

Veterans in the Workplace: Myths and Realities

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This paper will endeavor to cover some of the issues regarding veterans in the workplace...the myths and realities of veterans in both today's working environment, and even more important, in the jobs of the future. It is by no means an exhaustive list of matters surrounding jobs and veteran employment, but will give the reader a broad overview of veteran employment matters, both as they currently exist, and as they are anticipated to exist in the decades to come.

MYTH No. 1—The Veteran as Victim

As I noted in an article that I wrote for *Forbes* in 2014⁽¹⁾, in the national media—on TV, radio, online and on the printed page—are heartrending tales of broken young veterans returning from the recent wars, and their heroic caregivers. Young people, burdened by all types of injuries, seen and unseen--blown off limbs, PTSD, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse, and mental illness dominate the national discussion regarding those who most recently have served. The terrible shootings at Ft. Hood and the Washington Navy Yard some years ago only reinforced how damaged these veterans must be.

And, surely, without a doubt, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have taken a terrible toll on the 1% of our citizenry who have stepped forward to defend the other 99% of our national population. According to the Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs at Brown University⁽²⁾, as of January, 2015—the most recent data available--more than 2.7 million young men and women have volunteered to serve and been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan—and, more than 6,809 have been killed and over 52,010 have been physically wounded.

As a soldier, who fought in the Vietnam War, I know all too well the devastating effects that war can have on the body, mind, and most importantly, the soul.

But, I think this unrelenting media attention on the pathology of the veteran is having a long term negative affect on those young veterans who served in these conflicts, and who were largely unscathed by these wars, and who just want to return to their communities and get a job.

In fact, Adam Linehan, in a well researched article, entitled, “The Suicide Contagion: How the Effort to Combat Veterans' Suicide May be Making It Worse”⁽³⁾, that appeared in the September 6, 2017 edition of *Task & Purpose*, argues that all of the overwhelming attention on veteran suicides in the media is actually making the issue of suicide among veterans *worse*, due

to the “contagion effect” of veterans copying what they read or hear about veteran suicide in the 24/7 media cycle that we find ourselves in today.

In fact, while it is perceived that veterans are “damaged goods,” exactly the opposite is true. For instance, a recent Gallup-Healthways-Well-Being Index survey finds that the active-duty and veteran populations are *more* emotionally resilient than their civilian counterparts. It concludes that, “Although many veterans face very serious and unique mental health challenges that does not seem to be the experience of most of the veteran community, which in fact fares better than working civilians in many aspects of emotional well-being.”

Indeed, as I explain in greater detail later on, it is widely acknowledged by companies that actually employ veterans that these former military personnel bring many, many valuable skills to the workplace—discipline, a commitment to accomplishing the mission, ability to work with and lead a team, and most importantly in this rapidly changing business environment, the flexibility and adaptability to pivot from established business plans that aren't working to those that do on a moment's notice.

But, you'd never know that from the majority of the newscasts about veterans—or unemployment reports that show the unemployment rate for post 9/11 veterans at 6.6% versus 4.8% for their nonveteran peers (8). You would think that every veteran who has served in these wars was mentally unbalanced in some way. Some are—but, the vast majority aren't. Estimates of veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) range from 11-20%, compared to 7-8% of the general population, according to the VA's National Center for PTSD (9).

And, that's the problem—one that needs an aggressive and comprehensive push to change public, and more important, employer perception of the post 9/11 workforce. The need for such a public service marketing campaign is glaring.

Yes, some veteran employment challenges can be explained by a mismatch of skills sought by employers and veterans who lack those skills, or have difficulty articulating the skills that they gained in the military in a way that potential civilians can understand.

But, in a 2016 Veterans Well-Being Survey performed by Edelman Intelligence (10), a highly respected global market research firm, in conjunction with Give an Hour, a non-profit that provides counseling to the active duty military and veterans, and the George W. Bush Institute, 92% of employers believe that mental health programs are necessary to support veterans in their communities—but, only 16% believe that veterans have good access to mental health support. Even more significantly, only 22% of civilians and 26% of employers believe that veterans are “strategic assets”—and, only 20% of civilians and 32% of employers believe that it is important to view veterans in that way.

