



## Mission Ready Workforce: How to Leverage Veterans' Skills

- Intro:** Welcome to Strategic Insights, brought to you by PrideStaff. On each episode, we bring you interviews with leading management and employment experts from across the country. Your host for Strategic Insights is Brad Smith. And now here's Brad.
- Brad Smith:** Hello and thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Strategic Insights. Today, I'm excited to have a panel of key leaders within the PrideStaff family who served our great country with honor and now who have transitioned from the military to becoming amazing business leaders. I'd like to start by having you each introduce yourself. Tell us what branch of the service you served in, what you specialized in, and your current role with PrideStaff. And Bob, let's start with you first.
- Bob Daniel:** Okay. Thanks very much, Brad. My name is Bob Daniel. I'm an Air Force and Vietnam veteran. The position I held in the Air Force, I worked in the Headquarters Squadron section. Different branches call it different things, but for me it was that part of the Air Force that dealt with administration of the various functions of the military. So, it was truly an administrative position where I learned a great deal.
- Brad Smith:** That's amazing. And Bob, what's your role now within the PrideStaff family?
- Bob Daniel:** Currently, I'm trying to figure that out. Maybe David can help me, but I'm a strategic partner. I'm the proud owner 18 years of PrideStaff Las Vegas.
- Brad Smith:** Congratulations! That's a long time, and it's awesome to see that military experience extended into business ownership. Jon, if you don't mind, give us an introduction. What branch of service were you in, what did you specialize in, and what's your role at PrideStaff today?
- Jon Brink:** Well, thank you, Brad, for hosting and I want to welcome all the listeners to our podcast today. I served in the US Air Force out of college, so I went into an ROTC program, and spent four years active duty and then 22 years as a reservist. And I retired from the proud US Air Force. My specialty there, I was a commanding officer of a field unit and our field unit was charged with basically doing the FBI's work on U.S. federal installations. I separated, worked a little bit in HR, and then I'm now the very excited and proud owner of a PrideStaff franchise up in beautiful Hartford, Connecticut.
- Brad Smith:** Thank you for sharing, Jon. Mike, let's jump to you.

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Mike Pred: Thank you, Brad. I served in the United States Navy. Proud to have been able to serve for seven years. I was what's known as a nuclear trained submarine officer, so I bored holes in the ocean on a ballistic missile submarine. And then I spent two years training sailors and officers on how to operate a nuclear propulsion plant. And in my current role at PrideStaff, I'm on the field support team, and I provide support to individuals like Jon and Bob and I help them run their operations, provide staffing and sales support to them as well.

Brad Smith: So, Mike, I've got to ask, your role in the military, training people on nuclear and other challenges, now you've transitioned and you're working and helping to train Jon and Bob and their teams. Which is tougher?

Mike Pred: No comment.

Brad Smith: Okay, terrific. Smart man. Last but not least, David, give us an overview of your time in the military and what you're doing now.

David Duffey: Sure. Thanks, Brad. David Duffey, and it's only fitting that I am last because a proud member of the United States Army, which everyone knows is the senior service of all the branches of the military of the United States. I served a total of 10 years. First enlisted as a Cavalry Scout, which is reconnaissance. And then after I was commissioned, I was commissioned as an armor officer, but I was detailed cavalry, so I served in cavalry troops, armored cavalry regiments. Again, I enjoyed that time.

I look back on it with... You tend to remember all the good and the fun stuff and you tend to forget about the stuff that wasn't so fun. Currently, I am the senior vice president of field operations with PrideStaff. It's my privilege to work side by side with Mike Pred and the rest of our field support team, and also have that direct interaction with Bob and with Jon and with our many, many other strategic partners all across the country.

Brad Smith: Terrific. I want to thank you all. We're very well represented here. And I'm so excited about this episode because it is all about the next step for veterans. After military service, how can you create and sustain an amazing career? We have two business owners. We have two business leaders, very accomplished professionals who leveraged their skills and discipline learned from the military into extremely successful careers and have continued to grow as people and grow as business leaders.

So today is all about talking about how to harness veterans, how to support veterans, how to use those skills and that discipline in your business, in your life, in your career to make amazing things continue to happen. So, with that said, in our first segment, I would really like to ask our panel about the unique skills that veterans bring to the workforce. Mike, if you don't mind, let's start with you. When an organization brings on a veteran, what are some of the intangibles they are getting?

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Mike Pred: That's a really great question, Brad. I think first and foremost, military veterans come to the table with leadership experience, the ability to work well within a team. They're adaptable, and they have problem solving experience, real-life problem-solving experience. In addition to that, they come to the table with discipline. They know how to show up to work on time.

