

Best Practices in Manufacturing for Military Veteran Hiring

Veteran Transition Guide at Koch Industries

The Koch Industries logo, featuring a stylized 'K' icon followed by the word 'KOCH' in a bold, sans-serif font with a trademark symbol.

› Company Overview

Based in Wichita, Kansas, Koch Industries employs about 130,000 people in 60 countries worldwide, about half of whom are in the U.S. With numerous subsidiaries across multiple industries including energy, manufacturing, technology, and agriculture, this multinational corporation topped Forbes's 2020 list of "America's Largest Private Companies" and has been routinely featured by that publication as one of "America's Best Employers by State."



› Program Summary

When Koch Industries hired John Buckley in 2014, he was tasked with improving their military recruitment program. John was in the process of transitioning from his own military career, and he knew that many veterans face unique barriers in becoming acclimated to life and work as a civilian. In assessing how Koch might become a better recruiter of transitioning servicemembers and veterans, John began to develop a detailed understanding of what these barriers are and how they can affect veterans during the hiring process and during their employment.

The largest barriers that John noticed were related to what he calls the "communication and culture gap," which can significantly impact a veteran seeking employment, including knowing how and where to begin. For example, veterans often struggle to demonstrate how their military training and experience translates to the workplace without relying on military-specific jargon. Things that become second nature to a servicemember might need to be spelled out in more detail to someone who has never served.

To address these challenges, John and Koch Industries developed a Veteran Transition Guide (VTG) to help transitioning service members start to overcome these barriers. The VTG recognizes that transitioning to civilian life, work, and culture is not always smooth and easy. Informed by his own experiences, John wanted to assist all veterans in making the leap from the military to the workplace.



One of the things that makes the VTG unique is that it approaches veteran recruitment and hiring from a new angle. Where many companies might train their HR teams to identify how military experience can translate to workplace experience, John realized that providing veterans that same training could yield even better and longer-lasting results. Instead of only focusing on internal training and policies, the VTG allows Koch Industries to turn their attention to helping potential veteran employees long before they ever schedule an interview.

Title of Project



Veteran Transition Guide

Tags



Recruitment, Hiring, Retention,
Training, Mentorship

Point of Contact



John Buckley
Outreach Strategies Manager



If we truly want to grow and innovate, we have to be open to new ideas.”

– Charles Koch

Koch Industries and the VTG don't stop supporting veterans at the moment of hire, either. The communication and culture gap doesn't go away when someone signs a work contract. Workplace culture can be a big change from military culture, and transitioning servicemembers truly benefit from linking up with a mentor to help them navigate these changes. It also helps to have people at the company who know from experience how to identify a veteran struggling with the transition and can advise leadership on how small adjustments can make a big difference in whether a person performs well or chooses to stay with an employer or not.

› Program Impact

Koch Industries' efforts to re-envision their approach to hiring and retention resulted in a more robust tracking system. An initial data review showed that military veterans were being rejected for jobs at a very high rate. This led the HR team to rethink how and where job descriptions were being posted. A simple shift from placing hiring announcements on more formal job-posting sites to focusing more on social media posts has driven a significant amount of traffic to Koch's veterans careers page and led to a spike in veteran hiring. Of the seven, targeted recruitment pages on the Koch Industries' website, the Veterans Careers page is by far the most visited, and the Veteran Transition Guide alone is twice as popular as any of the other career pages. Additionally, the renewed emphasis on their mentorship program directly led to a greater number of referrals for job candidates and allowed Koch to bring in even more valuable veterans to their workforce.

› Lessons Learned

- ✓ Developing an effective recruitment program starts with identifying the right individual(s) to champion the effort. Where possible, try to identify a Subject Matter Expert (SME) who can help bridge the communications and culture gaps where they exist.
- ✓ It is important to understand your target population as much as possible. Transitioning to civilian life can be challenging on its own without having to worry about how to adopt to a workplace culture.
- ✓ Make sure you are communicating your knowledge of the veteran experience through your recruitment and outreach campaigns. If your approach to marketing clearly shows that you haven't thought much about your target audience, you will struggle to find success.
- ✓ Know where to look for your intended recruitment audience. After evaluating recruitment practices, the outreach team at Koch recognized that they weren't reaching job-seeking veterans on more formal career posting sites. Instead, the company learned that less formal options, such as social media, resulted in better success at reaching this audience.
- ✓ An effective recruitment campaign doesn't just mean providing training for your HR team. It could mean working with the recruits themselves, helping them to prepare for the intricacies of the hiring process and even their lives as civilians. Koch's Military Relations team works with transitioning servicemembers long before they even reach their first interview. They work with veteran recruits individually where possible, spending time on the phone helping them put together resumes and preparing for their interviews.