

The Impact of Employer Attitudes

There are several ways an employer can show interest in a woman's military experience. Employers can talk about women veterans' military careers during the interview process and express appreciation for that service; they can value the training obtained and skills learned through service; and, they can give veterans the feeling that their military experience gives them an advantage in the workplace. When an employer shows they value the services a woman veteran provided to our country, respondents to the survey show that it can correlate with much more positive feelings about their civilian jobs. Unfortunately, not all employers encountered by women veterans studied in this research project had this attitude.

Women veterans were asked about the attitude of their first post-military employer towards their military service using seven questions, each with a scale of one to seven with seven being the highest. These seven responses were added for those women who answered all seven questions, giving a theoretical minimum of seven (a score of one on each question) to maximum of 49 (a score of seven on each question). The median total was 37, with 25 percent scoring 45 or higher, and 25 percent scoring 26 or lower. These two groups, the upper and lower quartiles, were used in the following analyses.

First, it appears from the data that employers displaying high levels of appreciation for military service were much more likely to employ women veterans in jobs in which veterans felt:

- The work was important and challenging;
- They could apply the knowledge gained in the military;
- They gained self-confidence.

Second, women veterans who said their employers valued their military service rated their jobs much higher – more satisfying – than those who worked for employers that appeared less-appreciative. When women veterans accepted jobs from employers that appreciated their service, they rated the jobs as more rewarding.

Nearly 80 percent of women veterans surveyed who said their first post-military job was “just what they were looking for” had an employer that scored high on the military appreciation scale. Likewise, 86 percent of women veterans who accepted a position with an employer that scored high on this scale felt well prepared for the demands of that job. When the employer was felt to appreciate the service of women veterans, the veterans felt that being able to

think in military terms helped them in performing the duties of that job.

Perhaps the most interesting finding from this set of questions involves how an employer's appreciation for military service appears to be reflected by the co-workers of women veterans: when an employer appreciates military service, it appears the co-workers do as well. This appreciative work environment appears to correlate with making it easier for these veterans to communicate with their colleagues and lessened the chances of problems with the workplace culture.

The benefits of working for employers that value the service given to the country extends into the veterans' lives as well. Women veterans who indicated that their first post-military employer appreciated their military service were more likely to speak positively about their lives to date.

On the job related side, women veterans who strongly supported the assertion that their first post-military employer appreciated their service were also more likely to say that on the job:

- They really like the people they interact with;
- People they know tell them they are good at what they do;
- They get along with people;

“I found that while employers generally appreciated my time and work in the military, they rarely accepted the experience in lieu of certifications given by civilian schools.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

“As a female soldier I reached a position of leadership and respect. The civilian sector does not acknowledge those leadership skills...”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

- Most days they feel a sense of accomplishment;
- Most days they can pretty much be themselves.

Policy and Practical Implications

Those who help women transition from the military to the civilian workforce need to also make an effort to work with potential employers. A successful transition for women veterans appears to strongly correlate with their working for and with appreciative employers and co-workers. Supporting employers by enabling their understanding and appreciation for what women veterans bring to the civilian workplace has the potential to create a win-win opportunity for both employers and women veterans. Employers can attract a highly skilled group of workingwomen, and women veterans are engaged in work that better utilizes all their skill sets. Women veterans assert types of skills that are related to leadership and given a growing need for leaders within the succession pipelines of employers because of the impending retirement of a generation of Baby Boomers, employers may find additional benefits in supporting the full engagement of women veterans in the workplace. In order for this to happen, employers must also proactively promote themselves as women and veteran friendly and then ensure that the workplace structures and culture support that assertion. These implications can also apply to other groups of workingwomen, particularly with regard to retaining highly-skilled workers.

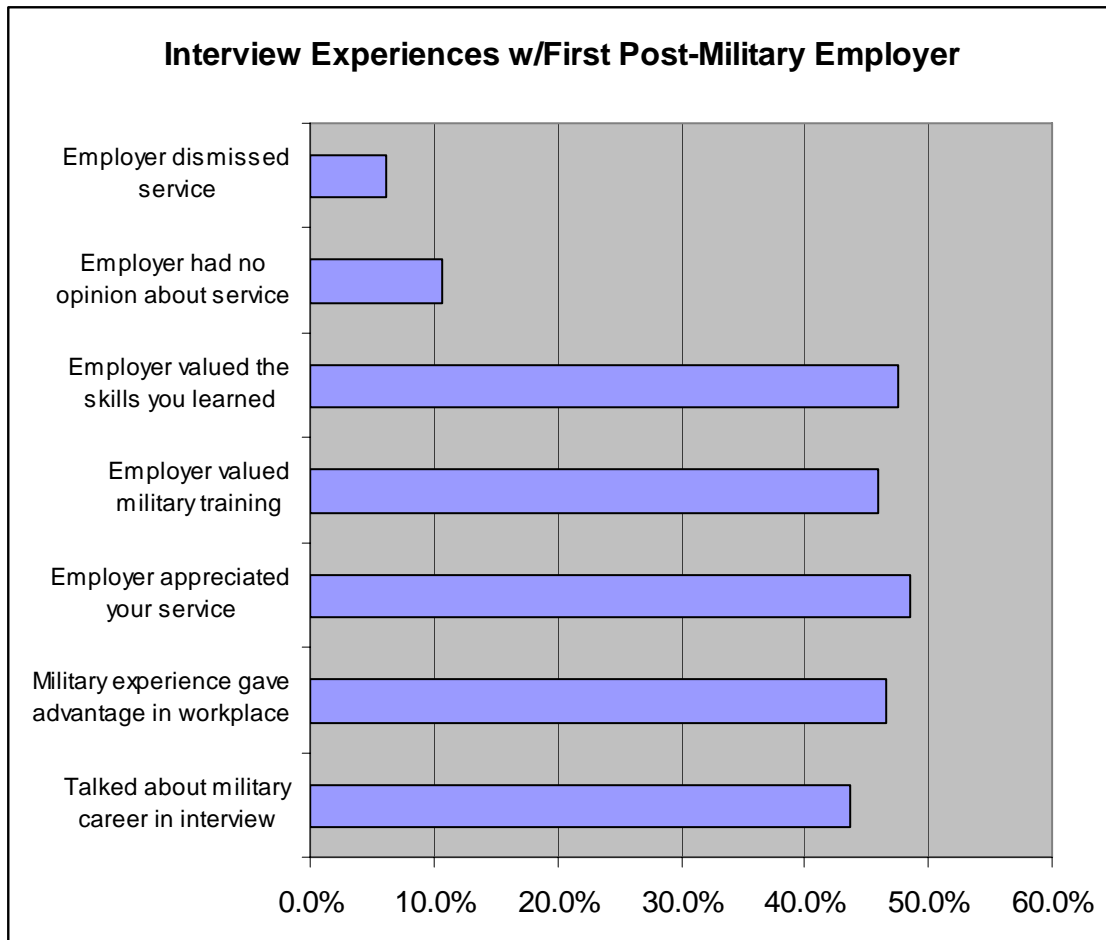


Figure D: Women veterans were asked about their experiences interviewing for their first post-military job. When asked about their experiences with their first post-military employer, many indicated that their employers showed that they valued their skills and military experience. See Appendix D for more information.