

SUPPORTING VETERANS

We have to ensure veterans hang up their well-worn boots while ensuring they are confident in their own ability to positively influence the civilian workplace.

We have to remind veterans their skills and experience are relevant and needed by small and large employers throughout the UK.

We have to work with veterans, not to reframe their thinking, but to reset how they communicate – this is the single biggest factor that puts people off. In the military we strive for brevity, for clarity and often for the straight between the eyes message. We also do just that – talk in terms of “we” not “me”. These are all great traits, but they have to be checked if CVs are to be read, applications considered, interviews secured and offers made.

Absolutely our community should face no disadvantage, but it pays to be sensible. If a junior member of staff in a HR team initially responsible for glancing over applications can't understand what's written on a CV, are they going to process it to their boss? Would you? It's us who have to change – not the rest of the world.



Veteran employment the bigger picture

The argument about whether to call ourselves veterans is done - I have been part of too many discussions, with politicians, senior serving military leaders of all ranks and a number of people from the ex-military community talking round in circles.

We are veterans, we used to serve in the military and now we don't. It's not an American word, that too is a misnomer, and for the purposes of this article, I will refer to those who have served in the military as “veterans”. Veterans have left, Service Leavers are leaving, I get that – but to save my fingers, let's call everyone veterans. Incidentally the word veteran comes from the Latin *veteranus*, so it could be worse.

So, who am I? I'm Garrath and I'm a veteran. The 4th generation in my family who have served who between us have clocked up over

50 years in uniform since 1914. I served for 17 years, initially as a fair to middling officer in the Duke of Wellington's Regiment before taking the Queen's Shilling Downunder and transferring (or transitioning) to the Australian Army. I got out in 2016 and like many veterans, had thought long and hard about what I wanted to do when I finally popped smoke and packing all my gear in the loft – just in case. I have had several jobs since 2016 I am now the Director of Veteran Engagement and Development at a new veterans' employment community called JobOppO, but more on that later.

A friend once told me we should look at transition as a

five-year opportunity to get it right. If we're lucky success may come quicker but I've found the following to be true, both personally and for many of my peers;

*Our first job is normally what we **think** we should do. Our second job is what we **have** to do – often after we realise the first job was wrong. And the third job is the job we **want** to do.*

While I myself have had more than two jobs, it's not lost on me it's now been five years since I left – so fingers crossed!

SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHEN YOU GET OUT?

If we as veterans go into transition with our eyes open, the Government fund various transition support services appropriately and employers are more receptive and understanding, service personal and their families can indeed “*leave and land well*”. This process will of course be significantly improved if those leaving the military are given the credit and the opportunity they deserve to move on and add value

elsewhere, such is their right. It is vital we remember the pledge the UK Government made in their “*Enduring Covenant Between the People of the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Government and all those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown and their Families*” – specifically that our community “*should face no disadvantage*” when it comes to finding meaningful and rewarding employment post service. Since then, employment has been spoken about by many as the cornerstone of a successful transition from the military. In his 2012 review on military transition, Lord Ashgrove charged the MOD with challenging and changing perceptions;

“though a small number do have problems and need special provision, Service Leavers as a whole begin new careers, enjoy good health and are no more likely to suffer PTSD, become homeless, commit suicide or go to prison than the rest of the population.”

He went on to say these negative perceptions, that, in my belief have been fuelled for too long,

are hampering our chances of (as the Australians put it) a fair go, and unnecessarily create;

“an extra hurdle for Service Leavers, restricting their opportunities by lowering expectations of what they can do.”

The Office of Veterans Affairs has dabbled, mainly in the Civil Service and by offering a, dare I say, rather confusing National Insurance break for employers. However, simply, to make change happen we must wrestle back and change the narrative now.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS

On the other side of the coin, we have to work with employers to ensure they are more aware of the benefit veterans can and indeed do bring to their organisations. While recording a podcast with the Talent Director of Talk Talk recently it was heartening to hear some employers really do get it. Ian told me what he was looking for in people and why he feels the veteran community are a go to for his organisation.