Unfortunately, veterans agree with this perspective. Of the veterans surveyed in this analysis, only 34% believe that veterans are viewed as strategic assets, with only 37% of veterans/military personnel believing that it is important to see themselves in that way.

These perceptions are compounded by another problem. In the most recent Monster Worldwide, Inc. Veteran Talent Index, published in November, 2016, ⁽¹¹⁾ 62% of the veterans surveyed indicated that they believe that hiring managers and recruiters don't understand the skills and experience that veterans bring to the workplace.

MYTH No. 2—The Veteran as Hero

Most veterans who come home from war are not heroes, as civilians commonly think of the term. These soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines served as aircraft mechanics, truck drivers, logistic specialists, communication operators, radar technicians, and the like.

These returning service men and women may have never seen combat.

In a very insightful article entitled, “If You Call All Veterans Heroes, You're Getting It Wrong”, published in the August 5, 2014 edition of *Task & Purpose*, an online publication for the active duty military, veterans, and their families ⁽¹²⁾, author Carl Forsling, a Marine pilot, relates a time when he was at a sporting event—and, the announcer asked that all of our military “heroes” to please stand.

Forsling states, “Many of the people standing for applause put their lives on the line about as much as a 7-11 clerk in a marginal neighborhood. Others have never even deployed. For most service members, their lives were on the line in only a theoretical sense. They had gourmet coffees at the Green Bean coffee shops on major forward operating bases in Iraq or Afghanistan, bitching about how the wifi in their quarters was too slow.”

Forsling goes on to opine, “Just being exposed to some degree of sacrifice doesn't make one a hero. Going above and beyond the call of duty does.”

Certainly, Medal of Honor recipients come to mind as fulfilling the latter category to be legitimately called heroes.

There is even some research that suggests that viewing all veterans as “heroes” might even hinder their ability to get a job and integrate back into their communities upon their return from service.

The results of the previously mentioned Edelman Intelligence Survey, as reported by *USA Today* in a July 7, 2016 article ⁽¹³⁾, found that, although the vast majority of Americans and employers see veterans as “heroes”, they don't see them as particular assets in their communities, as I noted previously. Edelman concludes that this “heroes viewpoint” can actually keep veterans from the jobs that they want when they muster out of the service.

Edelman goes on to conclude in this article that this stereotyping of veterans as “heroes” may be detrimental to the veteran population in another way. Civilians who view veterans as “heroes” might make it difficult for community members to connect with veterans and see

them as potential colleagues.

Brian Duffy, the past national commander and current adjutant general of the 1.7 million member Veterans of Foreign Wars emphasizes this point. Duffy states, “We understand that in times of war, yes, there are heroes. But just because you went to war, doesn't mean that you came back as a hero and by calling everyone a hero, it devalues the term.”

And, Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, the founder and president of Give an Hour, reinforces this idea in the same article. Van Dahlen says, “The issue is about long-term job fit, advancement, retention. Is the veteran given the same look as others?” Van Dahlen goes on to say about many, but not all, returning service people, “These folks come home from war. They're seen and done things that would make many of us feel uneasy, uncomfortable, intimidated. And, by seeing them this way, as heroes, it does keep us distant from them.”

And it is the civil-military divide that can make it difficult for veterans to find stable, long-term and meaningful work when they depart the service.

In a 2017 report by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) entitled, *Lost in Translation, The Civil-Military Divide and Veteran Employment* ⁽¹⁴⁾, the authors state, “However, this research (referring to previous research performed by CNAS) also uncovered a deeper issue: that the civil-military divide itself may be a significant root cause of many transition challenges, to the extent that it causes a lack of knowledge, familiarity, and interaction between these communities, resulting in friction when veterans first engage within the employment market and with employers.”

THE REALITIES

So, what are the realities about veterans in the workforce? Why should companies hire veterans? And, what makes veterans good employees—and, even more important, potentially excellent company leaders?

I think that there are several reasons, as noted in an article that I wrote on this subject ⁽¹⁵⁾:

- **Focus On Accomplishing The Mission**—The military is extremely mission focused. The whole idea in the Armed Forces is to seize the objective—to capture or kill the enemy--while, at the same time, ensuring the integrity and welfare of your troops. You can't get distracted by small things along the way. You need a vision—yes, the “vision thing”--of what your battle plan is going to accomplish, and then execute that plan flawlessly.
- **A Commitment To Hard Work**—Anyone who has served in the Armed Forces knows what I mean. The days are long. The work is hard—very hard. Combat, and the preparation for combat, doesn't take a holiday. There are no week-ends. You don't go home at 5 PM. The Army once had a slogan, “We do more by 9 AM than most people do all day.” That is absolutely true.

