

# Fueling

# the Workforce

## Straight Talk and the Upside of Hiring Vets

Every vet who chooses a civilian career has a story. I am writing this using my personal active-duty history from the mid 60's, from my management experience as a business owner, and especially as a consultant over the past few years.

For some background, I went off to college after high school but because of a lack of maturity, interest, and commitment, I left after my sophomore year. We had the Draft in those days, so I was quickly reclassified and chose to enlist in the Navy rather than being drafted into the Army.



My issue with that enlistment was that I would get seasick standing on a dock! Right away, my thought process turned to "if I was going to be on a boat it would need to be a very big one," so I went for Navy Air and became a PR (Parachute Rigger). The 28 weeks I spent in Boot Camp and A School transformed me. When I was done with those seven months of training, I had a new sense of purpose and maturity.

My duty time was during the Vietnam conflict, but I had the good fortune not to serve overseas. I did have regular first-hand experience with those who did until I left active duty in November 1968. What I saw and experienced during that time and the years after leaving active reserve duty in 1971 impacted me then and still does today. Friends were lost in combat and still more were lost years later because of their service—tied to numerous medical and emotional conditions.



Later, during the decades when I had my business, I made hiring and training vets a priority—not just to honor their service but also because they truly understood the meaning of team, discipline, and loyalty. Not every situation

worked out as planned for the business or for them, but the effort and investment was always worth the try.

In my years as a consultant to the delivered-fuels industry, I have had a few opportunities to again get involved directly with veterans or sometimes with business clients when I could encourage them to hire veterans. It is still something I believe needs to be a priority for us all as we work to build the highest quality workforce. My word of caution is that for some veterans, the transition from military life to civilian is not always easy and, in fact, will fail in certain situations.



I recently helped a client in their hiring process and was able to bring in two vets: a soldier who served eight years and three tours and who had recently completed an accredited HVAC training program; and a Marine who served two tours and remained an active Marine reservist. The Marine had only high school tech classes and his military experience, so we committed to OJT along with available industry training.

For the one individual, he found a home, a new family, and immediately made an impact on all who worked with him and the customers he serviced. The other did well in the beginning but soon began to lose interest in this new life and, within a year, left the company to return to active duty. With another client, their company experienced a situation in which a vet who had become a tech was suffering from PTSD, and his issues were not recognized or properly diagnosed.

My purpose for writing about this is that you owe it to yourself and our veterans to actively look for and hire former military men and women. You need to accept that your responsibility does not end on their hiring date! You and your team need to watch, talk, listen, and guide these individuals as they return to civilian life. For the vast majority, it is a straightforward and simple transition, but for some, it is not. It is with those few that we need to step up and do all we can to support their needs and do what we can to help them through that transition. From my personal experience, those efforts will pay lasting benefits for your business and your customers.



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