

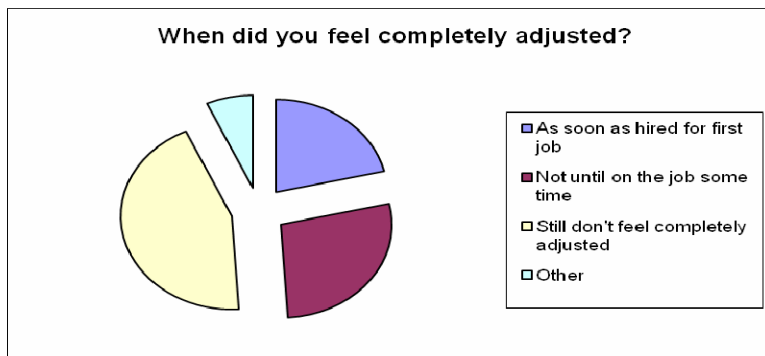
3. Results

Agencies wanting to support women veterans as they move into the civilian workplace should know that while general, short-term, pre-separation interventions may increase the success of initial job search activities, such programs may not be sufficient in terms of frequency, outreach to women veterans or breadth of services in order to address all their possible reactions to separation including their long-term adjustment to the civilian workplace.³ While 37 percent of those responding to the survey reported that their participation in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop (offered by the Department of Labor as part of the pre-separation process for military personnel) was very useful in their job search, additional resources were requested to help them through the full transition process.⁴

Responding to the survey, women veterans indicated that resources would be useful not only before they left the military but also for an extended period of time after separation. They also indicated that support to help them move from the military into the civilian workforce could go well-beyond, including after they secured their first post-military job.

An early conclusion that can be drawn from these preliminary results is that helping women veterans as they transition in to the civilian workforce involves a combination of both practical hands-on supports and psychological supports. Practical support varies from learning how to write a resume to dressing appropriately for the office. Psychological support is more complex, such as awareness of what veterans have to offer a civilian employer, what the veterans actually want from a new job and understanding the effects that workplace culture (i.e. how well their employer and co-workers value their military experience) can have on their transition experience.

Simultaneously, employers seeking to hire women veterans should understand that perceptions are



being formed as early as the interview process about their level of appreciation for the veteran's service. These perceptions potentially impact the veteran's feelings of job satisfaction. Other aspects of workplace culture can also have an impact on how well a newly acquired and highly skilled veteran employee may feel about her new job. For example, when women veterans felt their military service was appreciated by their co-workers, they were twice as likely to strongly assert that their first-post military job was what they were looking for when they left the military.

In fact, the sense that their co-workers had positive opinions about their military service appeared to correlate with higher ratings on women veterans' assessments of their job skills and feeling that they had

Figure B: Women veterans surveyed indicated that the transition process was not simply about finding a civilian job. Instead, 44 percent of respondents said that they still did not feel completely adjusted to the civilian workforce. See Appendix D for more information.

secured the jobs they wanted, it also went along with general feelings of satisfaction regarding their lives to date.

The transition into the civilian workforce is not as simple as finding a job. When asked how long it took to feel completely adjusted to the civilian workplace, 44 percent of respondents said they still did not feel completely adjusted to being in the civilian workforce.⁵ Women veterans completing the survey had been out of the service seven years, on average.

³ (2007) *Preseparation Guide, Transitional Assistance Program*. Retrieved October 2007 from <http://www.transitionassistanceprogram.com/register.tpp>

⁴ See Appendix D. Also, DOL-VETS funds veterans' employment representatives to assist female veterans; according to the DOL website: 221,697 women veterans, including 10,852 disabled female veterans, have received employment assistance at local career One-Stop Centers around the world. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2002 data, the unemployment rate for female veterans was 5.0 percent, compared to 4.7 percent for male veterans, and 5.1 percent for female non-veterans. Information retrieved October 2007 from <http://www.dol.gov/21cw/2003-accomplishments.htm>

⁵ See Appendix D: General Results_ Section By Section for a breakdown of results question by question.

