

Benefits of Public Service Sector Employment

The majority of women veterans who indicated in the survey that they had held a full-time job since leaving the military found their first post-military position in the private (for-profit) sector, 73 percent. But, those who said they were happiest with their first post-military position were the 27 percent that worked for the public service sector, which includes both the government and non-profit sectors. Whether this reflects actual differences in the workplaces or the expectations of veterans towards their workplaces or the ability of different employment sectors to effectively communicate their benefits to women veterans is an area ripe for additional research.

Those who worked in the public service sector were more likely to report that they felt their employers valued their military service, 64 percent to 44 percent. While discussions about the employee's military service were no more likely to come up with public service sector employers than private sector employers during the job interview, women veterans were more likely to report that public service sector employers showed appreciation for their military service. Public service sector employers were perceived by women veterans as valuing the military training and skills of women veterans. Also, women veterans that had found employment in the public service sector were more likely to say they felt a sense of accomplishment from what they did most days, 61 percent to 51 percent.

“Feeling insecure about whether my job will last based on (the availability of) government contracts bothers me. In the military, I felt secure.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

However, contrary to what might be expected, there were no measurable differences found across the 22 skill measurements for the women veterans surveyed. That is, there were no differences found between public service sector and private sector employers in terms of the kinds of women veterans they attracted: both sectors were equally attractive to women of all skill levels.

An interesting difference between public service sector and private sector employers is reflected in how well women veterans felt the different sectors provided them with jobs that matched their goals and aims. Women veterans who entered the public service sector, compared to those who entered the private sector, were more likely to report that they had found something:

- They found important;
- The work was challenging and interesting;
- They served in a position where they could apply their military knowledge;
- They could gain self-confidence in their abilities.

Most importantly, perhaps, women veterans who took a position in the public service sector were more likely than their private sector counterparts to believe that their first post-military position was just what they were looking for when they left the military. Forty-one percent of public service sector veterans surveyed expressed this opinion compared to only 27 percent of those who entered the private sector. Women veterans employed in the public service sector were also slightly more likely to believe they were well-prepared for the demands of the job, more likely to express the opinion that being able to think in military terms helped them in the job, and that they felt they were more appreciated by their co-workers.

The above findings hold true for both officers and non-officers and for those who did and did not serve in combat or combat zones. That is, both groups find the public service sector just as attractive.

“Today, I work for the state of (Pennsylvania) as a Veterans Service Officer, and it is the most gratifying position I have had and will ever want.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

Policy and Practical Implications

Those engaged in helping women veterans transitioning into the civilian workplace can help them understand the opportunities offered in the public service sector. Likewise, government agencies and nonprofit

organizations may benefit from becoming more aware of how well women veterans fit within their workplace culture, how applicable their skills are and how to better recruit women veterans. Conversely, it appears for-profit sector employers may want to find out how to better communicate their support, benefits and professional development opportunities to women veterans as well as to ascertain if there are disconnects between their workplace culture and their veteran employees' expectations. This disconnect could be preventing them from fully utilizing the abilities of this highly-skilled group of workingwomen and retaining them in the workplace. Almost 50 percent of respondents reported that their first post-military job was in the for-profit sector, but less than 30 percent are still employed in the for-profit sector. Approximately the same percentage worked in the government, non-military sector for their first post-military job as did at the time of survey (20 percent). Again, whether this shift in the employment sector presence of women veterans reflects the retirement of veterans from the for-profit workforce or an actual change in preferred sectors of employment is an area for further research.

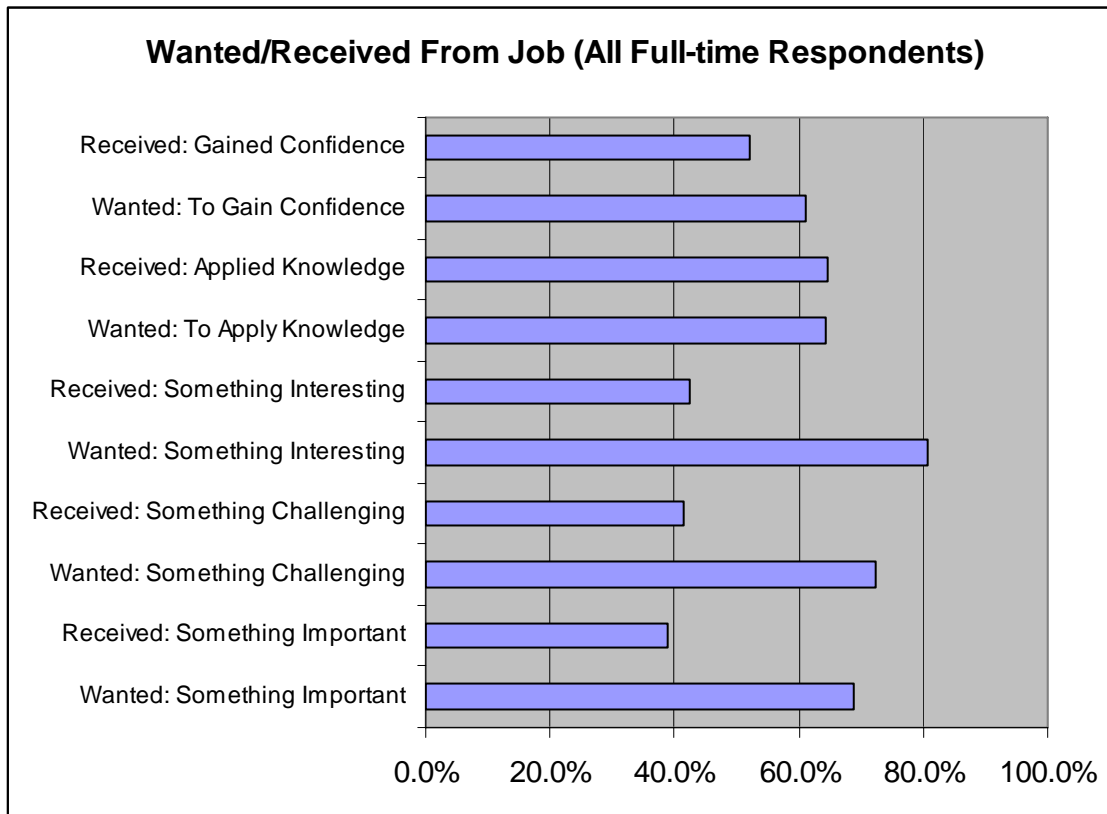


Figure E: Women veterans had high expectations for their first post-military position. They wanted jobs that were interesting, challenging and important. Their perceptions of what they received from their first post-military job often feel short of their ambitions. For more information, see Appendix D.