

Breaking Down Barriers and Stereotypes

It's amazing how many times we deal with stereotypes? Our perceptions (or misperceptions) by categorizing people into boxes has created all sorts of barriers that limit the potential of both the individuals and the organizations. This is especially seen in the areas of employment of transitioning military, veterans and military spouses. Employers can see them based upon stereotypes developed from the news and film, to mention a few, that erroneously define the applicant with military background or the spouse who has changed employment or even not worked due to frequent moves.

Diversity initiatives from employers are widening the aperture of hiring managers. Employers such as USAA, Randolph Brooks Federal Credit Union and Rackspace to name a few are now actively promoting programs to hire military and spouses. The US Chamber Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes has a variety of programs geared to military and spouse employment. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) has published a handbook for veteran hiring. SHRM's local chapter, the San Antonio Human Resources Management Association or SAHRMA, highlights the military community at the November meeting each year.

A challenge to the transitioning military and to the spouse is to address these stereotypes and turn them into positive attributes. Here are some thoughts drawn from a SHRM article entitled Guide to Veteran Hiring: 8 Facts to Break Down Barriers and Stereotypes. This article addresses the issues to the HR managers. Let's turn them around.

1. Just because you have military career doesn't mean that you were a combat specialist. The majority have military "jobs" equivalent to the civilian workplace.
2. The military community reflects the diversity of the civilian community. This is a statistical fact.
3. The number of women choosing military careers continues to grow. The opportunities for women in the armed services continues to grow and they are stepping up to the challenges.
4. The military's emphasis on education throughout the career has resulted in more college-educated veterans than the general civilian population.
5. The operational challenges of the decades have developed a military force that is "agile" and not defined by the institutional hierarchy of the past. This is a needed trait in today's civilian marketplace.
6. The Reserve and National Guard members make up close to half of today's U.S. armed forces. These "warrior citizens" bring such a wide portfolio of skills and experiences that are valuable to both military and civilian employers.

7. The unsung “heroes” of the military are the spouses. Educate the employer on all of the various skills and experiences that can be used in the workplace. These are professional AND volunteer. Another fact: men now make up about 10% of the military spouse.
8. The military career is now a viable option in a competitive global economy. The recruit is making a conscious choice to enlist and succeed. No one is drafted into the military. The skills and experienced in the military are extremely marketable to employers.

The challenge and the opportunity of any transitioning military, veteran, retiree and spouse is to translate their skills and experiences and then market them to the employer. Go for it!