They know what that means, what it looks like. They have a respect for the chain of command. They can be counted on to execute efficiently and be good at making decisions in complex and stressful environments. They also have experience working in diverse and inclusive environments, as well as the ability to follow processes and execute tasks efficiently.

Brad Smith: Yeah, Mike, I couldn't agree more. There are so many intangibles that you get with that level of experience, that level of commitment, and that level of dedication that's required and really honed in the military. Bob, I want to transition to talk to you a little bit about how your military experience prepared you to run and lead your own business. You mentioned in your introduction you're going on almost 20 years of running a highly successful business. How did the military help you?

Bob Daniel: I think that's an excellent question, and I was trying to gather my thoughts on, excuse me, all of the things I learned in the military. In addition to what Mike said, I think loyalty is something that is instilled in you from the time you go through basic training. So, I think loyalty, commitment, and an ability to always focus on the task at hand and make sure that that task is done. I think reliability is something that veterans bring to the workplace as well.

As was said previously, if you're supposed to be at work at 8:00 in the morning and you're rolling in at 8:02, that won't cut it in the military. If you're supposed to be there at 8:00, you're probably there at 7:30 or 7:40 ready to go to work. So, I think it's a combination of discipline, resiliency, loyalty, and the ability to absolutely get things done and to follow a prescribed process, but also having the capability of raising questions about processes to the chain of command and have them resolved.

So, for me, just learning how to stick to a task, get it done, don't quit, be loyal, and absolutely make sure that I'm responsible to the people that are working with me, not for me.

Brad Smith: And those certainly sound like amazing skills that any business would find extreme value and overcome some of the biggest challenges that employers are facing right now. Jon, I know that you talk with a lot of employers in your market. I know that you have a passion for helping veterans and helping them transition to their next career and be successful.

I know that you also have clients that actively seek out veterans because of the amazing experience they've had employing them in other areas of their

business. What is some of the feedback that you've gotten from your clients or employers that have brought veterans on?

Jon Brink:

Well, I'm glad we've segued into the client section because where all of our businesses and the leadership team is here to serve our clients. And I think if we can understand their needs and help them show a talent pool of veterans, I think most of them would lean on veterans to hire. A couple notes. I think veterans, it tags in with what Mike said about leadership discipline. I think they bring courage and determination to the workforce. They also are used to working in severe environments, hazardous missions.

So, they've been battle tested, so to speak, in very unique cases. I just interviewed a branch general manager. He's a branch manager candidate for this large plumbing supply location in Massachusetts. He was spent four years in the Marines. Two of those years were two separate missions to Iraq. So, if you can survive in Iraq and come back home, I think you definitely could become a shop supervisor or shop foreman easily. Veterans have an edge over other candidates, I think, due to training and their experience in challenging situations.

I just add a couple extra things. I think they're quite affordable. I mean, you don't join the military because you're going to make a six-figure income. You're going there for to serve the country or to gain that experience. So, I think affordability is something. I think relocation, that candidates are able to relocate while they're in the military and they're okay to change jobs or to relocate or take other assignments on. We talked a little bit about training.

I think the value that clients look for in veterans, I think it all wraps up to being a leader, a leader of your own career, a leader of the organization you're going to join and lead that company, lead that client to success. That's the feedback I've gotten. And I'm going to tell you, Brad and all the listeners, I'm a veteran. I've had hired many people on my team. David knows.

He was just up here visiting Hartford. And I hired Hannah, who's an army reservist. Head and shoulders over all the other candidates I've had in that position. And it comes down to her leadership, ability to handle tasks, courage and determination, and respect for others.

Brad Smith:

Really appreciate that, Jon. David, I want to talk a little bit, you were an officer in the military. I think veterans can fulfill roles throughout all levels of the organization. I'd like to hear your thoughts on leadership or management roles and the training and support that you received in the military or gained in the military. How does that transition over to civilian life in high level managerial or leadership positions?

David Duffey:

Brad, the leadership equation, it's very interesting. On one hand in the military, it's when you are in a stressful situation, and without going into a lot of detail,

and you're leading your team, however large that team is, to accomplish the mission, they have to have faith in the leader, because there's not an opportunity that you're going to sit and you're going to call it time out and discuss, hey, should we do this or should we not do it? I mean, it doesn't quite work that way.

So, in order to get there, you have to have that trust of your team. And that's as the leader, but also the team members have to look to their leader and trust that they're making the right decision. And that doesn't happen overnight. That team working together, building that trust, the leader earning that trust. And I think that the leader, what you're going to get with a military veteran is the commitment.