Interestingly, Dan Senor and Saul Singer, in their book, “Start-Up Nation,” say one of the principal reasons Israel is one of the most successful entrepreneurial nations on earth on a per capita basis is the country's compulsory military service, which creates an environment for hard work and a common commitment to accomplish the mission.

- **Ability To Lead and Function As A Team**—The whole Armed Forces are built on the “buddy system”. Nobody accomplishes the mission alone. If you're going to be successful in the military, you need to work with all types and kinds of people, from all races, creeds, genders, backgrounds and persuasions, and weld all of these disparate interests into a fighting force that's going to defeat the enemy. Service in the military makes you understand the concept of “teamwork” perfectly. And, as an officer, or non-commissioned officer, you learn how to lead a team to accomplish the mission. If you can't do this—if you can't forge your troops into an effective fighting force—you're mustered out of the service pretty quickly. There's no margin for error here. There's no second chances. This is serious business. This isn't just about “corporate profits”. Lives are at stake.
- **Ability To Pivot On A Moment's Notice From Plans That Aren't Working To Plans That Do**—When most people think about military service, they think that it's all just about the rigidity of following orders. Well. That's true—in part. Of course, you need to follow orders. But, what most people never see is that the military teaches you to think and act flexibly, so that if your battle plan isn't working, you pivot immediately to a plan that does. You have to do that, if your plan isn't working---you have to be quick and think on your feet—or, you risk defeat and death at the hands of the enemy. Flexibility and immediate action are key to survival.

Finally, the best leadership training in the world is the training that is given to commissioned officers, and senior non-commissioned officers, in the Armed Forces of the United States. As young Army officers, we were taught to take care of our troops first, if you want them to follow you. An officer has to convince the people under his or her command that they have their best interests in mind, while they are accomplishing the mission. An officer doesn't eat until all of his or her troops have eaten. An officer is the last to sleep, and walks the perimeter of the camp to ensure that their troops are safe and sound. An officer doesn't change into a dry pair of socks, until he or she is satisfied that their troops are dry and warm. Otherwise, the troops just aren't going to follow you to places where they wouldn't go by themselves.

And, that's the best definition of leadership that I have ever encountered. *A leader is someone who people will follow to a place where they wouldn't go by themselves.* The United States Army has more than 200 years of experience in training leaders. And, some of us got to test that training on the battlefields of Vietnam—and, carry those lessons with us into our business careers.

These traits that are common to all who have served in the military, embodied in the words, “Duty, Honor, Country” – the motto of the Armed Forces of the United States that can profoundly influence and inspire a business or entrepreneurial career.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

So, how do we change the narrative?

How do we move the discussion from “veterans are damaged goods” or “veterans are heroes” to “veterans have the leadership and work skills that employers should value and make use of in today's rapidly changing business environment?” How do we ensure that the roughly 80%, or more, of veterans who have returned from the recent wars, who are not impaired in any way—and, the millions more who will follow them in the years to come—will be snapped up by employers as valuable members of their organizations?

No question it is up to the individual veteran--no matter what their circumstances--to demonstrate to employers and community alike the tremendous leadership and work skills that they learned during their term of service.

But, that's too narrow. That type of thinking will never move the needle on the national discussion to where it needs to go-- a national dialogue on the valuable skills that veterans bring to the workplace, and why employers should capitalize on these skills.

As I noted in the *Forbes* article that I wrote in 2014 on this subject ⁽¹⁶⁾, what's needed is a national media campaign that showcases successful veterans in the workplace, and the valuable skills that they learned in the military and bring to the job.

Such a campaign could be patterned after the Travel Industry Recovery Coalition's highly successful campaign to restore travelers' confidence in safe and secure travel after the devastating 9/11 attacks, or BP's successful campaign to bring people back to the Gulf after the oil spill. Starbucks, with their recent “Starbucks Commitment to Veterans” program (https://1912pike.com/today-americans-know-fewer-veterans-than-any-other-generation/?utm_source=starbuckscom&utm_medium=mobile&utm_campaign=summer2) comes close to serving as a national model.

