

ARE YOU VETERAN-READY?

The Playbook for Transportation and Supply Chain Employers

BROUGHT TO YOU BY





Our Mission

At Spark Change Lab, we are dedicated to driving people-first change across the transportation and supply chain industry. Our mission encompasses a wide range of initiatives, including our commitment to supporting the successful transition of military talent into the civilian workforce.

As a team of passionate advocates for positive change, we believe that by empowering companies to embrace innovative, people-centered approaches – including becoming veteran-ready employers – we can drive innovation, resilience, and positive social impact throughout the industry.

Join us in this journey as we build a transportation and supply chain industry that is stronger, more diverse, and better equipped to meet the challenges of the future. Whether it's supporting veterans, optimizing operations, or fostering leadership development, Spark Change Lab is here to ignite positive transformation at every level.

Sincerely,
Leigh, Angela, and Beth
Spark Change Lab Founders

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Introduction

As the transportation and supply chain industry grapples with digital disruption, market fluctuations, and talent gaps, tapping into the pool of veteran workers has never been more critical. Veterans bring unique skills, experiences, and leadership abilities that can help drive business success in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment. However, many veterans face significant barriers in transitioning to civilian careers, from translating their military experience to finding employers who understand and value their contributions.

At Spark Change Lab, we are passionate about driving positive change and empowering companies to create inclusive, high-performing workplaces. Through our collaborative efforts, we aim to provide the tools, resources, and insights needed for organizations to attract, develop, and retain top talent from all backgrounds. We hold a special place of honor for our nation's veterans, whose unique skills, experiences, and sacrifices make them invaluable assets to any organization willing to invest in their potential.

This playbook is a comprehensive guide to help you unlock the potential of military veterans in your transportation and supply chain operations. By implementing these strategies, you'll effectively support veterans' transition to civilian careers while enhancing your overall workforce capabilities. Veterans' unique skills and experiences can drive innovation and operational excellence across your organization, creating a win-win situation for both your company and these valuable team members.

To learn more, visit sparkchangelab.com/veterans

The Veteran Advantage

The evidence is clear: hiring veterans is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a smart business move that can provide organizations with a competitive edge in today's challenging talent landscape.

Recent data from the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) sheds light on the current state of veteran employment. As of January 2024, the overall veteran unemployment rate stood at 3.3%, an increase from 3.0% in December 2023. However, this masks significant variations across different veteran demographic groups.

Veterans aged 18-24 experienced a sharp increase in unemployment, jumping from 7.7% to 11.0% in January, a rate higher than their nonveteran peers. Female veterans also saw a notable rise in joblessness, with their unemployment rate increasing from 3.3% to 4.8%, surpassing the rate for female nonveterans (3.4%).

Interestingly, the IVMF report found that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino veterans had lower unemployment rates in January compared to their nonveteran counterparts, at 3.4% versus 5.6% and 5.4% versus 5.7%, respectively. However, it's important to note that monthly data for specific veteran subgroups can fluctuate considerably.

Despite these challenges, veterans represent a highly educated and skilled talent pool that can drive measurable results for employers. According to LinkedIn's 2023 Veteran Opportunity Report, 60.5% of veterans have attained a bachelor's degree or higher and are three times more likely to have a graduate degree than nonveterans. This educational attainment, combined with the rigorous training and experience gained during military service, equips veterans with a unique set of skills and qualities that can benefit organizations across industries.

The report also dispels the common myth that veterans struggle to adapt to civilian work, finding that 61% of veterans' first post-military jobs are in high-skilled positions. Moreover, contrary to the belief that 50% of veterans leave their first civilian job within six months, the data shows that veterans are actually 27% less likely than nonveterans to leave their first jobs within that time frame.

Beyond their technical skills and educational backgrounds, veterans bring a wealth of intangible qualities that can strengthen any organization, including leadership, teamwork, adaptability, and a strong work ethic. These attributes, honed through intensive military training and high-stakes experiences, can translate into improved safety records, increased productivity, and a culture of innovation in the civilian workplace.

Becoming a Veteran-Ready Employer

Becoming a veteran-ready employer requires a multifaceted approach encompassing commitment, communication, community, inclusive practices, and strategic partnerships. Based on insights gathered from industry experts and research, we have developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for companies looking to recruit, hire, and retain veteran talent in the transportation and supply chain industry.