When I say I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it and showing up, being there. And I think one of the other things, and the guys touched on it, is about working with people from different backgrounds. I mean, you're in the military. And if you're from New York City, you are probably working side by side with people from a very small town in Alabama. Totally different environments and worlds that you're living with.

I remember early on in the army that there was no distinguishing between people and where you're from and all you saw was green. And that was beat into us. And I'm sure the same thing in the Navy, in the Air Force, that it was beat into you that when you looked at your, in my case, my fellow soldiers, I saw green. I didn't see anything else because we all had to come together.

We all had to come accomplish that mission, and we all had to have faith and trust in each other to accomplish whatever that mission was, whether it's on the battlefield or whether it's in a part supply house. Every role is critical. And I think that's one of the things obviously that a veteran's going to bring to any organization.

Brad Smith:

And that is key to leadership. So, thank you very much for sharing. All right, in segment two, I want to discuss some of the current challenges that employers are facing in the market right now. And then we'll finish up by talking about how veterans can help overcome a lot of these issues and challenges. Jon, I want to start with you. In your market, you're actively out there talking to employers in all different types of industries, all different types of sectors. What are some of the biggest employment or labor challenges or workforce challenges they're facing right now?

Jon Brink:

Particularly a couple of points I just want to share with the audience. Unemployment rate is very low. It looks like, it just came out for last month for the month of June, looks like it's 4.1% nationally. And then you could look at the number of open jobs in the US. It looks like as of today, can you believe it? There's an 8.1 million jobs. And I've learned through a lot of business materials that half of those jobs have candidates, the other half don't.

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So, they're looking at a shortage of around 2 million candidates. High turnover is key. We have the economy. Many of our employees work two or three jobs to maintain, to stay ahead of the cost of living, put gasoline in the tank, pay for groceries. So, there's quite a bit of high turnover when employees change jobs for a significant increase. I'd say that's one of them.

I hear a lot about younger people coming from school. Candidates that have grown up with the internet, with cell phones in their hands. That there perhaps is maybe a little bit lack of a work ethic, attention to dedication, and are they willing to ghost people for no reason. So, I'd say those factors are probably the biggest drivers or challenges that employees find. I talked to a client Friday.

They say, "Jon, Hartford Team, we're all filled up." I tell my team the call will come in on Tuesday that he will need more. And sure enough, the call comes in Tuesday that they need more because people have either ghosted or they left to get a 20% or 10% pay raise. And I think it's driven by the unemployment, as mentioned, the high number of positions out there and the high turnover, Brad. I would say that combination of those is from what I'm able to comment on.

Brad Smith: Yeah, it's a tough combination right now and tough for employers to find a fit. The other thing that I'm seeing and running into is the disparity between degree to non-degree jobs and the available talent. For years, it's been pushed and ingrained in us that you have to go to college, but many of the positions don't necessarily require a college degree and those that are degreed don't want to go into that. So where do we find the talent to fill these mission critical roles? I think there's a big opportunity for us at looking at veterans and other transferable skills.

Jon Brink: If I could just add, Brad, and I think most of us are located in large metropolitan areas, but those smaller communities, I think they even have a bigger challenge because they can attract talent in. And I think the military veterans have that ability to relocate or are willing to relocate into those maybe smaller towns for any reason.

Brad Smith: Yeah, that's a great point. I want to open it up to some of the other panel members. Maybe Mike, David, those challenges that Jon just mentioned and we just talked about, where do veterans help? Where can they fill in? What can they bring to the table? Mike, do you want to start?

Mike Pred: Yeah, sure. Thank you, Brad. I think Jon mentioned a lot of really good points as it relates to the challenges that many companies face today. And the first thing that strikes me is that when a veteran comes on board, they come to the table with the perspective of the importance of the mission. It's all about the mission in the military and translating that into the civilian world of employment. Companies have missions. Their foundations are based on a mission.

A veteran can come in, understand that, relate to that, put the mission first, be able to work within a team to accomplish the goals, be able to think big picture, while at the same time respecting the chain of command and the discipline that it takes to come to the table with solutions and a focus on decision-making and execution. And I know for me personally, coming out of the Navy, that experience really grounded me.

It gave me confidence in my ability to lead, to make decisions, to deal with adversity. And I think you can extrapolate that experience to veterans that are going to come into your workforce. They have that grounding. They know how to get things done. They've had the experience. They're not going to shy away from a challenge, and they're going to work well with others on the team because that's expected of them. That's part of their DNA coming out of the military.

