

Resume Preparation Workshop for Returning Veterans or Military Spouses

Although veterans and military spouses often acquire unique and valuable skills during their military service, they are disproportionately unemployed when compared to comparably qualified civilians. Though confronted by different issues than veterans, frequent relocation makes it difficult for military spouses to get a job or progress in a career, and deployment leaves many to balance their jobs and families with little or no aid.

For veterans of all generations, the unemployment rate for May 2011 was 8.3 percent. For veterans that left the service after 2001, the unemployment rate was 12.1 percent. For veterans ages 20 to 24, the unemployment rate has been about 27 percent. Among National Guard and Reserve units, Army National Guard units have returned from deployments with unemployment rates as high as 45 percent.

From the approximately 710,000 active duty spouses, 93 percent of whom are female; and an additional 500,000 spouses who are married to a Reservist or National Guardsman, 84 percent have some college education; 25 percent hold an undergraduate degree; and 10 percent hold a postgraduate degree. Nevertheless, 77 percent of spouses report that they want or need to work, 38 percent of military spouses are under-employed, compared to approximately 6 percent rate for civilian spouses, and only 19 percent of military spouses have adequate full-time employment.

Veterans or military spouses have worlds of knowledge and experience, but may need practice depicting these skills in a resume. Veterans and military spouses have specific skills and qualities - that benefit the employer and workforce - such as loyalty, maturity, leadership, integrity, focus, project and crisis management, solution-oriented approaches, motivation, initiative, respect, team attitude, etc.

As a volunteer, you have the chance to help veterans and military spouses improve their chances of getting employment and therefore re-integrate them into the communities upon return home. Give back to your country by leading a resume preparation workshop for military veterans and/or military spouses. Helping a military jobseeker develop resume-building skills might not land him or her a job, but it could make a big difference when a jobseeker gets an interview.

Type of service: skills-based volunteering, ongoing project, project done-in-one-day, group volunteering

Objectives: assist returning veterans in preparing resumes for better re-integrating upon service completion

Difficulty level: medium

Special skills: professional experience in drafting and editing resumes

Resources:

- Sample resumes (included in this playbook)
- Laptop computer
- Flash drives are helpful but not necessary if there is Internet access

Project instructions:

Step 1: Identify Partners and Leaders

Identify agencies that provide assistance to the unemployed in your community. This might include human resource agencies, welfare assistance programs, unemployment agencies, libraries and community centers. Offer to host a resume preparation workshop or find out if there will be an upcoming job fair in your community to which you may add your assistance.

Recruit colleagues and/or family and friends to be resume reviewers. Friends who work in human resource departments and those who have done a lot of hiring are often the best resume reviewers.

Also, recruit military veterans and/or military spouses in your community, especially those who have had success in finding work after returning from deployment. These members would be great resources for other veterans/military spouses looking for inspiration and understanding.

Step 2: Set Expectations

Has the average individual been out of work for a year or longer? What is the average education level of the jobseekers? The more you know about the people you will be assisting and the more you communicate this information with your team, the better prepared you and your team will be for providing the best service. Be sure that your team has adequate expectations of what can be accomplished during the given workshop timeframe. Do your best to set expectations for the agency with which you are working, as well as for clients. While you should try to build the confidence of jobseekers, no one should expect to get a job as a result of your workshop.

Step 3: Project Preparation

- Confirm the number of veterans expected. Be sure to have an appropriate number of water bottles and snacks for the volunteers and veterans. Also, be sure to locate bathrooms and water fountains ahead of time to direct participants. For every two-hour session, include a 15-minute break.
- Aim to have one volunteer work with one veteran for one to two hours.
- Ask the partner organization to instruct jobseekers to bring their resumes to the interviews.
- Review the meeting location with your team members and ask them to meet 15 minutes before the jobseekers arrive.
- Share any resources and information that will be helpful to your team.
- Thank everyone for coming, run through the timeline of the workshop and the expectations, and ask volunteers to stick around for a few minutes when the workshop ends. If a staff member from the agency is available to speak, encourage them to do so. The staff often advocates best for its jobseekers and helps volunteers understand the significance of their service.

Step 4: Resume Review and Development

A resume should emphasize the strengths of the candidate as they relate to the specific use of the resume.

The format of the resume should be such that a quick glance should highlight some impressive information to the resume reader.

Does this mean that you need to write a new resume for every position for which you apply? Well, some people do tweak their resume each time they use it. But repeatedly reworking your resume isn't really required. A lot depends on the scope of your resume.

What Goes In a Resume?

- Contact Information (email address, phone number, cell number, address)
- Work experience
- Volunteer experience
- Education
- Serious hobbies

Every Job Should Include:

- Company name
- Job title
- Dates of employment in chronological order
- Location (city/state)
- Job accomplishments and responsibilities (quantifiable and showcasing impact)

Critiquing a Resume:

Appearance/Style

Appearance and consistency are critical. Your resume must be professional. Stick to using only one to two “normal” fonts. Use font sizes no smaller than 10 point. Keep colors to a minimum. Be consistent in the use of color, font, size and style (bolding, italicizing, underlining). Use normal (3/4-1”) margin widths. Do not use resume templates; develop your resume from scratch – with your own unique style. Use bulleted phrases to describe your accomplishments rather than lengthy (and hard-to-read) paragraphs.

Completeness/Length

A resume should give a complete picture of why you should be called for an interview; however, that does not mean you need to include every job you have ever worked at in your life. Resumes should rarely be longer than two pages (although you can have supplemental pages for things such as grants, consulting, references, etc.), and, for entry-level positions, no longer than one page. Some senior executives with exceptional work experiences are sometimes deserving of a three-page resume.