The campaign could be spearheaded by national media companies, perhaps with an organization like the Walt Disney Company, which already has a substantial commitment to veterans, taking the lead. Additional support could be provided by companies that demonstrate a commitment to veterans, such as JP Morgan Chase, Allstate, Deloitte, KKR, Comcast NBC Universal, and Starbucks, as previously noted, to name but a few. And, companies led by highly successful veterans like Johnson & Johnson, Federal Express, Verizon, and even Procter & Gamble, which was recently headed by Robert McDonald, the former VA Secretary, could pitch in, as well.

These companies—and companies like them—could lead and fund a major national media campaign to substantially change the narrative of how our younger veterans are viewed by employers. They have the fire power to entirely re-cast, in a positive way, the national discussion regarding veteran employment.

General Martin E. Dempsey, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was recently quoted as saying, “There are those (veterans) that are very much in need of help, but the vast majority—are less in need of a handout than simply a handshake, an opportunity.”

And, a well-led and well-funded national media campaign that showcases successful veterans in the workplace could go a long way in giving those returning veterans who need it that opportunity, which they so richly deserve.

VETERAN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION—WHAT CAN COMPANIES DO?

There is a lot that companies can do to improve their recruitment of veterans, and, just as important, keep them on the job. Here are some tasks that companies can do to improve veteran hiring and retention, taken from the Monster Veteran Talent Index ⁽¹⁷⁾, the CNAS report on Military Veterans and Society ⁽¹⁸⁾, and other sources ⁽¹⁹⁾:

- Companies need to find a way to advertise or broadcast their desire to hire veterans.
- If you're going to recruit at a job fare, don't just send someone to collect resumes from veterans, if you don't have jobs that are ready to be filled. To that point, veterans want meaningful work to do, not “make work” jobs. You won't retain them otherwise.
- Don't recruit veterans because it's a good PR move, and makes your company “look good”. Veterans can sense a company that does that a mile away. Hire veterans because of the valuable skills that they can bring to your company, hopefully resulting in increased profitability.
- Reach out to Veteran Service Organizations and military non-profit groups to assist your company with your veteran hiring program.
- Build military cultural competency into your company, so that you understand the basics of the military, and how military skills can add value to your products or services. There are a number of consulting firms and online training programs available to assist you with that effort. The PsychArmor Institute (<https://psycharmor.org>) is one such organization to assist your company with an understanding of military culture and customs.
- Make certain that your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if your company has one, includes any assistance that veterans might need.
- Create veteran affinity groups at your company, comprised not only of veterans, but also of any of your employees who are currently military reservists, spouses of veterans, and other employees who are simply interested in veteran issues. These affinity groups can serve as a valuable community for veterans, and those interested in them, to exchange views on what works, or doesn't work, regarding veterans employed at your company.
- And, for veterans currently working at companies--Mentor newly hired veterans to ensure their success at your company. Make the connections for the newly hired vet that are necessary to succeed in any corporate environment.
- Veterans at the company also can educate non-veterans coworkers on the valuable organization and leadership skills that veterans bring to the workplace.
- Veterans already employed at a company can use the organizational skills that they

learned in the military to build professional networks that include veterans, active duty service members and reservists, and civilians to help bridge the military-civilian cultural divide that is so prevalent in our society today, and which would reflect great credit on the companies that employ them.

- And, finally, veterans employed by a company can use their exceptional skills and leadership talents—and, sense of mission and purpose—to contribute to non-profit organizations in the community, most of which are in dire need of the exceptional qualities that veterans can bring to any organization. This would, likewise, greatly benefit the companies that employ them.

VETERANS AS ENTREPRENEURS

As I noted in a recent article, the nation has finally realized that veterans make great entrepreneurs. Daily press reports of veterans starting new businesses are common throughout the media landscape, with profiles of hometown vets starting coffee shops, tech support companies, landscaping services, security firms, and a whole host of businesses too numerous to mention.

This should not be a great surprise. According to the SBA report entitled, *Veteran-Owned Businesses and Their Owners* (20), there are nearly 2.5 million veteran-owned businesses in the U.S., representing 9.1% of all businesses nationwide. These small business enterprises owned by veterans employed 5.03 million people, had an annual payroll of \$195 billion, and receipts of \$1.14 trillion.