The matter of adjustment does not seem to be associated with feeling unprepared to compete; women veterans rated themselves highly on possessing a number of skills and attributes valued by civilian employers. Women veterans felt they had much to offer as well as had high expectations for their first post-military jobs, which were not always met. After leaving the military, women veterans responding to the survey said they still wanted jobs that were important (50 percent/very true), challenging (51 percent/very true) and interesting (59 percent/very true).⁶

Different factors related to job transitions, including when women veterans began to seek their first post-military job and the selection of a job within a specific employment sector, appear to correlate with differences in their reported levels of adjustment, job satisfaction and length of time to secure a civilian position.

Regardless of when the job search begins, it seems that the transition into the civilian workforce does not end with being hired. Only 21 percent of women veterans in the survey felt that their transition into the civilian workforce was completed as soon as they were hired for their first job; 28 percent said that they had felt “completely adjusted” only after having been on the job for some time. And, as stated earlier, a full 44 percent

“...I think after getting out of the Military, people are on a continual transition. I have been out for a year, and I’m still not completely settled.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

said that they still did not feel completely adjusted. The average time out of the service for respondents was seven years.

It is possible that the “real” length of the transition process may play a role in the adjustment factor. The job search process for women veterans separating from the military varied greatly.

Almost half (48.4 percent) of all women veterans surveyed began their job search before leaving the military; looking an average of five and a half months before their official separation. But, 51.7 percent did not seek civilian work until after leaving the military, and on average, this group began their job search nine months after leaving the service.

“My career as a female in the military gave me a lot of experience in many different fields, but I appear to be either over or under qualified to get a job. . . . Quite frankly, I am very frustrated. I would rather work out of my home (i.e. telecommute), but I don’t see any resource that will let me tap into (information) on this subject.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

In analyzing these results, the question emerged: **is there a psychological separation as well as physical separation involved in forging a successful career transition?**

Women veterans that began looking for a civilian job prior to their official separation from the military were twice as likely as those who started looking afterwards to say that they had found the job for which they were looking.⁷ They were also twice as likely to say they felt well-prepared for the civilian workforce.

These early job hunters were also more likely to rate themselves highly for possessing the skills needed to succeed in the civilian workplace. A sample of the skills in which early job seekers were more likely to indicate a high level of confidence includes:

- Accurately communicates thoughts, ideas, information and messages in writing
- Uses math skills in job-related tasks such as budgeting, interpreting graphs, etc
- Allocates and manages resources well
- Communicates effectively with supervisors and colleagues
- Learns about and uses any office technology
- Possesses useful computer skills
- Thinks creatively and combines ideas and information in new ways
- Has decision-making abilities

⁶ See Appendix D: General Results_ Section By Section. Respondents were asked to rate their responses from 1 to 7 where one was “not at all true” and seven was “very true.”

⁷ 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.

- Recognizes problems and then define and implement solutions
- Uses reason to uncover the rules and principles applied on the job
- Uses the “mind’s eye” to organize and process symbols, graphs, pictures

This early preparation mind-set also correlates with a study of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that showed that participating veterans secured their first post-military position three weeks prior to those who had not.⁸ Participation in the TAP program is not mandated for military personnel separating from the armed forces, except for those in the Marine Corps. The program participation rate for the TAP Employment Workshop varies among the services with a reported range for the years of 2002 to 2004 from 56 to 86 percent.⁹ In recognition of the importance of early preparation, those running the TAP have developed a goal to increase the average participation rate to 85 percent; the DoD also recently released a statement supporting that goal.¹⁰

Additionally, anecdotal reports emerging from those who work with women veterans are outlining emerging areas for research on the adjustment process of women veterans. These reports indicate that health care providers working with women returning from active combat are showing that they are under a great deal of stress relating to issues including parenting, marriage and re-integration into society and life in general. Those who work with women veterans are saying that some women veterans need time to recuperate from their experiences before they can resume the duties inherent in being a wife, mother or daughter.¹¹ Over half of all women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation were married at the time they separated from the military, and similarly over half had dependents at the time of their separation.