Content/Layout

Use standard resume headings. All resumes must include certain critical information, such as contact information, experience and education. Other sections include career objective, professional profile, honors and awards, professional interests and memberships. Resumes should never include names of supervisors, salary information, photos or references.

Focus

Perhaps the most critical element of any resume is its focus. Your resume must have a specific theme related to the position (and employer) you are seeking. Do not include extraneous information on your resume. Whether you use a career objective or not, always keep that objective in mind when writing the rest of the resume. Your resume must be written in such a way that your career objective, as well as what you're good at, is obvious to anyone reading your resume.

Format/Approach

There are three types of resume formats: standard chronological, functional and combined chrono-functional. Jobseekers with a steady employment history in one field looking to advance within that field should use a chronological resume that focuses on employment history (starting with most recent). Recent college grads with a variety of work experiences and jobseekers changing careers sometimes use a functional or chrono-functional resume. Functional resumes omit position titles, places of employment and dates of employment and is not the preferred format. For jobseekers who don't have a clear path to the positions for which they are applying, a combined chrono-functional resume might be best. Job dates, position titles and locations may be listed without duties and accomplishments, which get highlighted elsewhere.

Perspective

Review your resume from the perspective of a hiring manager with just a few seconds to spend on each application. Your resume must be attention-getting, good-looking and sharply focused. Your resume should provide the employer enough reasons to invite you for an interview.

Professionalism/Integrity

There's simply no excuse for resumes to have any kind of misspellings or typos. Employers often toss resumes with even just one error in the trash. The other issue is honesty. Your resume is a statement of facts, so do not fudge your dates of employment, job titles, certifications or educational achievements. It's not only wrong, but more and more employers are conducting background checks.

Use of Accomplishments

In terms of job-hunting, nothing is more important than documenting all your accomplishments. It's even better if you can quantify those accomplishments. Employers want jobseekers who are problem-solvers with a proven record of success. Do not describe your experiences in terms of duties and responsibilities.

Use of Keywords and Action Verbs

Action verbs are verbs that make your experience jump from the page. Keywords and keyword phrases are vital because as more and more resumes are placed into large databases, employers search for jobseekers the same way you use Google to search a topic – with one or more keywords.

Versions

Job-hunting today really requires more than one version of your resume. You still need your traditional "print" resume, but you'll also want to develop one or more electronic versions of your resume. E-resumes come in a number of versions, including rich text, text (ASCII), Portable Document Format (PDF) and web (HTML).

Don't include on your resume your height, weight, age, date of birth, place of birth, marital status, sex, ethnicity/race, health, Social Security number, reasons for leaving previous job(s), names of former supervisors, specific street addresses or phone numbers of former employers, picture of yourself, salary information, the title "resume," or any information that could be perceived as controversial, such as religion, church affiliations or political affiliations.

Tips for Dealing with Employment Gaps

Think about other activities you can use to fill that time period. You might have experience relevant to your job target, regardless of whether you were paid. Volunteer activities, community involvement, special projects, consulting engagements and continuing education can be used in the experience section.

Short gaps might not be apparent if you eliminate months from your traditional resume. Use the objective statement to summarize your goal as well as your top qualifications. This will draw attention to your selling points and downplay your work chronology.

If you're returning to the workforce after an extended absence, show how you've kept up-to-date with changes in your industry. If you've been out of work because you raised a family, continued your education, cared for a sick family member or recovered from an injury, be sure your tone is not apologetic. There's nothing wrong with being out of work for whatever reason, and a negative attitude might affect your resume's quality.

Translate Skills

The military teaches you many skills and abilities that are desirable to civilian employers. All service members are exposed to some form of basic training which equips you with a sense of teamwork, leadership and confidence. As you advance in your career, you often learn more and more skills and abilities that your civilian peers do not learn. All veterans have character that matters and competencies of value from their training and experiences.

- Character that matters: Accomplishment of the mission, commitment to duty, culture of competition, ethics of civic engagement, understanding of lie and a maturity upon which to build a better life
- Competencies of value: Leadership, teamwork, communications, critical thinking, quality execution, personal responsibility, organization dynamics, assessment management and world view.

However, the military does not often teach you how to translate your skills. The O*Net Crosswalk will translate your MOS into terms a civilian employer is looking for.

First go to www.onetonline.org/crosswalk/ and enter your MOS.

O*Net will give you ideas on how your skills translate into the civilian world. Not all suggestions will apply to your positions and experience, but the report will arm you to better translate you tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities and work activities, style and values along with other position suggestions. As long as these apply to the positions you have held, you can use all or some of the suggestions in your resume.

Be sure to include tangible figures and facts to your statements. If you can, include dollar amounts of equipment you were accountable for or number missions you planned or operated in. These facts and figures give civilian employers something they can understand and not just words.

Download Sample Resumes: www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/sample_resumes.pdf

Step 5: Debrief

Bring your team together at the end of the workshop to thank them for their help. Ask them to reflect on their experiences and to brainstorm ways to improve the volunteer opportunity.

Additional Resources

- Partner agencies - Resources include the state National Guard office, your local military recruiter, local chapters of the American Red Cross, veterans organizations, VA hospital or local VFW, local office of the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs or the state VA office
- HandsOn Network www.handsonnetwork.org
- Community Blueprint www.the-communityblueprint.org
- Blue Star Families: Making Volunteerism Work for You www.handsonnetwork.org/volunteers/gethandson/toolkits