communications or public relations manager	Excellent written and verbal communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, skilled in digital marketing and social media
Photographic specialist	Outdoor event or product photographer	Excellent written and verbal communication skills, proficient with photo editing software
Photographic specialist	Tech Rep or Specialty Sales	Strong people and relationship management skills, time management, tolerance for travel/being away from home



Courtesy Rick Meade

## PRO TIP

### CHART POSSIBLE CAREER OUTCOMES

The service's chain-of-command makes career-paths clear, so many veterans find the expectation to chart their own path disorienting. Provide veteran hires with specific indicators for when they should consider going after advancement opportunities aggressively, or backing off.



Courtesy Simon Abrams/Unsplash

## INCENTIVES FOR HIRING VETERANS

**The government wants veterans employed. Period. Which means there are Federal incentives for businesses to recruit, train, and retain veteran employees. Veterans also have access to funding for job training. This primer on incentives is just an intro, visit [Military.com](https://www.military.com) to learn more.**

### Tax Credits

Hiring an out of work veteran can be a service and a reward. An eligible veteran's specific pre-employment circumstances may qualify your company for up to \$9,600 in tax-credits. Check eligibility and general requirements for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the Returning Heroes Tax Credit, Veteran Unemployment Tax Credits, and the Wounded Warriors Tax Credit. If an existing employee in the National Guard or Reserve gets called-up, your company may also be eligible for the Differential Wage Payment Credit, which can reimburse up to \$4,000 of salary. Check your state tax code as well, many states offer additional benefits.

### Skill Bridge Program

This program allows a service member to do on-the-job training, a job shadow, internship, or apprenticeship in place of their military duties for up to 6 months before they leave the military. Worth noting: As service members are still on the federal government's payroll, they are not permitted to receive compensation from the training host during this time so their work could be, essentially, free to employers. Learn more at [dodskillbridge.com](https://dodskillbridge.com).

## PRO TIP

### UTILIZE THE VETERANS CURRENTLY IN YOUR RANKS

**It's likely that your company has a veteran or two already among your staff. Consider engaging them in a focus group about their work experience and satisfaction to learn more: How did they come to work at your company? Why do they stay? Any aspect of their military experience critical to their success or underutilized by your company? How could your company better support their career advancement or satisfaction?**

# INCENTIVES FOR HIRING VETERANS (CONT’)

## The GI Bill

This education benefit earned by a service member (and their families) can help veterans gain job skills as varied as ski instruction, supply chain analysis, and finance. GI Bill benefits may cover tuition, relocation costs, and even payroll for on-the-job training—for a total of up to 36 months. If current veteran employees (or future ones) can claim a GI Bill benefit to improve their prospects or add value to your company, consider it a win-win. All you have to do is support their effort by accommodating their educational plan (part-time/flex scheduling, apprenticeships, etc.) and encourage them to look into their eligibility for:

### → INSTITUTES OF HIGHER LEARNING BENEFIT (IHL Benefits)

These benefits can be used to cover the cost of attendance for four year colleges, community colleges, and advanced degree programs. May include thousands of dollars per year in stipends to cover tuition, housing, books, and even relocation.

### → VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION & EMPLOYMENT (VR&E)

Covers on-the-job training and non-paid work expenses along with support services like career counseling and housing. The hiring and retention of a qualified VR&E veteran also entitles businesses to tax credits through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program and partial salary reimbursement (up to 50% for six months) through the Special Employer Incentives program.



Courtesy, Jake Wheeler

## OTHER RESOURCES

Learn about incentives & connect with vets

### U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

[benefits.va.gov](https://benefits.va.gov); 800-827-1000

For information about incentives and resources such as hiring consultants and eligibility paperwork.

### Hire Heroes USA [hireheroesusa.org](https://hireheroesusa.org)

This organization empowers vets looking for work and partners with employers to fill staffing gaps.

### Career One Stop Business Center

[careeronestop.org/BusinessCenter](https://careeronestop.org/BusinessCenter)

A U.S. Department of Labor site providing resources for managing and retaining veterans.

### Veteran Outdoor Leaders on LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8643166>

Join a group of outdoor industry-involved veterans already networking and building connections.

# RECRUIT MILITARY VETERANS

**If you're near a military hub (Seattle, San Diego, Denver, Baltimore) you probably already see veterans in your applicant pool. But by casting a slightly wider net, you're likely to increase your appeal to former-military talent. Use these resources to reach high-quality veteran hires.**

## **Veteran Job Boards** ([veteranjobsmission.com/employer-resources/pipelines](http://veteranjobsmission.com/employer-resources/pipelines))

Most vets (61%) use general job boards (such as Indeed), but almost half research on sites specifically targeted to former military personnel. The Veteran Jobs Mission is a one-stop-shop with over 150 of the best websites and job boards to reach veterans and increase your talent pipeline. They also have resources for training, managing, and retaining employees.

## **Job Fairs/Events for Recruiting**

Military bases may hold job fairs for transitioning personnel up to once a month—less often for smaller bases. If you're looking for a specific technical skill or have many job positions to fill, these job fairs can be valuable places to connect with a huge talent pool. Connect with your neighborhood base's Career Resources Specialist or Information Systems Coordinator for more information.