Many employers are now assessing how and who they hire in a post Brexit, post Covid environment and this provides a great opportunity for veterans. Who better to turn to than a cohort of proven potential employees who may not have the industry experience (yet), who may not have the exposure to the commercial world (yet) but can be trusted to roll their sleeves up, who relish uncertainty and have a propensity to work with minimal guidance towards the strategic aim? It's important employers are reminded to consider the fluidity of the environments the military have functioned in over the last 20 years particularly has bred excellent leaders and committed, broad-minded team players. We should challenge employers to think about the VUCAness (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) of counter-insurgency operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and beyond and to think how mentally dextrous must most junior Soldier, Sailor or Airman need to be to hand out blankets to lonely children, engage in a fire fight against local armed militia and provide assistance to international law enforcement agencies during the same 24-hour period, often through an interpreter, with minimal sleep, and probably while soaked to the bone. And invariably with a smile.

Take Carl, a former Corporal in the RAF. Now working in the account management team of a well-known retail brand in Portsmouth, Carl said to us;

“It didn't take me long to realise the process used for planning and conduct of various patrols and missions during my time in the RAF could be applied to the projects I was working on in my new job. Happy days!”

Jenny, who served for 7 years and left the Royal Signals as a Captain surprised the HR team from her new employer in Leeds who were blown away during her interview by the complex challenges

D,E and I policy, others see the broader value in actively recruiting (and supporting) veterans into their organisations, more often than not with one eye on the value they can bring outside the job description as much as what's included on these often loosely written documents. Amazon don't get much wrong and the Head of Recruiting and People Development at Scottish Rugby said on a call lately; “*when you're up against it, who would you rather bring in to do a job?*”

It is also important to move on the stories and feelings of sympathy for our community born out of the challenges some have faced during and after their service in the Middle East and Afghanistan. There has to be a collaborative effort to bust the unhealthy cauldron of myths, the flames under which have for too long been stoked by the large military charities. We are not all Bad, Mad or Sad. We are valuable, not vulnerable. A former senior officer I spoke to recently said to me; “*we are not all in clip and it's about time people started saying that.*” Point taken General.

WHY VETERANS?
We have the **skills, knowledge and attitude** employers are looking for, now so more than ever.

Veterans may not know it, and we may call these **skills** something else, but time and time again veterans prove the abilities they amassed when in uniform work well for them in the civilian workplace.



Jenny had to work on while in uniform. They quickly saw how this **knowledge** would work well for them – so offered Jenny the role, increasing the base salary to boot.

“We had no idea how much Jenny had done in such a short period of time in the Army and our hiring manager was confident she will bring so much to the team.” Finally, the can-do **attitude** bred into all service personnel is what sets us apart so quicky. When Dave joined a Facilities Management company as a Shift Leader 5 years after leaving the Royal Marines as a Sergeant he was promoted twice in the first 12 months. “I just cracked on” he said. Fair enough and a trait all too familiar with our community.

SO WHAT?

There are many organisations out there offering to support veterans into civilian roles. Some care more than others, some have short term targets and some take fat cuts from doing so. But JobOppO is different. Our mission is simple, we want to link good people with good organisations and help you find **the** job, not just **a** job.

Founded by a former JNCO in the RAF who felt he'd not been provided the support through his transition he needed, we are establishing ourselves as the go to employment community for veterans and service leavers. We adhere to the KISS model, are removing the white noise from the employment aspect of military transition and have you at the very centre of our work.

HOW IS JOBOPPO DIFFERENT?
Our service is completely free and **Exclusive** to anyone who has served. Our online platform is **Efficient** and easy to use. We work hard to **Educate** veterans by creating our Veterans' Employability Skills Development Series that will help you find, prepare for and nail the job interview you want. We also Educate employers about the skills, knowledge and attitude we offer as well as acting as a go to for any applications they receive that they just don't understand! And lastly we **Empower** not only by encouraging you to manage your job search yourself, but we also give back to the community by supporting our military charity partners by donating 10% of our profits to the OppO Foundation who in turn empower many veterans to get back on their feet – and “*crack on!*”. You can find out more about JobOppO by visiting our website, and more still by registering your details and joining our exciting community.

joboppo

AUTHOR
Garrath Williams
Director of Veteran Engagement and Development at JobOppO