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"IT Employers Looking for A Few Good Veterans"

By Gail Repsher, Staff Writer

Companies looking for qualified technology workers with good work ethics and leadership skills need look no further than the 200,000 veterans leaving the U.S. military each year, according to military placement firm executives. "All of a sudden, with labor being as tight as it is nationally, people are discovering [veterans]," said Theodore Daywalt, president and chief executive officer of upstart Web site VetJobs.com. The online resume database and job board for military veterans is owned and operated by veterans.

Ninety percent of military jobs now are dependent on the use of information technology, according to VetJobs. "The military used to throw bodies at a problem; they've now thrown technology," said Daywalt, a former Navy captain.

Employers have hired at least 450 veterans through VetJobs.com since its launch seven months ago, Daywalt said. The site lists several thousand openings - about half are technology related - from 315 employers. A bit of positive press and a lot of word of mouth among veterans has boosted quickly its traffic to 30,000 hits a day, with nothing spent on advertising.

The Marietta, Ga.-based company, founded by veterans, "just took off like gangbusters," Daywalt said.

The Military Transition Group, a veterans recruiting firm in Alpharetta, Ga., also has capitalized on the marketability of military alumni. "They represent one of the largest pools of qualified candidates today," said Thomas Macauley, vice president of operations at the 3-year-old company. "They are going to come out with a lot of management skills, as well as their specific technology skills."

Military Transition Group, also staffed by veterans, makes hundreds of job placements a year, largely at Fortune 500 companies such as General Electric Co. and GTE Corp. About 25 percent of its placements are in technology jobs. Its clients like veterans because they are usually willing to relocate, and many have worked overseas, Macauley said.

Plus, "they are not like your typical job seeker that's out window shopping," Macauley said. "If they separate from the service today, they are going to be out looking tomorrow."

Mike Harris, a former Navy electrical technician, found his latest job through VetJobs.com. He wanted to move to the East Coast from Phoenix, got an e-mail from Daywalt promoting the site and

decided to check it out. Six weeks later, Harris had an offer from Onlinesuppliers.com of Vienna, Va. The company knew it had a good hire - so good, in fact, that Harris is the only employee it has ever relocated. Harris was promoted quickly from technical writer to director of technical communications at the firm, which creates electronic marketplaces for government.

"This company is phenomenal," Harris said. "I put in 55 to 70 hours a week, and I'm loving it. It's the people I really enjoy working with." Companies that realize the appeal of military veterans "can't get to these people fast enough, because of their training," Daywalt said.

Recruiters at Oracle Corp., for instance, found VetJobs' candidates so attractive, they asked to partner with the Web site, according to Jane Conley, director of diversity and compliance at the Redwood Shores, Calif., software developer.

"When you see a great source of candidates, you want access," Conley said. "I've never not known there to be a high number of people who are former military working in this industry. It's a logical extension, because they have so much training."

But veterans do not always receive that kind of positive attention, at least initially. Some employers need to be convinced that veterans' technical skills are up to snuff.

Daywalt said he was told by one recruiter in her twenties: "We don't hire military here. They don't do the type of things we do here." Daywalt asked the recruiter to pass the veteran's resume on to her company's technical department anyway.

The result: The candidate aced the company's technical test - becoming the first person to score 100 percent - and got the job. Now that recruiter "will ask for more of the same," Daywalt said.

"Too many people think of the military as Beetle Bailey or John Wayne," he said. "Now, it's very team-oriented, cooperative decision-making. The old sad sack model with Sarge is gone. People are treated better; they are educated better. Even the basic weaponry is so high tech."

Eighty percent of military personnel use a local area network, and most can build and operate one, Daywalt said. In addition to their technical skills, most veterans have security clearances, and most are drug- and alcohol-free, he said.

Scott Wilson, a human resources manager for Electronic Data Systems Corp.'s eastern U.S. operations, needed no convincing of the skills and experience that veterans bring to the workplace. That is because EDS, a leading provider of IT solutions to government, has a history of successful hires from the military ranks dating to its early years under company founder H. Ross Perot, himself a Navy veteran and a lifelong supporter of veterans. "At EDS, we really reach out into that market segment," said Wilson, who has recruited both officers and enlisted personnel during his 12-year career with the Plano, Texas-based company.

"Military alumni traditionally have strong discipline, a focused career horizon and are very committed to achieving goals," Wilson said. "And the folks we bring on board are able to hit the ground running, because they know the customer and they can relate to the client." Mitch Mitchell

was one of those folks. An EDS senior vice president responsible for federal sector logistics, Mitchell spent 27 years in the Army before retiring as a colonel.

In the Army, Mitchell was a project manager responsible for purchasing hardware and software for the Army's digitization program and commanded its software development center. His experience, both technical work and military understanding, translated perfectly to EDS, he said.

"Companies that do a lot of business with [the Defense Department] need people who can get behind the face of their clients and understand what they're thinking and why, and only military people bring that," Mitchell said. "It's almost impossible to bring someone in who has no knowledge of military, and put them in an environment with colonels and generals, and have them understand how the budget is prepared and executed and why they say and do certain things."

In a bustling job market, anybody in the information technology field, and especially a veteran, has his or her pick of positions, said Cozy Bailey, another military alumni hired by EDS.

"The experience that we have is invaluable in understanding the requirements of the military and presenting solutions," said Bailey, the company's vice president for service delivery. "And the military work ethic is not a myth; it's true."

Still, anyone who has spent decades in the military is likely to have some doubts about his or her marketability in the private sector, Bailey said. To those doubters, the former Marine Corps lieutenant colonel offers reassuring words. While in the Marines, he helped modernize the Defense Department joint command and control system, and then managed the networks supporting the Corps' commandant and his staff.

"After I began a true job search, I realized how marketable I was, and all those doubts went away," Bailey said.



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