And, a 2011 study from the SBA Office of Advocacy reported that veterans are 45 percent more likely to start their own businesses than people who have never served in the military (21).

But, even though veterans have received excellent training in the military in the skills necessary to be successful entrepreneurs, not enough younger veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are choosing to start their own businesses. And, we don't know exactly why, even though there are less veterans now in the working population than in previous years.

After World War II, nearly one-half of all returning veterans started their own businesses—but, by 1996, according to the Bunker Labs Veteran Entrepreneur Fact Sheet (22)—that rate had dropped to 12.3%, steadily declining to 5.6% in 2014. Even more important, just under 3% of all current veteran-owned businesses are started by veterans under 35 years of age. The rest are started by older vets.

This makes some sense. Personnel mustering out of the Armed Forces after 20 years or so have a pension that gives them a financial cushion to take the risk of starting a new business at a relatively young age.

And, older vets retiring from a traditional job at around 65 years of age, and who are looking for something else to do, would most likely have their house paid off and their kids out of college, giving them the financial means to start a new business without risking their family's

financial future.

But, it is the lack of younger veterans who are choosing entrepreneurship as a viable career path that is the critical issue in veteran entrepreneurship today.

Fortunately, over the past several years, there has been a burgeoning industry that has sprung up to help veterans who want to start their own businesses. Veteran led incubators and accelerators, as well as university and community college programs, government services, online resources, and community based organizations have all answered the call to help aspiring veteran entrepreneurs realize their dream of owning and operating their own businesses.

While it is not possible to list all of the resources available to help veterans--and, particularly, younger veterans--who want to start businesses, a small sample of these programs in each of the categories mentioned is provided below ⁽²³⁾:

- Veteran Led Incubators—Bunker Labs (<https://bunkerlabs.org>) is probably the best known and most successful veteran led incubator in the country. While headquartered in Chicago, it has expanded to fifteen cities around the nation. Its Chicago location is embedded in the 1871 incubator facility, which gives veterans the crucial opportunity to interact with non-veterans who are creating new businesses. The “Bunker in a Box” program (<http://bunkerinabox.org>) enables veterans who are not near one of its urban locations to get some of the basic tools necessary to start a new business.
- Veteran Led Accelerators—Vet-Tech (<http://vet-tech.us>) is the nation's leading accelerator for veteran-owned businesses. Located at Silicon Valley's Plug and Play Tech Center in Sunnyvale, CA, it has an extensive network of financial, government, and management resources to bring a veteran-owned business to its next level of success.
- University Programs—Syracuse University's Entrepreneurial Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (<http://ebv.vets.syr.edu>) is one of the most extensive programs in higher education for veteran entrepreneurship. This program is offered at ten other colleges and universities around the nation.
- Community Colleges—Community colleges around the nation offer veteran entrepreneurship courses and programs, typically through their small business development centers. Wake Tech Community College in North Carolina offers a Veterans Entrepreneurship Advantage Course (<https://www.waketech.edu/programs-courses/non-credit/build-business/entrepreneurship-initiatives/center-for-entrepreneurship?course=SEF-3001V1>). And, the Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program (<https://www.tampatraining.com/veteransflorida/>) at Hillsborough Community College in Tampa, Florida are representative of these types of programs.
- Government Services—The SBA's Boots to Business program (<http://boots2business.org>) is an example of the type of program offered by government to transitioning service members to give them the basics in starting a new business.
- Online Resources—VeToCEO (<http://www.vettoceo.org>) is a free online training program that assists veterans in leveraging their skills to start or buy a business and run it successfully. The American Legion Entrepreneur Video Series

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b41aCjXB-MI>) is another no-cost source to give aspiring veteran entrepreneurs at least a basic introduction to starting and running a business.

- Community Based Organizations—SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, is an example of a community based organization that is supporting veteran entrepreneurs with their Veteran Fast Launch Initiative (<https://www.score.org/content/veteran-fast-launch-initiative>).

Veterans interested in starting a business should research what resources are available to them in their local communities, and then pick a program that fits the type of business they are interested in creating.

It also is interesting to note that it isn't just veterans who make great entrepreneurs, but spouses of active duty service members and veterans, as well.

