

Effects of Self-Perceived Skills Mastery Among Women Veterans

Transitioning from the military and finding work in the civilian sector is easier for some women veterans than others. Those who make a more successful transition share some attitudes and beliefs, and engage in some practices, that appear to increase the likelihood of their feeling successful as a civilian worker. One set of these attitudes revolves around the broad topic of what women veterans perceive as their skill sets. Those who thought highly of their skill levels were more likely to say they felt successful with their civilian jobs and more likely to have felt appreciated by their employers and co-workers.

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate 22 skills on a scale of one to seven, with seven being highest. These scores were then summed across the 22 items for those respondents that completed all questions. This resulted in a score that ranged from a minimum of 22 (for those who answered one to each item) to 154 (for those who answered seven to each item).

Women veterans surveyed were very aware of their skills and abilities, with more than half of the respondent group scoring 146 or more on this scale, showing overall comfort with their skills. Conversely, 25 percent scored 132 or less, thus showing relatively less comfort with their skills. While this may seem to be a small difference in absolute terms, this lower perceived skill level had a negative impact on women veterans' perceived success in the workplace. Those with a high skill set score, in the top 25 percent, were more likely than those with a low skill set score, in the bottom 25 percent, to perceive:¹²

“I felt very fortunate to have had the resources from the military. It led to my education after the service and multiple opportunities since then. I owe much of my success to being a Veteran of the Air Force.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

“I found that my military background gave me a great advantage in interviewing for sales positions. Employers felt that my discipline, oral and written communication skills and the ability to self-manage would be key assets.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

- The job was just what they were looking for;
- They were well prepared for the job;
- Compared to what they did in the military, the job was easy, and
- That being able to think in military terms helped them.

Additionally, feeling that they had high skill levels impacted how women veterans interacted with co-workers. As examples, those with a high score were more likely to:

- Feel their co-workers appreciated their military background;
- Have an easy time communicating with their co-workers;
- Feel they worked better under pressure than their non-military co-workers;
- And, feel they got along well in the civilian workplace culture.

Further, belief in strong skill sets appears to have influenced what these women veterans both wanted and received from civilian employment. Those with high perceptions of their skills were more likely to have looked for and found a job in which they could do something important, challenging and interesting. They were more likely to want and find a job where they could apply their military knowledge, yet one that was different from what they did in the military. And, finally, women veterans with high skill perceptions were less likely to want to return to the job they had prior to going into the service; it appears these women veterans had little interest in looking back in life.

¹² The report references only those differences where they were deemed significant based on the results of t-test for the difference between two means or a chi-square distribution and the resulting odds ratios.

Policy and Practical Implications

The policy and practical implications of these findings involves enabling women veterans’ understanding and appreciation of the skills and abilities they have gained from their military experience—skills and abilities that make them competitive in the civilian workplace. Many possess, in their own opinions, what can be termed skill verbs: Understanding, interpreting, communicating, managing, learning, creating, decision-making, and problem-solving, reasoning, organizing, and being responsible and persevering. Translating the military experience and skills of women veterans into a format that resonates with civilian employers is a skill set in itself that both employers and support agencies may find it beneficial to invest in. Those working with women veterans as they transition to the civilian workforce must enable a deeper understanding of the importance of the skills women veterans have and how valued they are in civilian workplaces.

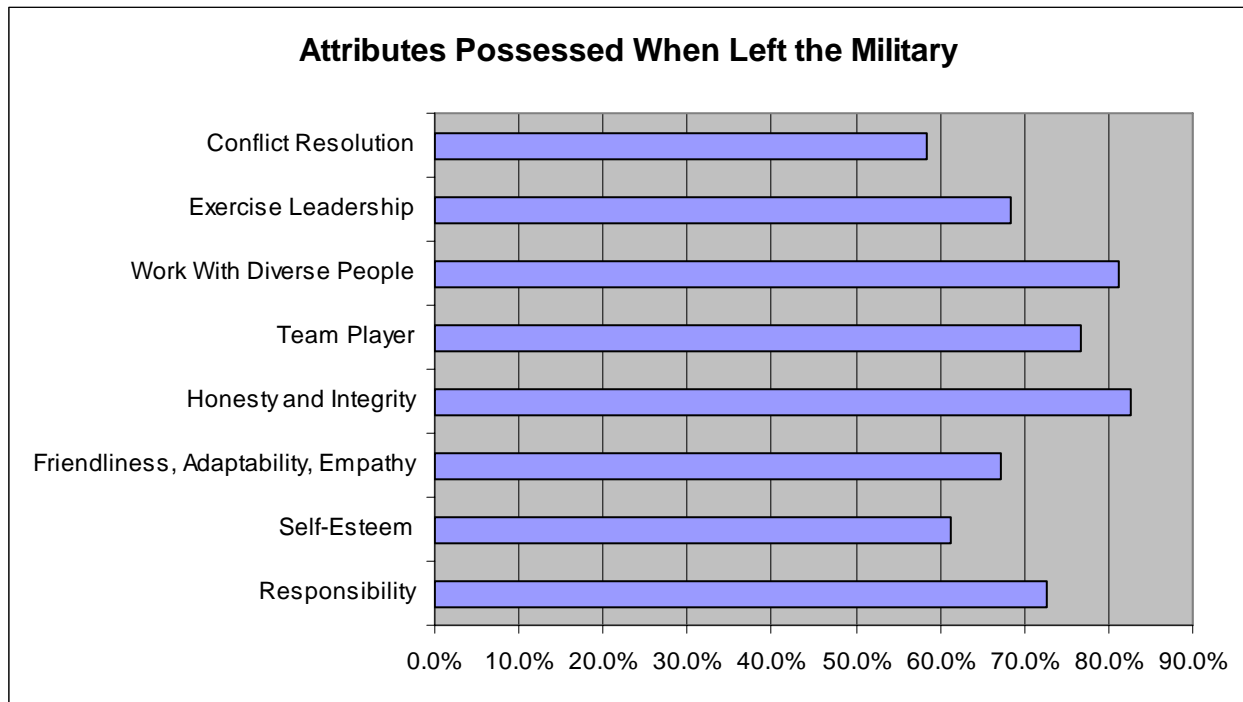


Figure C: Women veterans were asked which of a series of skills and attributes they felt they possessed after leaving the military. By and large, women veterans had confidence in their skills and felt well-prepared for the demands of the civilian workplace. See Appendix D for more information.