A continuing review process will take place on why the adjustment to the civilian workplace was challenging for the group surveyed by BPW Foundation. Over the next year, further analysis is planned to fill in this critical gap in knowledge including focus groups and interviews with women veterans who have agreed to continue with the research project.

“I worked hard, left my young children with child care providers for months at a time, deployed with mobile units, lived in tents...only to be divorced when I came home....I still won awards, (and) earned medals and promotions for 28 years and still loved my job when I had to retire. Now, I feel like I’ll (never) get a decent job because I didn’t have the time to ‘network’ with the right people before I retired.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

Whether they started their job search before or after leaving the military, respondents consistently rated themselves highly on possessing a sense of responsibility, self-esteem, friendliness, goal-setting, honesty and integrity, team work, leadership skills, conflict resolution and the ability to work well with others from diverse backgrounds.

In trying to explain how a group of women veterans can so strongly assert their sense of preparedness for a civilian job while making an equally strong assertion that they still do not feel completely adjusted, researchers

began to look at the activities undertaken by women veterans as they searched for a civilian post.

One possible factor affecting the ultimate success of the transition process, as measured by the respondents’ feelings of adjustment to the civilian workforce, may be linked with their strong tendency to *not* join networks as part of the job search process. While the importance of networking is often emphasized as part of a job search among civilian job seekers, women veterans in the survey appeared reluctant to make extensive use of existing networks of other veterans or civilian contacts and to join new networks as part of their job seeking process. Fully 93 percent of women veterans surveyed said that they did not join a women’s network, veterans’ service organization or professional association to help find work.

⁸ Winter, Tim (Interview) (October 5, 2007) Transition Assistance Lead for the Department of Labor; (2005); *Military and Veterans Benefits: Enhanced Services Could Improve Transition Assistance for Reserve and National Guard*. Retrieved October 2007 from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05544.pdf>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Trowell-Harris, Irene (Speaker) (2007). Director, Center for Women Veterans. *Supporting Women Veterans in the Workplace*. Retrieve from www.bpwfoundation.org; CICCOLELLA, Charles (Testimony) (June 13, 2007). Retrieved on October 2007 from http://nvti.cudenver.edu/resources/VETSNET/Vol15no3/VETSTestimony_SVAC_Ciccolella.pdf; Command Support for the Transition Assistance Program (Memo) (August 24, 2007). Office of the Undersecretary of Defense.

¹¹ Trowell-Harris, Irene (E-mail) (October 12, 2007). Director, Center for Women Veterans.

According to market research and anecdotal information supplied by women veterans through BPW/USA's *Women Joining Forces* (WJF) Program, "lack of networks" was a major obstacle for a successful transition both personally and professionally. This fact was a major factor in the organization's decision to create the WJF Program that facilitates women veterans tapping into the national BPW/USA network of working women who act as mentors, offer job leads and provide a professional support network.

One woman veteran in the survey commented: "I believe that although there may be many sites and associations that may offer assistance with this transition, they are not readily available. I would have liked to have had a conference where organizations like military recruiting companies and veterans (organizations meet)."

As a whole, women veterans surveyed did not seem to engage in the kinds of activities that appear to build the types of professional networks that can aid in either securing a job or a quicker adjustment to the workplace. Activities *not* undertaken by women veteran job seekers included joining professional, women-focused or veteran's organizations to find jobs, engaging a mentor or mining contacts made with civilians while in the military, to name a few.

An initial look at the results indicates that decision makers may need to look at a number of factors in order to craft programs and services that more fully support women veterans who are transitioning into the civilian workforce. The transition from the military to the civilian workforce is a multi-dimensional process, and this reality has implications not only for the types of resources needed by women veterans during their transition but also when those resources are needed.

Comments

As part of the survey process, participating women veterans were given the opportunity to provide comments about their transition experience. The open-ended question provided a rich source of information

"I did not anticipate the emotional challenge of this transition."