R. Riveter –(<https://www.riveter.com>), ⁽²⁴⁾ which makes handmade handbags, was started by two women who were military spouses, and needed to do something where they could make money while they traveled around from duty station to duty station with their husbands. As the two founders state on their web site, “...the unemployment rate among military spouses is 42% despite the fact that 85% want or need to work.” Their handbags, which are crafted by a network of military spouses, known as riveters, scattered across the country, was a solution to that problem.

This highly successful company, whose name is a play on “Rosie the Riveter” of World War II fame, appeared on Shark Tank in 2016, and received an initial investment from Mark Cuban. R. Riveter has recently landed on Inc.'s 500 list.

CODING BOOT CAMPS FOR VETERANS

There is one area of both employment and entrepreneurship that is particularly well suited to veterans, and that is computer coding; and, coding boot camps have sprung up to train veterans in this discipline, as noted in an article that I wrote on this subject ⁽²⁵⁾.

Coding bootcamps are programs that teach programming skills. Typically, these bootcamps are short (6 weeks to 24 weeks), often intense (sometimes requiring 90 hours/week), and usually designed to teach beginners enough so that they can become professional junior software developers.

And, the demand for their graduates is robust—and growing! According to Dave Molina, a former U.S. Army Captain, and the founder and executive director of Operation Code (<https://operationcode.org>), a non-profit online, open source coding program for active duty military, veterans, and their families, “There are over 200,000 computing jobs open annually in the U.S., with 30,000 of those jobs filled by computer science graduates; however, that number is expected to rise to 1.2 million by 2020. Meanwhile, we have 250,000 U.S. military personnel that exit the service annually, many of whom possess the discipline and aptitude to fill those

jobs, if they had some training in computer coding skills.”

These are generally good paying jobs. Rod Levy, the founder and executive director of Code Platoon (<http://www.codeplatoon.org/>), a non-profit coding camp in Chicago for veterans, states that, “starting salaries for graduates coming right out of the bootcamp are about \$65,000, rising to about \$100,000 after five years of experience. Placement rates for graduates are high.”

So, why are coding bootcamps a good option for veterans?

Levy, of Code Platoon, lists several reasons. “As we know, veterans often struggle 'translating' their military experience to a civilian audience. Coding bootcamps solve this problem by giving veterans job-ready skills that are well understood in the job marketplace”, he says.

“Even more important”, Levy adds, “successful software developers typically need to work well in teams, demonstrate grit and resilience, and have to be able to systematically problem-solve. These characteristics are often found in veterans.”

Molina, from Operation Code, supports this view. He says, “Military veterans have the right set of skills to become programmers. Technical expertise, emotional resilience, psychological persistence, and teamwork—these are the qualities of the best of the U.S. Army, and they are the qualities of the best programmers.”

There are coding bootcamps to serve about every veteran's needs. These various bootcamps are distinguished by the following characteristics:

- **Level of intensity.** "Immersive" is around 60 - 80 hours a week; “full-time” can be 30 to 70 hours a week; “part-time” is typically 10 to 30 hours week.
- **In-person or remote.** In-person means you spend the majority of the training on-site, with instructors and fellow students on premises. Remote means you do the training on your computer at home regardless of location.
- **Technology stack.** Most coding bootcamps teach web development or mobile development. Web development means you learn to write applications for the web—mobile is for phones. The most popular technology stacks being taught are Ruby on Rails, Python/Django, Full Stack Javascript, C#/.Net and Java.
- **Internships/Job Placement.** This one is obvious. Coding bootcamps that offer internships and/or have high job placement rates should be given serious consideration.
- **Population focus.** A few coding bootcamps serve specific populations and look to tailor their programs to those populations, as well as creating a “safe” space where members of those populations may feel more comfortable among themselves. There are coding bootcamps just for women, minorities and veterans, to name a few. Obviously, veterans should choose a bootcamp that caters to their specific needs, when possible.

Given all of these various aspects of code camps, what should a veteran look for in choosing a coding bootcamp? At a minimum, veterans should consider the following items when selecting a bootcamp:

- Different bootcamps are meant to serve different interests. Remote online bootcamps, like Operation Code, are much more convenient than in-person bootcamps, such as Code Platoon. The trade-off for that convenience is that it may be very hard to stay motivated all the way through the difficult path of learning to code. In-person bootcamps, on the other hand, offer the immediate feedback and support that can be missing in remote programs, although they may not be located near where the veteran lives or works. Consequently, they may be much more expensive to attend.