WHERE TO BEGIN

What Does Veteran Ready Mean to You?

Understanding what it means to be a veteran-ready company is crucial for any organization aiming to effectively support and integrate veterans into their workforce. This concept goes beyond mere recruitment; it encompasses creating a supportive environment where veterans can thrive, leveraging their unique skills and experiences to benefit the business.

To embark on this journey, starting with a clear definition of what being veteran-ready means for your company is essential. This involves convening a diverse group of executives, military, and veteran employees to engage in a meaningful discussion.

Getting Buy-In: Engaging Key Stakeholders

Gathering a cross-section of executives and military/veteran employees is a strategic approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding and buy-in from all levels of the organization. This group should collaboratively explore and define the attributes and practices that make a company veteran-ready.

Discussion Questions:

What are the key characteristics of a veteran-ready company?

Goal: To identify specific attributes and practices that support veteran employees.

How can we leverage veterans' unique skills and experiences to benefit our business?

Goal: To explore veterans' transferable skills and how they align with business objectives.

What challenges do veterans face when transitioning into civilian employment, and how can we address them?

Goal: To understand common obstacles and develop strategies to overcome them.

What resources and support systems can we implement to ensure the success of veteran employees?

Goal: To identify necessary training, mentorship programs, and other support mechanisms.

How can we create an inclusive and supportive company culture for veterans?

Goal: To discuss ways to foster a welcoming environment and promote diversity.

What metrics should we use to measure our progress in becoming a veteran-ready company?

Goal: To determine key performance indicators to track success and areas for improvement.

Linking to Your Business Goals

To ensure the definition of a veteran-ready company aligns with business objectives, it is crucial to link the outcomes of these discussions to the company's strategic goals. This can be achieved by:

1. Utilizing government data (e.g., from the Department of Labor) to demonstrate the value of investing in veterans can contribute to business growth and innovation.
2. Aligning veteran integration strategies with corporate social responsibility initiatives.
3. Demonstrating the business value of a diverse and inclusive workforce through case studies and metrics.

With a clear definition of what it means to be a veteran-ready company, the next step is to translate this understanding into actionable strategies.

The Five Pillars of a Veteran-Ready Organization

This journey is anchored in five key pillars: Commitment, Communication, Community, Partnerships, and People. Each of these pillars plays a vital role in building and sustaining a veteran-ready culture:

- Commitment involves dedicated efforts to prioritize veterans within the organizational agenda.
- Effective Communication ensures that all stakeholders are informed and engaged.
- Building a supportive Community fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support among employees.
- Forming strategic Partnerships with veteran organizations enhances resources and opportunities.
- Finally, focusing on People means valuing the unique contributions of each veteran employee and providing pathways for their growth and development.

The following sections will delve deeper into these pillars, offering practical guidance and insights to help your organization become truly veteran-ready.

COMMITMENT

Solidifying Buy-In and Enterprise-Wide Support

This is another critical first step toward becoming a bonafide veteran-ready organization. No matter the size of your company, having an executive sponsor for veteran initiatives and veteran resources or affinity groups is a critical first step to creating long-term success. Leadership buy-in is essential to helping formalize and firmly establish your company's veteran focus both internally and externally.

Solidifying Buy-In: Executive Sponsorship

The executive sponsor should have a deep understanding of issues related to the military, the organization's brand, and its public image.

The executive sponsors should ideally:

- Have a deep connection or understanding of the military and the organization's brand and public image.
- Can provide strategic direction, help set measurable success criteria, and leverage their network to overcome obstacles.
- Have the ability to influence and support veteran priorities linked to the business priorities and goals, such as investment needed, hiring targets, retention goals, and affinity group establishment.