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

that helped put feelings, attitudes and opinions around the issues already reported. One way to understand these quotes is to view them as possible challenges to be addressed or pointers to possible solutions. Readers will find quotes from women veterans interspersed throughout this report.

Special Topics

In examining survey responses, several topics have already emerged that appear to shine a light on what a successful career transition includes for the women veterans surveyed. Results reported within the special topic sections indicate both areas for additional research as well as ideas for programs or policies that may support a successful career transition for more women veterans.

Special Topics:

- Effects of Self-Perceived Skill Mastery Among Women Veterans
- Impacts of Employer Attitudes
- Benefits of Public Service Sector Employment
- Impacts of Choices on the Job Search Process
- Reviewing Useful (and Not So Useful) Job Search Resources

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.

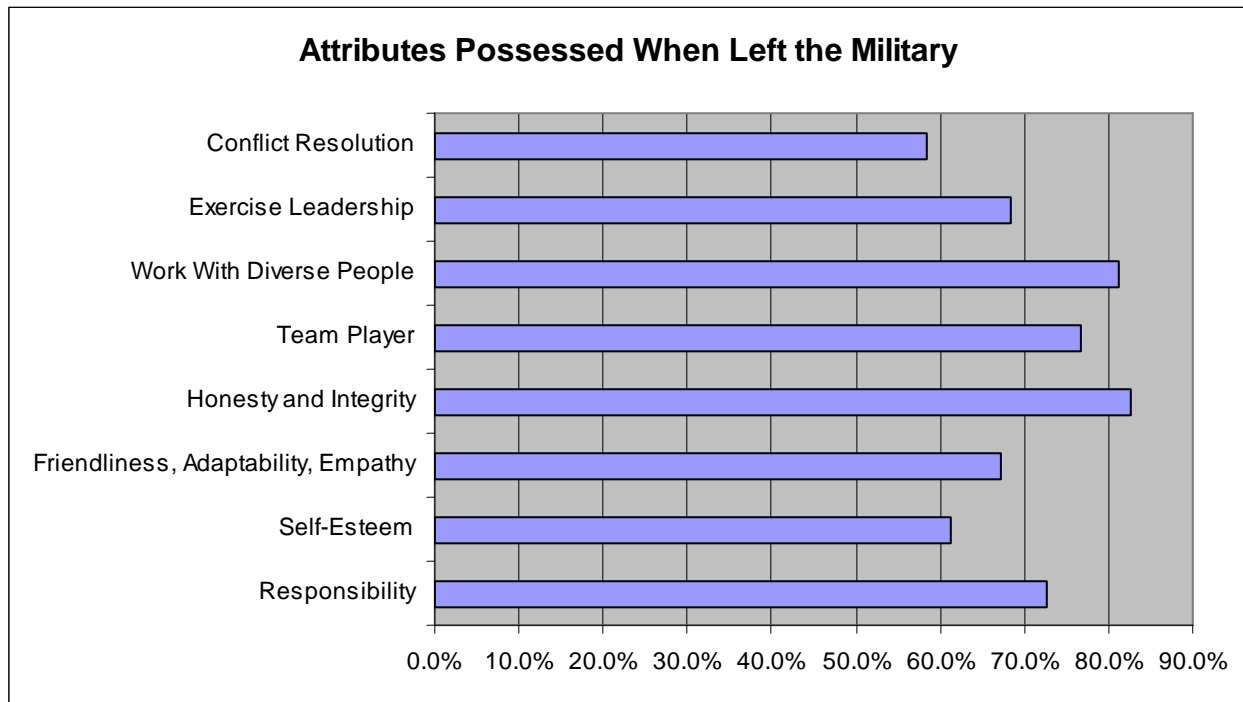


Figure C: Women veterans were asked which of a series of skills and attributes they felt they possessed after leaving the military. By and large, women veterans had confidence in their skills and felt well-prepared for the demands of the civilian workplace. See Appendix D for more information.

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.