Brad Smith: And those are so many solutions to the biggest issues and complaints I hear from employers today, that attendance is an issue, discipline is an issue, work ethic is an issue, following orders or chain of command, bringing innovation to things. Those are all extreme challenges that employers are facing. And you just rattled off so many great solutions and so many great skills that veterans can bring to the table. David, anything to add to that?

David Duffey: Well, and not a lot because Mike and Jon brought a lot of great points. Just a reminder for everybody that may have forgotten their history, the draft in this country ended in what, the mid '70s, if I remember right, maybe the latter part of the '70s. So the vast, vast majority of the veterans that are entering the workforce, I mean, I would say 90% of them already have a serving heart, already want to be a part of something that's bigger than themselves.

And I think everything that's been said about discipline and loyalty, the veterans of today are going to have that because each of them raised their hand and volunteered for... And some of them knew what they were getting into. I mean, if there was a time of conflict, others may have raised their hand and entered when this country was not into conflict, but they knew that there was that potential, but they did it anyway.

And I think that adds a certain edge to the veteran workforce that you just don't get from folks that did not raise their hand to volunteer, to offer themselves up for the good of the country.

Brad Smith: An amazing point. Thank you. Bob, to round things out for this segment, talk to me a little bit about the difference that veterans can really make and bring to the table. You're in a large market in Las Vegas. You have the chance to work with a variety of different organizations that need difference makers to be successful. What do veterans bring to the table?

Bob Daniel: I think veterans bring a number of things that business owners, excuse me, are really looking for. I think one of the things that's maybe often overlooked, maybe not, is a degree of maturity. So what clients are looking for in employees here in Las Vegas is someone that is mature, is reliable, is going to show up when they say they're going to show up. The other thing I think that's equally important is veterans...

It's an unknown thing, and I don't know the right word to put on it, but veterans are all about let's go. We can get this done. Let's move. Let's not procrastinate. Let's go. And I think far too often there's a sense in some individuals that, yeah, let's not worry about that. And I don't mean to imply that veterans are gung-ho and rah-rah and so on and so forth, but they really are focused on results.

Let's go. Let's get this done. There's no reason to procrastinate. There's no reason to be disrespectful. That's what we've been asked to do. Let's go ahead and get it done.

Brad Smith: I love that. I love that get it done type of attitude. Let's go. Terrific. In our final segment, I'd like to discuss how companies can more effectively recruit and attract veterans and maybe create a more friendly veteran workplace. Bob, I'd love to start with you. Any words of wisdom for companies that really want to make their workplace more friendly for veterans or more attractive for those from the service?

Bob Daniel: Yeah, that's an excellent question, and it's one I struggle with. And I'm sure everybody on the call struggles with it as well. I've interviewed a lot of veterans, and a particularly young man comes to mind. He was from the army. And I looked at his resume and he was infantry. And upon interviewing him, trying to really figure out what he could do, but his resume was not very detailed.

And when we got into the conversation, he goes, "Look, what I learned to do in the army was kill somebody. How do I translate that into a skill?" And I just said, "Look, let's just focus on some of the things that you learned in the military. Let's talk about leadership. Let's talk about organization. Let's talk about structure and what things can we put on your resume that would indicate that."

So, I think one of the things I'd like to see employers focus more on as it relates to veterans, because veterans may not possess the exact experience or skill that a client is looking for. And I'd like to see clients focus on the veterans will versus their skill. Because if they give them the opportunity, I assure you the veteran will come through and they will not regret that.

Brad Smith: I think that's a great point. There are so many transferable skills, but there are also so many intangibles that you don't get elsewhere. So, thanks for sharing, Bob. Jon, what do you think organizations can do to better support and attract veterans?



Jon Brink:

Thank you so much, Brad. So, I believe Bob was talking about transferable skills. So, I think a client needs to open up themselves to say, what is the ideal skills we really need, critical need, and which ones could we maybe look at someone that doesn't have those skills? So, I think identifying a set of transferable skills and be open to veteran talent. Since the Vietnam War, there's been maybe a reluctance to join the military. And I think recruiting is down significantly.

And I think just educating our clients on available talent, how many veterans are available, what's the skillset they bring in, I think that would help for them to support and attract talent. For many of the military roles, there isn't an exact fit, as Bob was mentioning, but I think transferable skills are vital. But I'd almost say everyone that joins the military goes off and goes through significant amount of training.

And I think I hear, Jon, get me someone that I can train in my industry. Get me someone that can learn my business. They don't want people coming in say, "I'm not going to do that, or I'm coming in with a new idea to do it differently," when you haven't even spent a week in the company. So, I think the military veterans bring that ability to be trained, to be flexible and adaptable.