Their executive sponsor responsibilities should include:

- Providing strategic direction to align with the organization's business strategy
- Helping to identify measurable success criteria that support business goals
- Offering advice and counsel to guide the veteran's initiative development
- Leveraging a broad network of internal and external relationships
- Identifying and overcoming obstacles and resistance within the organization
- Supporting the veteran initiative through communication, visibility, and accountability

Set Clear Goals & Priorities

Engaging an executive sponsor should be closely followed by selecting a few clear goals and priorities that everyone in your company can grasp. Some recommendations for goals and priorities include:

- Developing targets for hiring veterans and military spouses
- Setting veteran retention goals
- Creating a process for self-identification of veterans and military spouses, identifying community engagement opportunities, and
- Formally establishing a veteran affinity group

Resources

- Veteran Jobs Mission (VJM): <https://veteranjobsmission.com/>
- Spark Change Lab: <https://www.sparkchangelab.com/>
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Veterans Employment Resources: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/veterans-employment-resources.aspx>
- U.S. Department of Labor's VETS Employer Guide: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/employers>
- Military.com Employer Resource Center: <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/employer-resource-center>
- Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR): <https://www.esgr.mil/Employers/>
- Veterans Employment Toolkit from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/>

COMMUNICATION

Overcoming Stigmas and Showcasing the Value of Veteran Talent

Understanding on a broad level why veteran hires are good for the company and its employees is often overlooked and vitally important when it comes to dispelling stigma and accelerating your organization's readiness when it comes to veterans in the workplace.

Highlight Career Paths and Veteran Achievements

Ensure transparent communication about career paths, expectations, and opportunities for advancement within the organization. Celebrate veterans' contributions and achievements through recognition programs, PR initiatives, and storytelling campaigns that highlight their impact both within and outside the workplace.

Some key communication strategies include:

- Increasing awareness among managers about the benefits of hiring veterans and the specific skills they bring to the supply chain and logistics industry
- Gathering metrics and intelligence to understand veterans as a talent pool in the workplace, including the number and progression of veterans in the workforce
- Showcasing the ROI of veteran hiring to the organization, highlighting the specific skills and attributes veterans bring to the supply chain and logistics industry

- Seek PR opportunities to highlight veteran initiatives and ensure non-wired employees see these efforts.

Educate Employees and Managers

Training and education are crucial for fostering a veteran-friendly workplace. Implement the following strategies to overcome misconceptions and highlight the value veterans bring:

- Educate all employees on military culture, veteran experiences, and their unique skill sets.
- Train managers on the benefits of hiring veterans, especially for supply chain and logistics roles.
- Gather metrics on veteran employment and career progression within your organization.
- Showcase the return on investment (ROI) of veteran hiring, emphasizing their specific skills and attributes.
- Seek public relations opportunities to highlight veteran initiatives, ensuring company-wide visibility.

Resources

- PsychArmor Institute: <https://psycharmor.org/>
- Hiring Our Heroes: <https://www.hiringourheroes.org/>
- Got Your 6: <https://gotyour6.org/>
- Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF): <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/>
- America's Warrior Partnership: <https://americaswarriorpartnership.org/>
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes: <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/hiring-our-heroes>
- Call of Duty Endowment: <https://www.callofdutyendowment.org/>

COMMUNITY

Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Support

Create Veteran Mentorship Programs and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Implementing mentorship programs to connect veteran employees with experienced mentors can provide valuable professional guidance and support their transition to civilian life. Encourage participation in Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and organize activities such as volunteerism, team-building challenges, and welcome events to foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie among veteran employees.

Some important strategies to consider:

Plan Before Launching Mentorship Programs:

- Set clear expectations for mentors and mentees
- Define time commitments and desired outcomes
- Implement mentorship programs to connect veteran employees with experienced mentors for professional guidance and transition support

Seek Different Types of Mentors:

- Professional mentors to provide career guidance and support
- Personal mentors to help veterans transition to civilian life
- Communicate with leaders about their direct reports/employees participating in the mentor programs

Ensure Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are Inclusive:

- Include spouses, community members, and retirees in the planning stages.
- Encourage participation in Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and organize activities to foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie.
- Encourage LinkedIn networking to capitalize on veterans' desire to help one another.

Appoint Veteran Employee Sponsors

In addition, establish an internal advocate community of veteran champions who can share their stories, showcase their strengths, and serve as resources for new veteran hires. This can help break down barriers and promote understanding between veteran and non-veteran employees. Some key community and advocacy considerations include:

- Establish an internal advocate community of veteran champions who can share their stories and serve as resources for new hires.
- Clarify the important role of veteran employee sponsors to:
 - Conduct 1:1 meetings with new veteran hires.
 - Welcome veterans to the organization and create a safe, supportive environment.
 - Assist with acclimation to the company culture and practices.