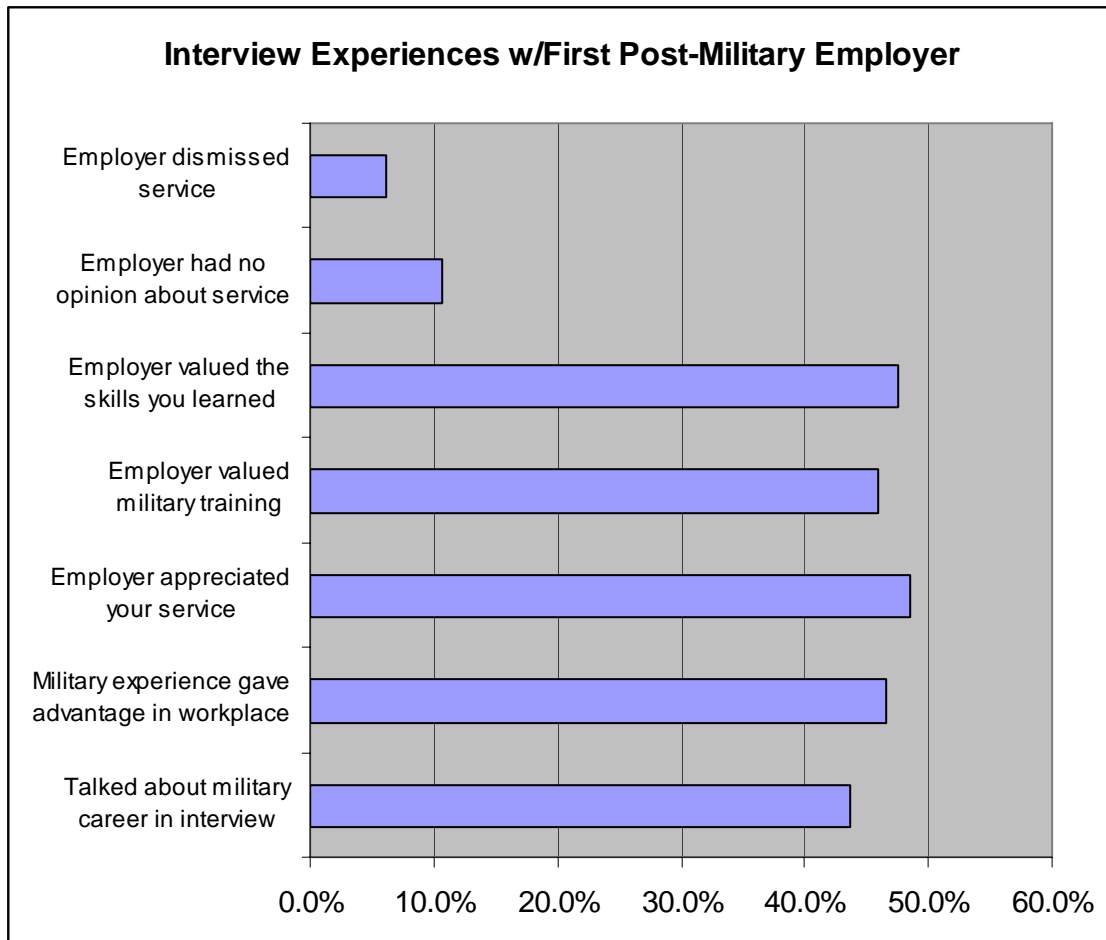


Figure D: Women veterans were asked about their experiences interviewing for their first post-military job. When asked about their experiences with their first post-military employer, many indicated that their employers showed that they valued their skills and military experience. See Appendix D for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

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.