## **Hiring Our Heroes** ([hiringourheroes.org/employers/](http://hiringourheroes.org/employers/))

This initiative, a partnership between the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and the Department of Veterans Affairs, has placement, management, and retention resources for veteran talent from entry- to management-level. This organization has hosted +1,000 job fairs (in the U.S. and at bases abroad). Through corporate sponsorships, they get commitments from employers to hire and support veterans and their spouses.

## **Encourage Employee Referrals**

Leverage the networks of your current veteran staff members. Part of the reason employee referrals can be so successful is because employers are attracting talent that aligns with a company's existing culture. By leveraging your employee networks, you'll enhance your exposure and likelihood of capturing veteran talent.



Courtesy HydraPak

## **PRO TIP**

### **COLLECT MEANINGFUL METRICS**

**Do you know how many of your organization's employees are vets? Or how veteran retention compares to those former river-guides or one-time ski instructors on your payroll? Tracking the performance and value that veteran employees add to your organization will help you recognize their value to your company.**



Courtesy Luke Clara/Unsplash

## MANAGE & RETAIN VETERAN EMPLOYEES

**Once you've landed an all-star ex-military employee, set them up for success with these tips to smooth their shift into outdoor industry culture.**

### Polish Your New-Hire Packet

The military is all-inclusive when it comes to benefits—healthcare is fully covered and many service members receive housing assistance. Help veterans fully understand your compensation package by offering a comprehensive introduction. Include a welcome letter from the CEO and their new manager, provide a list of available support resources available throughout their employment, outline the “chain of command” they should follow for grievances, and be direct about benefit options (like life insurance or retirement plans).

### Identify Veteran Mentors

While it may seem obvious to pair-up incoming veterans with your existing ex-military staff, you may not be aware of all the one-time service members in your payroll. Some veterans are reluctant to reveal their military history due to fear of being stereotyped or being censured by co-workers. But, veterans typically feel a sense of camaraderie, and pairing up a veteran new-hire with a veteran old-timer at your company can help your new staffer better navigate their new corporate landscape.

### Provide Purpose-Driven Responsibilities

By placing veterans in training or coaching positions and providing opportunities to do community work, you can foster deeper engagement with your core values and make the meaningfulness of your company mission more tangible. Offer paid volunteer hours, have a Habitat for Humanity build day, or sponsor a local nonprofit, for example.

### Set Stereotypes Aside

According to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 46% of HR professionals cite “PTSD and Mental Health” as hurdles in hiring veterans. Peter Gudmundsson, a former Marine and CEO and President of RecruitMilitary, says less than 20% of the veterans of Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom suffer from PTSD and most veterans never see actual combat. Whether you plan to actively hire veterans or not, it is important to be more informed about the facts that surround this stereotype.

### Be Inclusive of Families

Service men and women move every couple of years and strong family and community bonds develop quickly on military bases, so veterans are likely accustomed to close ties with co-workers and their families. Invite partners and children to company events and recognition celebrations show veteran employees that you recognize this important support network.



Courtesy Michael Amadeus/Christopher Burns/Unsplash

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## HELPFUL LINKS & ORGANIZATIONS

- O\*Net Online - <https://www.onetonline.org/>
- OIA Article "The Best Employees You're Not Hiring" - <https://outdoorindustry.org/article/the-best-employees-youre-not-hiring/>
- Veterans Affairs Employer Toolkit - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/for-employers.asp>
- Special Employer Incentives - <https://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/docs/SpecialEmployerIncentive.pdf>
- Department of Defense Instruction - <http://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132229p.pdf>
- Department of Labor Veteran hiring toolkit - <https://www.dol.gov/vets/ahaw/retain.htm>
- Veteran Outdoor Leaders LinkedIn group - <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8643166>
- Camber Outdoors - <https://camberoutdoors.org/>
- Hiring Our Heroes, US Chamber of Commerce - <https://www.hiringourheroes.org/>
- National Resource Directory - <https://nrd.gov/>
- Military Rates - [https://www.militaryrates.com/military-pay-charts-o1\\_o5\\_2018](https://www.militaryrates.com/military-pay-charts-o1_o5_2018)
- Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University - <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/>
- Department of Defense SkillBridge - [dodskillbridge.com](http://dodskillbridge.com)
- Military.com Network - [www.Military.com](http://www.Military.com)
- Veteran Job Boards - [www.veteranjobsmission.com](http://www.veteranjobsmission.com)
- Veterans Expeditions - <http://www.vetexpeditions.com/>
- <https://upstatebusinessjournal.com/how-employers-can-attract-engage-retain-veterans/>



Courtesy Thom Schroeder

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**This toolkit was developed by the Outdoor Industry Association’s Skip Yowell Future Leadership Academy—Class 3. It is an effort to raise awareness, provide education, and increase veteran participation in the outdoor industry through employment. This toolkit aims to promote deeper inclusion to strengthen and enhance the outdoor industry through diversity.**

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