

# Ten Tips for Businesses to Get Veteran Ready, from a Retired Combat Veteran

From “*Transition War Stories: Lessons from the Front Lines*”

Our nation converted to an all-volunteer force soon after Vietnam. Since then, military service has been fulfilled by very few in this country. Although the support, respect and appreciation for our military has increased since the terrible post-Vietnam days, the understanding and connection has not. The military-civilian divide has grown to detrimental proportions.

Veterans who are working in the civilian world feel this divide. Oftentimes, they even begin to fear the stigma they may experience by being known as a veteran, so they don't seek the help available to them at the new company or in their new community. Sometimes, they just pack up and leave.

- **Veteran unemployment:** At the end of 2019, veteran unemployment was at an all-time low, far better than for non-veterans; yet:
  - Underemployment was rampant – between 1/4 and 1/3 of newly hired veterans were underemployed (nearly 16% higher than their non-veteran peer).
  - Turnover was high – nearly 50% of newly-hired veterans left their first job within the first year; nearly 70% in 18 months.
  - Retention was poor – around 15% of newly-hired veterans remained in their first job.

If a veteran “survives” beyond 18 months in a new company, they will most likely remain for 10 years or more, while increasing value for the company and providing valued products to customers.

A good business leader will protect their investments. So, here are ten things companies can do to improve military-to-civilian transition results for their veteran employees and retain them for 10 years or more.

1. **Cultivate a veteran “perimeter.”** Employee resource groups, unique onboarding and online tools can initiate trust in the new operating environment.
2. **Develop a “battle-buddy” program.** When it comes to acclimating to the new culture and operating environment, veterans will gladly take care of veterans.
3. **Encourage referrals and coaching.** Encourage employees to refer former military colleagues, friends and family, then coach them through the military-to-civilian transition and company selection process.
4. **Ask veterans to assist talent experts.** Encourage and prepare your veteran employees to effectively contribute to job description writing, resume reviews and accompanying recruiters to events.
5. **Leverage program advocates.** Seek business leaders to enhance interest and improve effectiveness.
6. **Educate.** Familiarize recruiters, HR and business leaders on military culture so they dispose of their preconceived biases and help reduce military-to-civilian transition barriers.
7. **Change perceptions while building relevant talent.** Create fellowship and internship opportunities to create a pipeline of specialized talent, and to change business leader perceptions about veteran character, skills, and experiences.

8. **Create partnerships.** Connect new veteran employees with civilian mentors who model success within the company for continuous education and improvement.

9. **Communicate.** Reveal to internal and external audiences that veteran employees succeed “here” and that they create value for “our” customers.

10. **Stimulate military and veteran advocacy.** Supporting military or veteran programs in local communities can create mutually beneficial relationships and shows you care.

Establishing a comprehensive program will improve veteran employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, increase retention, and enable business leaders to realize their investment in veteran employees.

Get more tips on each of these steps in Koch Industries' [Veteran Transition Guide](#).

This excerpt was formed from “Transition War Stories: Lessons from the Front Lines,” a series of seminar presentations and articles based on the experiences of John Buckley, manager of outreach strategies at Koch Industries. John is a retired U.S. Army colonel who served for 33 years commanding infantry soldiers in combat and peacekeeping ops and directing two of the Army's most prestigious schools.