

READY TO SERVE: BUSINESSES FIND VETS ARE DEDICATED, CAPABLE



By: Joyce M. Rosenberg - May 24, 2017

NEW YORK (AP) — Clinton Smith hires veterans because he knows military service has helped them become dedicated and hard-working staffers.

"When you say, 'I need you to do this right now,' they get it done and get it done well," says Smith, a former Marine who is CEO of Government & Civil Employee Services, a financial planning company in the western Pennsylvania borough of Indiana.

Smith also finds that veterans are ideal for his company, whose clients are mostly federal workers; anyone who's been in the service has spent years understanding and navigating government-supplied benefits.

"The military experience in these individuals truly comes back in positive ways throughout the rest of their adult lives," says Smith, who with his partner Galen Bargerstock has six employees, three of them veterans.

Many small businesses make it a point to hire veterans. Often the owners have military experience themselves, and believe that years in the service make people dependable and industrious workers. Some appreciate service members for the sacrifices they make. And others want to help veterans who struggle with homelessness, addiction and other problems.

There are plenty of veterans looking for work. The federal government counted 453,000 unemployed veterans in 2016, with a 5.1 percent unemployment rate for veterans who were on active duty at any time since September 2001. The unemployment rate for all veterans was 4.3 percent, compared to the national rate of 4.9 percent.

Paul Huszar hires veterans because he learned firsthand that many employers don't recognize the value former service members bring to a workplace. Huszar, a West Point graduate who served as dean of the U.S. Army Engineer School, had a hard time finding a job when he retired in 2013.

"People didn't know my capabilities," Huszar says. He did find work with VetCor, a company based in Sebring, Florida, that repairs water and mold damage in homes and commercial property, and he ended up buying the business. He has 26 veterans in his company's three offices.

"We show up when requested and our technicians are fit, polite, in uniform, treat everyone with dignity and respect, and are willing to do whatever is required to complete the mission," Huszar says.

Steve Myers decided not only to hire veterans for construction, electrical contracting and computer networking jobs, but to also help them readjust to being civilians. He put together a training program, giving veterans a two-year apprenticeship. Between their benefits under the GI Bill of Rights and what Myers pays them, they take home money comparable to what they made in the service.

"We don't ask people that are typically in their mid-20s to start over at entry-level pay," says Myers, owner of True North Management Services, a Fenton, Missouri-based company that builds and manages cellphone networks.

Myers is aware that while veterans have spent years in uniform, their classmates have gone to college and graduate school and started moving ahead with their careers.

"They've truly put their lives on hold for us," says Myers, who served eight years in the Coast Guard. He describes himself as having been behind the eight ball when he left the service. By the time he finished his service and college, he was 10 years behind his contemporaries in experience and pay.

Companies cannot have a policy of hiring only veterans, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Because women historically were excluded from military service or work within the military, a smaller number of veterans are women and they therefore are at a disadvantage when it comes to hiring, the EEOC has said. A veterans-only policy could be seen as discriminating against women.

Employers report few downsides to hiring former service members. Some veterans use a military vocabulary that's laden with acronyms unfamiliar to civilians, and it can take a while for them to give up that habit. But many colleagues are happy to be working alongside team players.

"Veterans come from an organization that teaches team members to look out for each other in large ways and small, placing service above self," says Josh Broder, CEO of Tilson, a Portland, Maine-based engineering, construction and information technology company. Broder, who served with the Army Signal Corps in Afghanistan, has 240 employees, about half of them veterans. The company seeks out veterans because they work well together and are used to sometimes difficult work conditions, Broder says.

But veterans can encounter some would-be employers who assume that people join the military because they weren't smart enough to get other work, says Sherrill Curtis, a career counselor and consultant based in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

"Some people know zero about what vets can do," she says. "There are people who have come through the military with not one but two degrees."

Employers might also be reluctant to hire veterans who are members of the reserves, and thus must be on duty one weekend a month and spend two weeks each year in training. As employers discovered when troops were called up for conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, members of the reserve can be called to active duty. Employers generally must hold their jobs for them while they are serving.

There are other challenges, including the perception that veterans will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, Curtis says. She points out that many people who have never been in the service have had PTSD, and that employers usually haven't known that in advance.

Eric Basu has worked with Wounded Warrior Project to find some of the employees for his cybersecurity and information technology company, Sentek Global. Wounded Warrior Project helps veterans with service-related injuries or illnesses including PTSD.

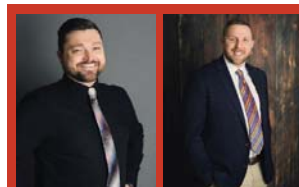
"You need to accommodate them," Basu says of wounded service members. Veterans have made up between 50 percent and 70 percent of the San Diego-based company's workforce since Basu, who served in the Navy, started it in 2001.

Brad Hamm decided to hire homeless and struggling veterans after learning that his oldest brother, a former Marine staff sergeant who served in Vietnam, had committed suicide while suffering from PTSD. Hamm, who owns an Americas Choice Auto Spa car detailing franchise in Houston, usually has two or three veterans working for him. He sends a van to pick them up and take them to jobs, and they don't keep him waiting.

"If you ask a veteran to be there at 8 a.m., he's there at 7:40," Hamm says. "You have to show him only one time what to do."

Hamm hopes to expand the business and hire more, and is also working on a project that would help house veterans.

"We're doing our best to pay it forward to the military," he says.



Galen Bargerstock and Clinton Smith of Government & Civil Employee Services, LLC (GCES), are focused on navigating federal and state employees through financial and retirement planning. Both hold a Pennsylvania Life, Health and Annuity License. Bargerstock is also Series 6 and 63 licensed.

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