

Women Veterans-One Size Does Not Fit All

Business and Professional Women's Foundation hosted a recent luncheon to encourage women to apply and its research in their communities. A keynote speech was given by veteran Velma R. Hart, national finance director/CFO, AMVETS, followed by a panel of national organizations that support veterans on the local and state levels.

"Taking It Home: Supporting Women Veterans in Your Community" highlighted a second briefing paper, *Building Strong Programs and Policies to Support Women Veterans*, based on BPW Foundation's groundbreaking research. Hart, also a member of BPW Foundation's Board of Trustees, shared insights from the survey *Women Veterans in Transition*. Panelists discussed programs that serve veterans and how using this new research could help strengthen those programs and support veterans during their transition. Panelists included Raymond C. Kelley, national legislative director, AMVETS; William C. Dozier, assistant director, National Employment and Homeless Veterans Programs, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Grace E. Emory, BPW/USA member representing *Women Joining Forces* program and BPW Foundation chair Roslyn Ridgeway.

Highlights from the briefing paper suggest that groups need to understand the opinions and experiences of women veterans as unique and caution not to take a one-size-fits-all approach. Such an approach to providing services to women veterans as they seek their first post-military position does not take into account the varied attributes and attitudes that can affect the success of their transition.

For instance according to the research, younger, women veterans without college degrees are less likely to report a successful transition into the civilian workforce after discharge from the military or reserves when compared with their older counterparts with college degrees.

It appears that current programs and policies to support the transition experiences of veterans may be better-suited to meet the needs of older, college-educated veterans than younger veterans without degrees. Analysis of BPW Foundation's data on women veterans shows that younger women veterans without degrees and with shorter military careers need more support during the transition. Their marital status and whether they have dependents, appeared to present more challenges than for their colleagues with degrees.



Velma R. Hart, national finance director/CFO, AMVETS

"Every woman veteran isn't the same; every woman isn't the same. You can't have a cookie cutter approach to providing services," explains BPW Foundation's research team.

Women veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce have a diversity of experiences, responsibilities and resources that appear to play a role in determining how prepared they feel to compete in the civilian job market as well as what steps they are likely to take while transitioning.

Three such factors were explored by BPW Foundation researchers and reported in *Building Strong Programs and Policies to Support*

Women Veterans. The briefing paper compares and contrasts the experiences and traits of eight different groups of women veterans based upon education levels, marital status and responsibility for dependents.

"These are critical factors that play a role in determining the success of a woman veteran's transition," explained a BPW Foundation researcher.

All veterans, male and female, have a four-part transition process available to them under federal law (Public Law 101-510). The process includes mandatory pre-separation counseling sessions, an optional (except for the Marines) Transitional Assistance Program (TAP) Workshop, and two briefings on veterans—one for all veterans and one for veterans with service-related disabilities. Government research shows that military personnel who participate in the TAP workshop are more likely to find a job sooner than those who do not, but currently only 65 percent of separating personnel participate in the optional program.

According to women veterans, as they enter the civilian workforce, they desire the same characteristics from the workplace as other workingwomen and experience many of the same challenges. Over half of all women veterans surveyed were married at the time of their separation from the military, and similarly over half had dependents. About half of respondents reported they were the primary earners in their household.

The starkest differences of the women veterans surveyed are between younger, non-married women veterans (average age 27) without dependents or a college degree and older, non-married women veterans (average age 40) with dependents and college degrees.

On average, this younger group (86 percent held a civilian job), took longer to secure jobs after leaving the

Message from the BPW Foundation Chair

military (about seven months) and felt less positive about their first post-military job. They also were not as likely to say their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military. They also believed that their first job demanded different skills than what they had learned in the military. A much smaller percentage of this group compared to all others surveyed started their job search prior to leaving the military.

Conversely, college-educated, unmarried women veterans with dependents more often reported smoother transitions into the civilian workforce. They were much more likely than other veterans surveyed to have started their transition prior to leaving the military; to report finding a civilian position they liked quickly; and to have found ways to build on their military experiences and the skills they learned in the military.


There are important implications for groups supporting veterans and to policymakers as we have begun to see proposed legislation specific to veteran needs. In order to recruit this group of skilled working women who possess honed leadership ability, support must be tailored.

BPW Foundation research reveals that no matter what their status, the majority of women veterans delay preparation for the transition process. This is especially disabling for those who are unmarried and without a college-degree. For these women, analysis indicates that strong efforts should be made, and existing efforts increased, to reach them and to emphasize the importance of starting their job search earlier.

Initial efforts to increase the overall success of the transition process should focus on helping younger, women veterans develop a similar set of actions as their more successful counterparts: proactive searches, understanding the value of their military service in the civilian marketplace and a willingness to seek out the “right” employer and the knowledge of how to do it.

Building relationships between transitioning military personnel and potential employers, social and business networks in their communities, and job search and/or training programs would have a significant impact on the transition success of women veterans.

BPW Foundation’s research is ongoing and will provide information that communities, policy makers and employers can use to support women veterans and to build successful workplaces.

Review the research today at www.bpwfoundation.org. 



BPW Foundation chair, Roslyn Ridgeway

As part of our mission, Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) Foundation partners with employers to build successful workplaces that are beneficial to both the employer and the employee.

Working “9-to-5” is an outdated model. Workingwomen and men of all ages need more flexible arrangements, and in return, flexible arrangements are more cost-effective and productivity-effective. Changing the face of the workplace is truly a win-win solution. BPW Foundation addresses the issues surrounding workplace flexibility to change the way work is done, not simply changing the worker. This is one of the topics that will be addressed at the 2008 National Employer Summit, *Practice What You Promise*, on June 20 in Washington, DC.

The third installment of BPW Foundation’s signature event will focus on the most promising practices of today’s workplaces. Through the companion publication, the *Successful Workplaces Digest*, we will explore the innovative leaders who create cultures of diversity, use technology to enhance the workplace and employees’ work; and find the best solutions for a transition workforce.

Tammy Erickson, an expert researcher and speaker on the changing demographics and employee values of successful organizations, as well as a blogger for Harvard Business Online, will keynote the Summit.

BPW Foundation encourages the participation of workingwomen and employers in this event. An easy way to participate is to share your organization’s promising practice by submitting to the *Successful Workplaces Digest*. You will find online and downloadable submission forms, and registration information on the web site: www.bpwfoundation.org. Looking for visibility opportunities that highlight your company’s best practices?

Sponsorships are available; email an inquiry to foundation@bpwfoundation.org. 