A representative list of code schools and scholarship information can be found on the Operation Code web site at the following link:

https://www.operationcode.org/code_schools

- If your goal is to learn skills for a new career in programming, look for a program that will put you through at least roughly 1,000 hours of coding/instruction, at an absolute minimum. Whether this is in an immersive 12 week program at 80 hours a week, or a year long program at 20 hours a week is up to you; but, a 1,000 hours of focused, directed learning in programming is the bare minimum needed to become a competent programmer.
- The choice of technology stack is often a source of much discussion, with tradeoffs discussed around the number of jobs versus the learning curve needed for various languages. In the end, there are many jobs in each of the languages/stacks that are being taught. So, unless you are looking to go to work for a specific company that uses a specific stack, this component of the decision process is not that important.

Cost is an important consideration that the veteran needs to keep in mind in selecting the right code camp to meet their needs. Most coding schools offer scholarships to veterans to help to defray the costs. At Code Platoon, for instance, the tuition is \$13,000 for the full program. However, all veterans accepted into the program receive a scholarship of \$10,500, bringing the total cost of the program to the veteran to \$2,500. Travel expenses to and from Chicago, and living expenses while attending the program in Chicago, are extra.

There is no charge for Operation Code programs for veterans, active duty, reserve and National Guard troops and their spouses. Information on coding bootcamp and conference scholarships can be found on the Operation Code website.

What about using the New GI Bill to attend one of these coding camps?

Thirteen code schools across the nation now accept the New GI Bill. Code Platoon, however, hopes to be eligible for GI Bill funding in early 2018. Each state has its own authorizing agency that approves programs for participation in the New GI Bill, with two years of school operating experience generally required.

Significantly, the Forever GI Bill just passed Congress and was signed by the President. Page 21/48 of the Forever GI Bill relates to coding boot camps as an avenue for veterans to get into

tech. This part of the law specifically will allocate \$5 million per year for 5 years to coding boot camps in the form of grants to provide coding education to veterans. More information on this subject can be found on the Operation Code website at https://operationcode.org/code_schools.

Internships, mentoring partners and job placement are all important considerations for the veteran in selecting a coding camp. Code Platoon, for instance, pairs its students with two industry partners, who work with the student during the entire program.

Operation Code offers its students a Software Mentor Protege Program, where its students are paired online, in a peer-to-peer learning environment, with professional software developers for life-long learning and understanding.

And, most coding schools help their graduates with job placement assistance, upon completion of their programs.

It is obvious that veterans need to consider a lot of things before applying to a coding camp.

The different types of programs, whether on-site, or online, need to be determined. The reputation of the coding camp, the success of its graduates, costs, potential use of the New GI Bill, scholarships, internships, mentoring and job placement assistance all need to be carefully researched.

But, one thing is perfectly clear about obtaining the skills necessary to be a successful computer programmer. It offers the opportunity to have a lasting career in a growing, well-compensated field that's going to change the world.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

Given all of the resources that are currently available to veterans interested in starting businesses, what does the future of veteran entrepreneurship look like?

It looks pretty robust.

There are only two cautions that need to be mentioned about support for entrepreneurship initiatives for veterans, in my opinion.

The first is that many of these veteran entrepreneur support programs are relatively new—within the last couple of years, or so. The proof of their efficacy—of their value and worth—will be when they produce long-term, sustainable and profitable veteran-owned businesses---and, by long-term, I mean businesses that are in existence for at least five years, at a minimum. Some of these support programs are so new that not enough time has passed where this can be determined.

The second “caution”, if you will, would actually be a good problem. And, that is, while there is no evidence that this is presently occurring, there could come a time in the future when there are actually more veteran entrepreneur support programs than there are veterans to fill them. This will become evident when these programs begin to admit non-veterans, in order to maintain their viability.

But, for now, it's all “blue skies and clear sailing” for veterans who want to start businesses and the programs that support them.

So, for veterans—and, especially younger veterans, thinking about entrepreneurship as a viable career path, there's a lot of help out there—go get 'em!

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