There's a couple things I was thinking of preparing for this question. How can you create a veteran pipeline? I think there's many organizations, that's my New England accent coming out, a number of organizations that can help fill the talent gap. One is military bases, Army bases, Air Force bases, Navy bases. There's the American Legion, which has a lot of military members, and there's a lot of veteran service organizations running the state.

So, I think those are fantastic avenues where you could call a base as an owner and get put on those career fairs, get involved working with their placement offices to get those candidates coming right out of the military. I'd say that's a fantastic way to go. Many chamber commerce meetings have an annual military event, and that's one thing I've done at Hartford PrideStaff.

We go to the annual event. It's around Veterans Day in November, and it's a salute to all veterans. Probably four or 500 business owners go to that event, and it's just a salute and recognize the owner. So, I'd say that's what I would think an organization can do to support and attract veterans, Brad. Maybe that's too much information for this, but I kind of went on a roll.

Brad Smith:

No, Jon, I absolutely love that because I think it is definitely an untapped talent pool. And Mike, I know we talk all the time about the challenges with historically low unemployment, shrinking talent pools, a lack of those intangibles that we've talked so much about today. Building off of what Jon just shared, how else could organizations really tap into this talent pool of veterans?

Mike Pred:

Well, the points that Bob and Jon made are just spot on and thinking about the attributes, not just the skills but the attributes. And when I think a lot about

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having been with PrideStaff for 10 years now, having been a strategic partner for seven years, and in my current role as a vice president for going on four years now almost, and do you hire for skills and experience, the actual skills, or do you hire for attributes?

And I think that's a challenge that companies face. And by considering the attributes, the intangibles opens up the talent pool. And certainly, military veterans have those intangibles, those attributes that are attractive to companies. So, consider dedicated resources to focus on finding that military talent.

And if you don't have those resources available to you, consider partnering with a company like PrideStaff that has military veterans in place, recognizes the value of veterans and can tap into that market for you. We believe in veterans. We are veterans. It's something that's important to us. We understand the value and we can help bring that resource to the table for you.

Brad Smith:

I love that. David, final question for the group here. PrideStaff has... One of the things that I admire most is the number of veterans throughout your leadership team, throughout your office ownership group, throughout your individual service team members, and how you've supported veterans and helped them find amazing careers. Is that something that just happened organically, or is that something that you've said as a team there, we want to have a focus on helping veterans?

David Duffey:

I don't think PrideStaff's different than a lot of other companies. We want the best person for the job. Well, it just so happens that on many times, not all the time, I'm not going to say that, but many times the person that has been in, serve their country transitioned to the civilian workforce, they've got those skills and they shine a little bit brighter because of what they've been through.

Now, did we set out and say, "Hey, we're going on a veteran's only hiring spree?" No. But when you're looking for the best person for the job, it seems like many times people that bubble to the top, so to speak, are veterans, that they have served. And I think that shines through. I think all the veterans that I know of, the ones that I've served with and the veterans on this panel that we're talking about today, I don't think we don't want special treatment.

And I didn't want special treatment when I came out of the service. I just wanted an opportunity. And I think that's with all veterans. They just want an opportunity and they want companies out there to see past maybe what their job title in the military was. And it's been hit on here a little bit, but what were the skills? What is that veteran going to bring to the table?

It might not be an exact skill match, but I'll tell you what, I learned in the military through all the training, I learned to do things I never thought I would. And I think that attitude still exists, and those veterans today could be and will be a

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great addition to many of the companies out there and many of the issues and the challenges that they're facing that a veteran could be their solution.

Brad Smith:

Thank you. Dead on, David. Gentlemen, I want to thank you, first, so much for your insight today. And then secondly, I want to thank you for your service and your dedication to this country. We truly appreciate it. To wrap things up, I just wanted to provide some key takeaways from our episode today. If you're struggling to find high performers, consider turning to our veterans who possess amazing skills like leadership, teamwork, discipline, adaptability, problem solving, and everything else that our amazing panel highlighted today.

Support your veterans. When you bring them on, look at mentorships, training, tailored recruitment so they can make a clear connection between their military experience and their role with your organization. And as Bob pointed out, some of the most trainable people that you will be able to uncover. Amazing opportunity for organizations. Create a supportive and inclusive environment for veterans, recognize their contributions, leverage their unique experiences, and you'll find a more diverse and effective workforce.

And finally, Mike mentioned it briefly, but connect with PrideStaff. We have an amazing team of veterans as you can see from this panel that are skilled at recruiting and matching other veterans with amazing civilian roles. So, I want to thank you all for listening. Mike, David, Jon, Bob, thank you again for your service and thank you for your insight today. Really appreciate it.

Closing:

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