



CASE STUDY

Leading Practices Model: BAE Systems - Wounded Warrior Program

Conservative estimates suggest that 30% of the post-9/11 generation of veterans will transition from military to civilian life with a service-connected disability. In some cases, the nature of these disabilities may dictate a unique approach to recruiting and onboarding, in the context of initiatives focused on veteran employment.

In 2009, BAE Systems (BAE) launched an employment initiative specifically focused on the wounded warrior population. The initiative emphasizes a “high-touch” recruiting strategy, and since its inception (and at the time of publication), BAE has hired 67 veterans with disabilities under this initiative. To qualify for the program, a veteran must have a 30% or greater disability rating. In addition, family members of veterans are now eligible for program benefits, as well. Across many dimensions, the program has realized great success, and has conferred positive benefits to both the veterans hired through the program and also to morale and team cohesion at BAE, given the firm’s positioning as a defense contractor.

Approach & Innovations: Leadership Commitment

In order to accelerate the development and implementation of the program, and to secure the institutional support required to enable the initiative, leadership commitment was perceived to be critical. As such, BAE created the position of VP of Strategic Acquisition, who reports directly to the CEO and the executive board. This employee is also a veteran. This new position is responsible for acting as an advocate and action officer for veterans issues in the firm, and is physically assigned to the corporate headquarters.

In the context of this effort, communicating why BAE is focused on hiring veterans and wounded warriors was recognized as central to the successful implementation of the program. This key messaging is the responsibility of the VP of Strategic Acquisition. Importantly, BAE is hiring veterans to leverage their talents, and this is the content of corporate messaging in support of the program’s recruitment goals.



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The VP of Strategic Acquisition supports firm-wide recruitment goals related to veterans by visiting company sites and educating managers, line workers, and supervisors about veterans and the valuable skills they offer in the workplace. Using internal success stories of past veteran hires, the VP of Strategic Acquisition helps non-veteran employees to understand the important role that military candidates can play within the company.

In addition to this new position, BAE has developed a veteran mentorship program that pairs veterans to help them grow internally and to identify career growth resources, provide guidance, and to share information learned with others. Takeaways from the mentorship program include providing for planned career paths, access and planning for college education, and mentoring for career development. Likely a consequence, veterans hired under this program demonstrate a very low rate of attrition; only four veterans hired through the program have left the company.

As an external resource to identify potential veteran employees, BAE has highlighted the Chamber for their efforts in providing opportunities for veteran recruitment, particularly their job fairs, and encouraging veteran participation in job fairs. A useful component has been organization and production of localized veteran career fairs by the Chamber, preparing veterans to be career-fair ready, and maximizing the matchmaking effort prior, during, and post-career fair. Veterans intending to participate in the fairs can be adequately prepared with tools to successfully network and identify appropriate jobs, and to address criticisms of underprepared or poorly matched employer/attendee.

Implementation and Generalizability

Based on the firm's experience implementing and developing the program, the following issues were highlighted as an ongoing focus of effort:

- Managing the inherent differences between the firm's mainline human resources practices, and those supporting the wounded warrior hiring program.
- Conveying to non-veteran employees the value that veterans bring to the work environment.



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- Ongoing difficulties with regard to identifying potential veteran hires in a timely manner; that is, a challenge related to finding veterans proactively given projected open positions. In this regard, job fairs have been useful, but BAE reports that many veterans are unsure of how to best leverage the opportunities that are presented at these events.

Recommendations

- BAE stresses the importance of senior leadership commitments are a key driver in the success of the initiative.
- Partnerships with business and trade associations represent a critical channel for recruiting talent, and also a means to source resources in support of mentorship and education, related to communicating the value of veterans in the workforce.
- Provide training and education about PTSD to all employers and employees; focus on both general knowledge and accommodation issues given the firm's unique circumstance.
- BAE recommends incorporating the veteran's family (to the appropriate extent) into veteran-focused programs and initiatives. Family involvement tends to enhance organizational commitment and promote enhanced wellbeing of the employee.

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