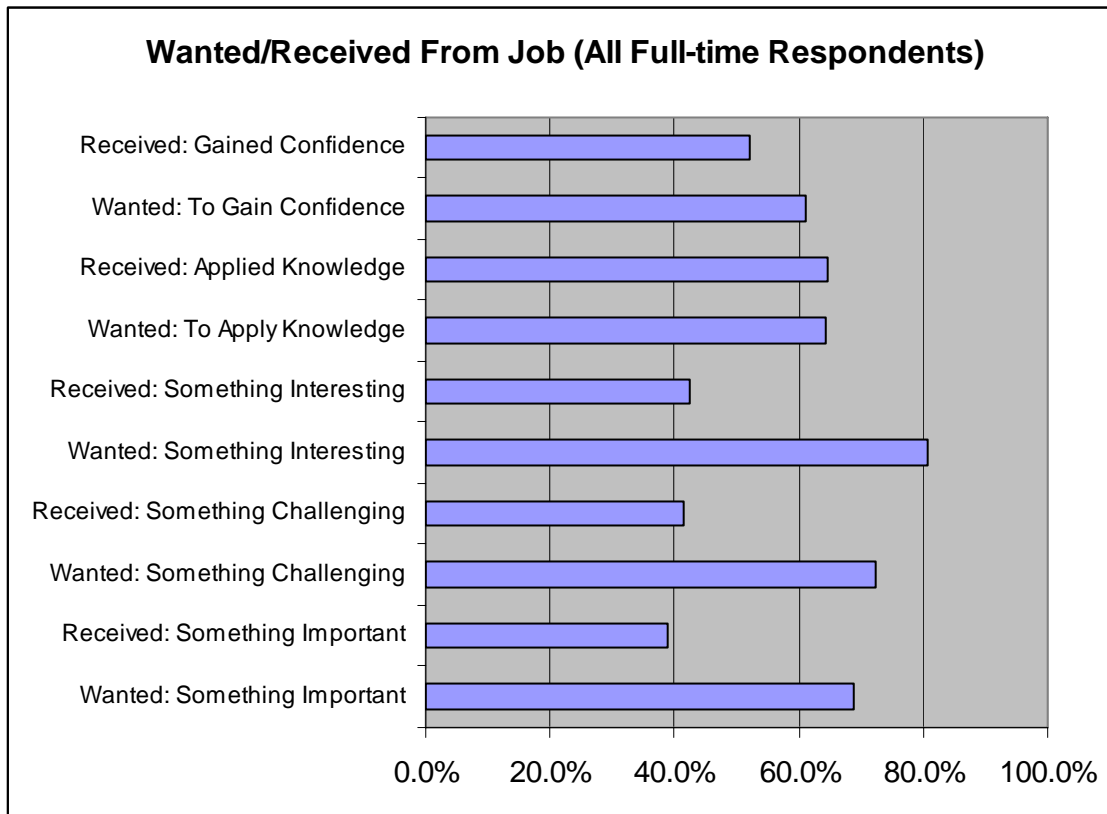


Figure E: Women veterans had high expectations for their first post-military position. They wanted jobs that were interesting, challenging and important. Their perceptions of what they received from their first post-military job often feel short of their ambitions. For more information, see Appendix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

Impact of Choices within the Job Search Process

Women separating from military service have choices to make, including when to start the civilian job search process, what resources to use, and how much time to take off between the end of military service and entering the job market. As shown below, how veterans handle these issues has an impact on how soon they become employed and how well they like the jobs they find.

Women nearing separation from the military can begin their job search prior to leaving or afterward. As one example, women who start the job search prior to leaving are more aware of the skills they have to offer as measured on the overall skills scale, found in Appendix D. Specifically, women veterans who started their job search prior to leaving the military felt, in comparison to those who started their job search after separation, that they were:

- Better at communicating in writing;
- Possessed stronger math skills;
- Better at allocating and managing resources;
- More skilled at communicating with their colleagues;
- More comfortable with technology and computers;
- Better thinkers, decision-makers, and problem-solvers;
- More adaptable and better able to work and use reason.

Given the above, it appears that among the women veterans surveyed who started their job search prior to leaving the military, they may be more confident in their abilities than those who started their job search some time after separation.

