

How To Strengthen Veteran Likeability For Employment

by Jeff Garton

Employment training qualifies people for consideration, but not for hire. Employers have observed how the jobless are not prepared for the rigors of longer-term unemployment and presumably, for increased pressures on the job. This article proposes a solution customized for veterans that boosts their performance and appeal when competing for fewer jobs.

Transitioning veterans are provided the same basic employment training as civilian job hunters. They learn the mechanics of how to look for jobs and to accentuate the positives that distinguish them from the competition. Thereafter, they rely on this knowledge to help them locate jobs and avoid rejections.

Although this basic training is essential, it has barely prepared veterans for the challenges they transition into. Not long into their job search, veterans start to experience many of the same frustrations as millions of civilian job hunters. This is one reason why over half of transitioning veterans have reported they were not ready, and why Monster found that 61 percent of employers agreed they were not prepared.

Why job hunters are frustrated and seem unprepared is not because they lack job skills. It's because their mental skills were never developed for the hardships created by longer-term unemployment. Since 2008, the average time to find a job has grown to ten months. After five months of unsuccessful searching, Pew researchers found the jobless become so discouraged they stop looking. The emotional turmoil associated with the lack of jobs and prolonged unemployment whittles away their spirit and makes them depressed, apathetic, and unlikeable. Because their weariness is noticeable, interviewers assume if a job hunter lacks the mental skills to perform well while searching for jobs, those skills will be lacking after the job is started. Their resumes suggest they are qualified, but in person, they don't seem prepared.

It might seem paradoxical that warriors lack mental fitness. However, their experience has demonstrated that having been mentally fit for battle does not guarantee they will be mentally fit for challenges posed to their families by longer-term unemployment. This just means their training for battle was better than their training for employment. How to help veterans improvise, adapt, and overcome in the civilian world becomes apparent when you understand this insider knowledge of employment in the new economy.

How Staffing Really Works

Job hunters are trained to showcase their assets, but this only makes them **discoverable** and merely qualifies them for consideration. Recruiters are trained to look beneath an interviewee's polished image and practiced interview skills to discover what enables their **likeability** and makes them qualified for hire. The truth is hiring managers do not always pursue the most qualified, but they always hire, promote, and retain who they like most. Likeability trumps discoverability and is based on the interviewee's perceived fit with existing workers and their mental skills to maintain a favorable attitude and good performance despite difficult job conditions employers may not fully disclose (i.e., long hours, low pay, shrinking benefits, poor supervision, lack of recognition, unfriendly coworkers, no budgets, impending layoffs, etc.).

Interviewers know likeability when they see it, but its full meaning is rarely spelled out in any job description. For this reason, and because the attributes and mental skills that make a job hunter likeable to one employer may not make them appealing to all, likeability is not the focus of training provided to the jobless or transitioning veterans. It's easier to teach the jobless how to write resumes, dress for success, and interview. The jobless are on their own to discover what makes them genuinely likeable to each employer, which helps us understand why, after their transition training, veterans still feel unprepared. Training to improve their discoverability helps them get a foot in the door, but without likeability, employers have no justification or obligation to hire them. This deficit in essential training is unfortunate for veterans because likeability is where employers are now placing the greatest weight.

What Motivates Employers

Rather than create new jobs employers have been squeezing more work out of fewer workers. As a result, Gallup reports 83 percent of the people with jobs have become as fatigued and disengaged as the people without jobs. Thus, due to rising concerns about declining productivity, employers are reluctant to hire any new workers who appear unlikeable or mentally unfit to perform well despite their personal or work related challenges. As to how this stance might affect jobless veterans, one reporting entity put it this way: *employment in the new economy is about performance, not patriotism*. Studies by Northeastern University and UCLA have shown how employers are so concerned, they have become biased against reviewing resumes of people who have been jobless over five months - the point at which job hunters become discouraged and stop looking. Until the government recently put a stop to it, some employers were advertising the jobless need not apply.

Why Veterans Are Recruited

Employers generally presume that due to their military training, veterans should have the right stuff to succeed in situations where civilian workers might not. This presumption creates advantages for the jobless veterans who manage on their own to maintain the necessary mental fitness to persevere and perform well despite challenges on the job, and while looking for jobs. A report by the Center for New American Security suggests veterans are hired for qualities that boost their likeability: their mental agility, discipline, trustworthiness, resilience, loyalty, etc. In fact, when a veteran is considered likeable, but may lack transferrable job skills, employers will hire them believing their skills can be further developed. But when a veteran is not likeable, they are rejected even though they may possess transferrable job skills.

Solution

Although the job market shows signs of improvement, the Brookings Institute predicts high unemployment conditions may continue through 2024. Longer-term unemployment has become the norm, in which case veterans are receiving only 50 percent of the training they will need and that employers would rather they have. Their most likeable qualities are being compromised by one of the worst job markets in U.S. history.

In addition to making veterans discoverable, the solution involves training that shows them: a) how to strengthen and maintain their mental fitness acquired in the military for increased likeability in the civilian world, and b) how to leverage an employer's favorable presumptions about their military qualities that are uniquely beneficial to improving productivity. In this economy, employers need warriors who happen to be civilians, not more civilians who don't know how to be warriors.



These are the objectives of *Veteran Empowerment Training (V.E.T.)*. Recently available online and through reinforcement workshops, this virtual classroom of learning resources integrates insider knowledge of recruiter practices and principles of performance improvement with mindfulness based stress reduction training that is provided to first responders. It was first designed by experts in staffing, psychology, eLearning, and workforce development as *Jobseeker Success Mindset Training* for the Illinois Department of Employment Security. Then veterans customized that training for veterans. The idea is not to convert soldiers to civilians, but to enhance the likeability of soldiers as civilians. They learn how to strengthen their mental discipline received in the military and capitalize on this asset for improved likeability and success in the civilian world. V.E.T. is a solution whose time has come, and just in time.

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