Resources

- American Corporate Partners: <https://www.acp-usa.org/>
- Spark Change Lab: <https://www.sparkchangelab.com/>
- Team Red, White & Blue: <https://www.teamrwb.org/>
- Student Veterans of America: <https://studentveterans.org/>
- Team Rubicon: <https://teamrubiconusa.org/>
- The Mission Continues: <https://missioncontinues.org/>
- Wounded Warrior Project: <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>

PARTNERSHIPS

Leveraging External Resources and Expertise

Collaborating for Comprehensive Veteran Support

Partnerships with external organizations provide access to specialized resources, expertise, and networks that can significantly enhance a company's ability to support veteran employees. These collaborations can fill internal program gaps, offer veterans additional opportunities, and help companies stay informed about best practices in veteran employment and support.

Some important strategies to consider:

Team Up with Service-Oriented Organizations and Develop Joint Programs

- Identify organizations that provide service opportunities for veterans
- Consider partnerships with disaster relief organizations or community service groups
- Create structured volunteer programs that allow veterans to continue serving their communities

Leverage Industry Association Partnerships:

- Research associations in your company's field that have veteran initiatives
- Look for associations that offer certifications or training programs for veterans

Partner with Local Colleges and Universities and Establish Educational Partnerships:

- Identify local institutions with strong veteran support programs
- Develop joint programs that combine work experience with academic credits

Support Certification and Qualification Programs:

- Collaborate on creating industry-specific certification programs for veterans
- Offer tuition assistance or sponsorship for veterans pursuing relevant qualifications

Utilize the SkillBridge Program:

- Research the Department of Defense SkillBridge initiative and its requirements
- Identify how your company can benefit from participating
- Design internship or training opportunities for transitioning service members
- Develop a clear pathway from SkillBridge participation to potential full-time employment

Collaborate with Government and Veteran Services Resources:

- Establish a relationship with your local County Service Officer and utilize their expertise in veteran benefits and support services
- Explore programs offered by the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)
- Participate in DOL-sponsored job fairs and training initiatives and leverage DOL resources to provide comprehensive assistance to veterans entering the civilian workforce

Engage with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- Partner with NGOs to collaborate on best practices, discuss challenges, and share successful strategies
- Participate in working groups or roundtables focused on veteran employment issues
- Use their expertise to enhance your organization's ability to attract and retain a diverse veteran workforce

Establish Connections with Military Bases:

- Build relationships with local military installations
- Reach out to Transition Assistance Program (TAP) offices on nearby bases
- Offer to participate in pre-separation briefings or career fairs on base

Create Pipeline Programs:

- Develop internship or apprenticeship programs for service members nearing separation
- Work with base leadership to identify and prepare potential candidates for civilian roles



Resources

- Department of Defense SkillBridge: <https://skillbridge.osd.mil/>
- Department of Labor VETS: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>
- Spark Change Lab: <https://www.sparkchangelab.com/>
- Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/>
- USO Pathfinder Transition Program: <https://www.uso.org/programs/uso-pathfinder-transition-program>
- Helmets to Hardhats: <https://helmetstohardhats.org/>
- Corporate America Supports You (CASY): <https://casy.us/>

PEOPLE PRACTICES

Inclusive Hiring, Onboarding, and Career Development

Implementing inclusive people practices ensures that veterans are effectively recruited, smoothly onboarded, and supported throughout their careers. These practices help veterans translate their military experience into civilian roles, adapt to corporate culture, and continue their professional growth. By focusing on veteran-specific needs in HR processes, companies can improve retention, job satisfaction, and the overall success of their veteran employees.

Get Your HR Teams and Managers Ready

Train HR personnel, recruiters, and hiring managers to understand military skill sets, translate veterans' experiences to civilian roles, and recognize the value of their unique perspectives and leadership abilities. Develop targeted recruiting strategies and partnerships with veteran service organizations, military bases, and local colleges to expand the pipeline of veteran talent.