On average, those who started before separation began their job search about six months prior to separation, while those who started after separation began their job search about nine months after separation, a difference of 15 months. For both groups, however, it took about three months, on average, for them to secure a job once they were available and in the job market. Those starting their job search prior to leaving found a civilian job, on average, about three months after leaving the service; while those that started the job search after leaving, began about nine months after their official separation and secured a job within 12 months of separation--the same three month time span. However, it is important to realize that those starting earlier were able to devote nearly nine months to their job search (six months prior, three months after) as opposed to the three months their peers took. This extra time appears to impact the quality of the job found.

Those who started their job search prior to separation found jobs with which they were more satisfied. They were more likely to describe the job as being just what they were looking for and more likely to say they were better prepared for the demands of the position they accepted. They were also more likely to think that their co-workers appreciated their military background and to feel they had an easier time communicating with their colleagues.

As might be expected, women veterans who began a job search prior to separation were more likely to report discussing their military career with their employer during the interview and more likely to feel that this employer appreciated their service to our country. They are also more likely to feel that their military experience gave them an advantage in the workplace and that their employer valued the skills they learned in the military.

Practical Implications

There are several practical things that can be done to help women veterans make good career transition choices: encourage women service members to begin their transitions before they separate from the military, help them to appreciate the benefits of taking more time to find the right job and enable their understanding of all they have to offer employers.

“People do not know how hard it is in the civilian sector. So, they want to get out and not make plans. It is so important to make plans.”

**Women Veteran in Transition Survey
Respondent**

Reviewing Useful (and not so Useful) Job Search Resources

Success in entering the civilian job market can be facilitated by taking advantage of resources available outside the military. As is shown below, the use of these resources varies greatly and with varying levels of success among the women veterans surveyed. Some of these resources were, in a relative sense, seldom used successfully, including working with a mentor or paying for a search consultant (i.e. headhunter/recruiter).

Mentorships

Working with a mentor was used by about one-third of women veterans surveyed, and only one-third of this group thought it was a useful experience. As an example, women veterans who worked with a mentor found it useful and were more likely to report that the job they found was just the one they were looking for; this successful

mentor experience is a relatively rare event. Likewise, slightly less than 30 percent of women veterans participating in this survey reported paying a search consultant and less than 30 percent of those – nine percent overall – rated the experience as useful. Looking at the initial results, it appears women veterans seem either not to benefit from these resources or are simply not aware of them as viable job search options. Further research

“The TAP program I went through was excellent. I found (the classes) very helpful and stress reducing.”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

appears to be warranted to ascertain “how” women veterans make use of these resources and if any positive effects can be enhanced.

Coursework

Women veterans in the survey reported more success in taking classes to improve job specific skills, but still less than half – 46 percent – did so. However, more than half, nearly 60 percent, who took such a course reported it as being useful, and such women veterans were more likely to be happy with the job they found. Likewise, women veterans reported taking classes in the job search process as a successful strategy. Including classes in things such as resume writing, interviewing and networking, about 60 percent of women veterans reported using these kinds of resources, and half of them found them useful. These findings suggest that these types of resources have potential for expansion.

Job fairs are popular with women veterans, with nearly two out of three reporting they attended such events. However, of those who attended, only about one-third reported they were useful.

Membership/Professional Organizations

The final item in this category of external resources available to help women veterans includes veterans’, professional or women’s organizations that a veteran may have joined to help her find her first post-military job. Note that this question asks about specifically joining to help in the job search, thereby excluding those who may have joined one or more organizations for some other reason. When getting help in the job search is put forth as the primary reason for joining, only 6 percent of this survey’s respondents report this as being true.

Further, only one-third of those who did join reported that such joining was useful in helping in their job search. It is not possible to discern from the collected data if women veterans are aware of how these kinds of organizations can help them in the job search, but the results suggest that whatever the reason, these organizations are not seen as a job-search resource by the majority of women veterans.

“The transfer was difficult. Fortunately, I come from a military family; so, my father and mother gave me the support and benefit of their experience transitioning...”

