

insights



BOTTOM LINE: IT'S ALL ABOUT INCLUSION



Veteran Hiring

*Is Diversity and Inclusion
Set Up for Success?*

*Facing the Gender Gap Today –
for Success Tomorrow*



VETERAN HIRING

Where diversity and inclusion meets your talent acquisition strategy



By Mike Dunford



The United States has been at war since Sept. 11, 2001. During that time, according to the US Department of Labor, more than 2.6 million people have served in the military – many returning to the civilian workforce with highly valued skills and experience.

This article is about one program that is making a difference in Massachusetts. *Edge4Vets* helps veterans translate their strengths from the military into tools for civilian success. In a series of workshops based on a resiliency training model, veterans get support from business mentors who participate with them in the translation process. During this process the employers get to know the veterans, and then partnering

with the sponsoring HR teams, they work to match them to real job opportunities.

In 2013, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) announced new regulations (known as the Final Rule) regarding the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA). VEVRAA prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against protected veterans, and

requires these employers to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain these veterans. The final rule clarifies the mandatory job listing requirements, and establishes hiring benchmarks to assist in measuring the effectiveness of their affirmative action efforts.

In March 2014, the Labor Department reported that the unemployment rate among veterans who have served since 2001 has declined slightly, to about 9 percent, but remains above overall civilian unemployment levels of about 7 percent. When you dig into the numbers you learn that for veterans ages 18 to 24, the unemployment rate sky-rockets to more than 21 percent. Younger veterans of the more recent conflicts receive training and skills that are applicable to the civilian sector, but they continue to be challenged in finding job opportunities.

Covidien has been a company focused on building a culture of innovation and inclusion. A strategic imperative in executing the company's global, fast-growth strategy was to have the diverse talent needed to execute our business plans. We needed people who would bring different experiences, perspective and skills to the organization so that we could effectively compete in a very dynamic global environment. Veterans, for many reasons, have become a viable talent source to help us succeed in this critical area.

As an HR leader I saw this strategic imperative, along with the growing requirements from the federal government, and the unemployment statistics of veterans, as an opportunity to solve

for real talent challenges facing Covidien and the growing life sciences industry in Massachusetts. Covidien needed people with skills and experiences that the military veteran offered. Our challenge was to find that talent, and better understand how those skills and experiences would add value to our company.

As a retired Marine Reservist, I realized that a missing piece was finding and connecting veterans looking for jobs, to employers with current open job opportunities. We needed to create an environment where the veteran could translate their skills and experiences for company decision makers, who could then better understand what the veteran would bring to an organization and ultimately meet the growing talent needs of the company.

In 2012 I met Tom Murphy, the Director of the Human Resiliency Institute at Fordham University, through a mutual friend, and quickly learned about his approach and how an Edge4Vets workshop would be the ideal environment for this translation to occur.

The Edge4Vets program is a two-part workshop that helps veterans learn how to identify the strengths that they have developed during their military service, and break them down into values and skills. The veterans work at tables with mentors from the sponsoring companies to develop strategies that identify the kinds of jobs that can lead to a career and ultimately a successful life.

Once we found the Edge4Vets Program, we needed other companies with job opportunities that wanted to get involved,

THE HR CHALLENGE

How do HR professionals responsible for meeting new OFCCP requirements, as well as doing what we know is the right thing to do, learn about and leverage effective veteran hiring programs?

What programs can we partner with that will help us meet these requirements while filling our critical talent needs?

Scan for a short video of veterans and company mentors discussing the benefits each has gained from the most recent Edge4Vets workshop in October:

For more information about the Edge4Vets Program, go to www.edge4vets.org.



and the most important, and perhaps most challenging part, we needed to find the veterans who were looking for jobs.

A key to success to date has been the ability to leverage my professional network. In order to find companies willing to participate, I first reached out to many

All images from an Edge4Vets program held November 2014 at UMass Lowell.





All images from a Edge4Vets program held November 2014 at UMass Lowell.

It may seem strange to some that finding veterans was actually the bigger challenge, and quite frankly remains one today as we grow the program.

of my peers in the life sciences industry. Life Sciences is a growing industry in Massachusetts with many opportunities for our veterans. The response was very positive, and early-on we exceeded our target of five companies to support the first workshop. Covidien was joined by Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Biogen Idec, Haemonetics, Fresenius, and Pfizer.

It may seem strange to some that finding veterans was actually the bigger

challenge, and quite frankly remains one today as we grow the program. When a veteran comes off active duty the cultural change is significant – they typically leave large bases with a comprehensive support infrastructure and head home to places like Massachusetts where the infrastructure is scarce, fragmented and very local. Accessing the many agencies that provide support to transitioning veterans has been a learning experience for us, but one that I feel good about today. We exceeded our initial goal of 20 for the first workshop, and have continued to grow that number to nearly 50 in the most recent workshop. The program has become a good example of a partnership between companies in private industry and the state government. Working early-on with the Massachusetts Department of Veteran's Services, we partnered with the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and the States' Boots-to-Business Mentoring program. These groups, in addition to others, have helped us find the veterans who need the translation help, and want to find meaningful jobs.

We have conducted several workshops to date and have added to the companies participating. The most recent workshop in October expanded beyond life sciences and included ten companies based in Massachusetts – Covidien (*now known as Medtronic*), Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Haemonetics, Fresenius, Boston Scientific, Thermo-Fischer, Pfizer, Analog Devices, Staples and Northeast Utilities. We had close to 50 veterans from Massachusetts, and continue to place over 40 percent of the participants in jobs with the sponsoring companies and the success rate

exceeds 50 percent when considering internships as well. Feedback from both veterans and mentors from the sponsoring companies remains very high, and as I write this article we are preparing for the next workshop at UMass Lowell in March.

This program has become an important tactic in our talent acquisition strategy – it is a key intersecting point for us where talent acquisition meets our diversity and inclusion needs. The diversity of experience and thought that the veteran brings to any job and any company is both refreshing and impactful.

Using this program as a viable talent source at Covidien has been very successful. We continue to meet our talent requirements across many functions and skills because of our affiliation with Edge4Vets – and the talent this program helps us find. ■

Mike Dunford is a global HR leader with 25 years of multi-industry experience in healthcare delivery, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. A retired Marine Reserve Officer, he most recently worked as the Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Covidien an \$11B global medical device company with 38,000 employees that was acquired by Medtronic, plc in January 2015.

Mike is active in several military-related causes and dedicated to helping veterans transition from active duty to career civilian opportunities. He has worked in recent years to bring the Edge4Vets Program to Massachusetts.

THERE ARE SEVERAL REAL WINS WITH THE Edge4Vets PROGRAM

For the companies ... the program serves as a viable talent source of skilled and experienced people; it provides a high level of engagement for the company mentors; it favorably impacts a company's diversity and inclusion talent acquisition objectives; and it provides an opportunity to give back to a group of people who have given so much to our country.

For the veterans ... the program provides an opportunity to pause, reflect and clarify what is important in a career or life; it begins the network building process; it better prepares veterans for the interview process and how to tell their story so it relates to the needs of companies, while meeting their personal career and life goals; and it connects veterans to mentors who stay connected long after the workshops end.