Some Important Strategies to Consider:

Prepare HR Teams and Hiring Managers:

- Conduct comprehensive training
- Develop modules on military culture, rank structure, and common roles
- Provide guidance on translating military skills and experiences to civilian job requirements

- Develop a military skills translator tool for job descriptions
- Create a guide for interviewers to assess veteran candidates effectively
- Train HR personnel and recruiters to understand and value military experience
- Help hiring managers recognize the unique perspectives and leadership abilities of veterans

Develop Targeted Recruiting Strategies:

- Collaborate with NGOs to discuss challenges, share best practices, and gain insights on attracting diverse veteran talent
- Connect with Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) at military bases
- Collaborate with veteran service organizations for recruitment events
- Tailor job postings and recruitment materials:
- Use military-friendly language in job descriptions
- Highlight veteran success stories and support programs in recruitment materials
- Attend both in-person and virtual veteran career fairs
- Train recruiters on effectively engaging with veteran candidates at these events
- Develop partnerships with military bases, veteran service organizations, and local colleges
- Create targeted outreach programs to attract diverse veteran talent
- Create a military service leave and return program that maintains salary and benefits for individuals and families

Retool Onboarding and Tailor Supportive Workplace Policies and Practices

Offer structured onboarding and transition support programs that help veterans acclimate to the civilian workplace, understand company culture and benefits, and connect with peer mentors. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities, including leadership training, career pathing, and coaching, to support veterans' long-term growth and success within the organization.

Ensure that benefits, policies, and workplace practices are inclusive and supportive of the unique needs of veterans and military spouses. This includes being willing to overlook gaps in resumes for military spouses and, understanding the challenges they face due to frequent relocations and other military-related factors.

Some key workplace, people, and policy strategies include:

Implement Structured Onboarding Programs:

- Design a veteran-specific onboarding track
- Create modules that address common challenges in the military-to-civilian transition
- Include information on translating military benefits to civilian equivalents
- Assign veteran buddies or mentors
- Pair new veteran hires with more experienced veteran employees
- Offer culture and expectations workshops

- Develop sessions on corporate culture, communication styles, and workplace norms
- Include guidance on translating military experiences into corporate contexts
- Help veterans acclimate to the civilian workplace and understand company culture
- Offer resources to support the broader transition to civilian life

Provide Ongoing Professional Development:

- Create veteran-focused leadership programs
- Design leadership training that builds on military leadership experiences
- Offer opportunities for veterans to mentor non-veteran employees
- Work with veterans to create individualized career development plans and develop a career pathing approach for veterans
- Provide access to both internal and external coaches familiar with veteran transitions
- Provide leadership training and career coaching to support veterans' long-term success.

Tailor Supportive Workplace Benefits, Policies and Programs:

- Ensure health benefits address common veteran health concerns
- Consider offering military leave policies that exceed legal requirements
- Implement military spouse-friendly policies
- Develop policies to support employees in the National Guard or Reserves

Foster an Inclusive Work Environment:

- Provide company-wide military culture awareness training
- Educate all employees on military experiences and challenges
- Offer guidance on how to be supportive colleagues to veteran employees
- Celebrate military service - Recognize Veterans Day and other military observances
- Create opportunities for veterans to share their experiences if they choose

Implement Veteran-Specific Performance Management:

- Develop guidelines for evaluating veteran employees:
- Train managers on how to provide effective feedback to veteran employees
- Create performance metrics that recognize and value military-honed skills
- Take advantage of government training programs and soft skill development opportunities to save on training costs and build a well-trained veteran workforce

Establish a Veteran Employee Resource Center:

- Create a dedicated space (physical or virtual) for veteran resources and support
- Staff the center with HR professionals trained in veteran employment issues
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities, including leadership training, career pathing, and coaching



Showcase Veteran Success Stories:

- Highlight veterans thriving within the organization through testimonials and storytelling
- Feature these individuals as spokespeople to inspire other veterans considering joining the organization and to educate internal hiring managers
- Compile and share these success stories to attract more veteran talent

Resources

- Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP): <https://msepjobs.militaryonesource.mil/>
- Spark Change Lab: <https://www.sparkchangelab.com/>
- Hire Heroes USA: <https://www.hireheroesusa.org/>
- Recruit Military: <https://recruitmilitary.com/>
- Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO): <https://www.va.gov/VESO/>
- FourBlock: <https://fourblock.org/>
- Warriors to Work Program: <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/warriors-to-work>

Additional General Resources

- Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS): <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>
- National Resource Directory: <https://nrd.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Resources: <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/>
- LinkedIn for Veterans: <https://socialimpact.linkedin.com/programs/veterans>
- Code of Support Foundation: <https://www.codeofsupport.org/>