Women Veteran in Transition Survey Respondent

Other resources studied in this survey are activities women veterans did on their own, without the intervention of another person (i.e. mentor, job coach) or organization (i.e. job fair, classes), specifically, working online. Using the internet to gain information on job search skills (resume help, interviewing, and networking) was

one area that was asked about in the survey; the other was posting one’s resume online. Both were used by more than three-fourths of the respondents to this survey, and more than 60 percent thought these were valuable resources. To conclude, women veterans found that the resources they could find on their own on the internet were more useful than the resources they had available in other forms. It should be noted that women veterans answering BPW Foundation’s survey may have a bias towards internet-based services given their comfort-level with completing an online survey.

Practical Implications

The role for support organizations appears to be three-pronged. The first is delivering concrete job-search assistance by offering job fairs and classes on job search skills such as resume-writing and interviewing skills. The second prong revolves around building on women veterans comfort with using the internet by offering enhanced services online such as webinars on job skills or perhaps even providing job search/resume listing services focused on women veterans. The final avenue for exploration involves working with women veterans to ascertain if engaging them in business and professional networks can, in fact, facilitate their job search process as well as their sense of adjustment to the civilian workforce even if they don’t originally perceive their help in securing a civilian job.

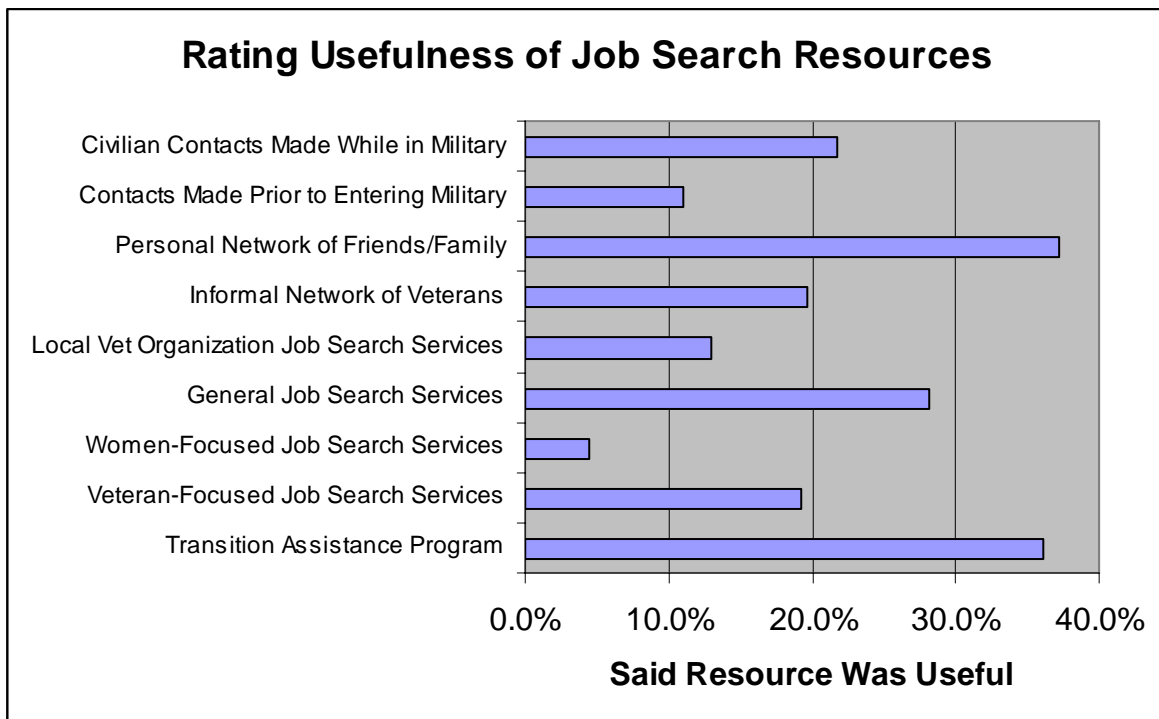


Figure F: What resources did more women veterans surveyed find useful in their job search: personal and family networks, the Transition Assistance Program and general job search services. Far fewer of them made use of or found useful networks beyond their immediate friends and family or targeted search services. For more information, see Appendix D.