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ENGAGING THE VETERAN & SERVICE-MEMBER POPULATION

**Focus on talent
acquisition and
mobility**

**By Cathleen
Podell, SCRP**

Across America, corporations, relocation service providers, government agencies, and social networks are dedicating time and energy to engage a very special community: military veterans and service-member families. Hundreds of employers are taking notice of the highly desirable skill set of this population and are taking specific and intentional actions to attract, hire, and develop veterans in their careers. This article conveys the expertise of individuals who are actively involved in the focus on and conversation around veterans, sharing best practices and resources to offer a look at what is trending on this topic.

Attendees to last year's Worldwide ERC® America's Mobility Conference in Atlanta had the opportunity to hear the insights of several professionals representing different disciplines, but with a common interest in the engagement of veterans and service-member families. Erin Koops, CRP, of Leading Real Estate Companies of the World, kicked off the introduction to the veteran and service-member population by offering the following data compiled by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD): In the U.S., approximately 1.1 million service members are currently on active duty, and approximately 235,000 service members transition out of service each year. Koops commented that these numbers should be ringing the bell of opportunity for anyone looking to hire veterans and discharged military personnel, as the current population of veterans in the U.S. alone is approximately 22 million. Members of the veteran community are predominantly older, male, and white. However, those among the current active-duty population—tomorrow's veterans—are younger and more diverse in their background and ethnicity.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

With these statistics in mind, the panel's conversation shifted to three contributors who have personal experience with the topic, as they are veterans themselves: Chris Peck of UPS (Air Force), Greg Murray of Wells Fargo Home Mortgage (Navy), and Pat Tooman, CRP, GMS, of RELO Direct (Air Force) offered firsthand insights about the veteran community and the outlook and characteristics they tend to demonstrate.

Murray shared that veterans are highly dedicated and focused on their task and mission, and they genuinely need to understand and feel the import of their work. Veterans have been conditioned to follow orders and execute strategy and plans effectively. To truly get connected to the veteran community, employers, service providers, and social networks will need to invest time and attention to get to know people and show commitment to fostering ties. Murray recommended that individuals and entities looking to operate in this space should demonstrate consistent and genuine affinity for the interests and needs of veterans. The bonds created over time will be very strong, as this community has proven to be intensely loyal to all who are a part of it and support it.

Tooman concurred with Murray's assessment, noting that in addition to an ability to execute tasks and demonstrate excellent attention to detail, veterans tend to be well-disciplined, well-versed in the application of compliance, familiar with navigating hierarchies and responsibility levels, and able to assimilate quickly to new environments. Sounding familiar, mobility industry?

Peck agreed and added that if you need skilled talent that can move and get back up to speed quickly, the veteran population is an excellent source. Members of this community have a lot of experience with moving around and operating effectively under pressure. Skills including analytical and strategic thinking, planning, and the ability to deploy and execute a plan successfully are routine exercises and areas where veterans excel.

ATTRACTING VETERANS TO MOBILITY

The panel conversation next turned to strategies and tactics to attract and hire veterans and service members. Peck shared his knowledge of the VOW (Veterans Opportunity to Work) to Hire Heroes Act, which provides support to help veterans transition from active enlistment to career opportunity.

One of the key components of the VOW Act is the Transition Assistance Program. The website for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (<http://bit.ly/2m8FACG>) offers the following description: "The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provides service members who are about to be discharged with job-seeking skills such as résumé-writing to help their transition to the civilian world."

As the vice president of corporate human resources with UPS, Peck shared how important this legislation has been to his company's focus on the recruiting of veterans. The VOW Act provides a 12-week period for transitioning service members to be trained for a new position with an employer. The cost of training time is paid by the military branch of service, and the cost for the service member to move for the new position is covered by TAP.

Peck also discussed the tools and resources UPS has made available through a special section of its career site dedicated to veterans. The "Military Skills Translator" and "Career Transition Guide" help veterans and service members navigate the employment process and understand the benefits and advantages to working for UPS (military.jobs-ups.com).

Murray spoke about an initiative underway to increase the team member population of veterans working for Wells Fargo to 20,000 by the year 2020. Per the career site dedicated to those with military experience (wellsfargo.com/about/careers/veterans), "Wells Fargo's commitment to veterans doesn't end once a job offer is made. The company strives to create a culture of caring that supports veteran team members throughout their careers."

So how can you start a conversation within your own organization about engaging the veteran and service-member population? What are the special needs this community might have when it comes to relocation?

The first thing to keep in mind when considering intentional engagement with this community is that veterans are everywhere. You don't need to cast a wide net to come in contact with veterans and service members, and when it comes to mobility, Koops shared additional data from the DoD: On average, members of the military will move 10 or more times during the course of a 20-year career. More than 260,000 active military service members are given permanent change of station (PCS) orders each year. This is a community on the move!

Koops noted that MILLIE (*gomillie.com*), a strategic partner with which LeadingRE works in serving the military community, compiled data from the National Association of Realtors and the DoD, which shows that only 35 percent of PCS families live on military installations. The reasons are insufficient inventory (not an uncommon theme in real estate today), preference/location, and better value in the civilian community. Sound familiar, mobility industry? So what this means is that 65 percent of military families on the move are actively looking to rent or buy housing off-installation, and most often the decision-maker will be the spouse—93 percent of whom are women aged 25–45.

Tooman added that being ready to work with the spouse or significant other is a common theme with veterans and service members, just as it is for the mobility industry overall. To make strong connections and help these families make successful moves, Tooman encourages service providers to know the terminology and speak the language. Be conscious of concepts such as homesale that may be totally new and foreign to families who are transitioning out; Koops mentioned that a quarter of a million service members do this every year.

When it comes to supporting the housing needs of the veteran and service-member community, both Peck and Murray emphasized the importance of making information readily and easily available, engaging this community through networking and educating members on their options. Peck shared that UPS hosts a Spouse and Family Summit, a group that fosters connections with UPS employees who share the common experience of military service. This summit is an opportunity to ensure veterans know of the resources and support available to them through their employer, their community, and beyond.

Murray encouraged employers to work with mortgage lenders who are fluent in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home loan product and have dedicated staff with expertise in working with this population. Murray noted the VA loan benefit is significant for veterans—but is not as well-utilized as many might hope or think. Home lending websites that dedicate content to the military community have information that is easy for veterans and service members to source (*wellsfargo.com/military/veterans*). Murray also shared a resource that provides broader financial education tailored to this community: *hands onbanking.org*, which is available to the public.

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WORTHY OF ATTENTION

What we learned by bringing together this passionate and talented group of professionals representing different disciplines was that the veteran and service-member community is rich in potential, talent, and highly desirable skills, and that they are worthy of our attention and best effort. All panelists agreed that by embracing this community and doing a good job for them, not only will employers gain a loyal and supportive employee or customer, but also the dividends they receive will go well beyond the immediate connection.

Please visit the “Conferences and Audio Recordings” page of the Worldwide ERC® website (<http://bit.ly/2hXRTUC>) for access to a recording of the May 2017 panel discussion “Engaging the Veteran/Military Service Member Population: Talent Acquisition and Mobility Strategies” and to view a list of recommended websites and resources.

All involved with this conversation give our grateful thanks to those who have served our nation and to the families, friends, and communities that support them! *M*

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