

executives has some type of military experience, while among human-resource workers the rate drops to one in six hundred. Additionally, in the years since his report, Poriotis notes, the HR community has become younger and predominantly female, which distances it—both emotionally and practically—from the typical veteran. “The hiring mafia,” he says, “creates a de-selection based on lack of familiarity,” which leads to a bias comparable to racial or gender prejudice.

It also results in an enormous waste of talent and skill, garnered at taxpayer expense. You can’t grasp the significance of the problem, Poriotis explains, until you’ve sat with hundreds of transitioning soldiers, seen what they have to offer employers, and heard the stories of their desperate job searches—and then witnessed HR people’s unmistakable reluctance to consider interviewing someone from the military.

Charles Phillips, president of Oracle, a former Wall Street

stock analyst, and former Marine, experienced the bias firsthand. “People just did not want to even consider someone ex-military,” he says. “I’ve seen it in my career since I’ve been on Wall Street, and now in the software business. People will set aside a résumé if it has military ex-

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Most HR-people, like many Americans, also have a skewed impression of the armed forces, tending to see military leaders through the lens of Beetle Bailey and Gomer Pyle: as screaming sergeants barking at hapless recruits. “When you think about the military leader as a tough, heartless SOB, that’s not true,” says Bob Corcoran, president of the GE Foundation. “The military does a great job. They look at the same things we look at and develop.”

But the bias runs even deeper, grounded in a perception that peo-

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ple who opt for military careers are inherently unsuited for the business world. A lot of business-minded civilians can’t understand why anyone would choose to go into the military rather than embark on a lucrative private-sector career. And with that comes a class bias: Joining

the military is seen as something that poor kids do.

Yet for many—especially underprivileged youths—the military is a legitimate start to a career, teaching recruits the leadership skills necessary to thrive in business. David Moore spent twenty years in the Army, watching what he calls disadvantaged young men become “squared away”—Army talk for turning a recruit into a responsible citizen. After retiring from the military, Moore went to work at a community college, expecting the college to perform a similar function in a civilian setting. It didn’t. For a dozen years,

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A Few Good Men On the Internet

If there is indeed resistance to hiring ex-servicemen, it hasn’t inhibited a lively employment market from developing. A number of firms—many of them online—specialize in placing veterans in civilian-sector positions. The largest of the online employment companies, Monster, has a division, Military.com, that exclusively targets the military, but there are many more smaller sites—among them MilitaryHire, RecruitMilitary, and Corporate Gray Online—that are military-specific.

Here’s how they work: The employer specifies location and key words pertaining to job function in order to narrow the search of résumés. Costs appear reasonable. Military.com, for instance, charges \$365 to post a job for sixty days and from \$400 to \$1,000 to search through résumés posted by candidates. Most of these sites do not engage in contingency hiring, meaning they don’t work with individual companies or candidates, as a traditional headhunter does. Other firms, like RecruitMilitary, offer both contingency and database options to its clients.

Lucas Group, an executive-search firm, claims to place more than one thousand veterans—mostly junior military officers (JMOs)—annually in management and leadership positions in mainline companies. “The military provides much more leadership experience to people in their 20s and 30s than most CEOs have in a lifetime,” says Bryan Zawikowski, who heads Lucas’ military division. “In fact, when JMOs registered with Lucas go up against civilians with MBAs for leadership positions, our candidates win hands-down. There’s a big difference between someone who has only been at school and somebody who’s been shot at.” MilitaryHire president Michael Weiss agrees but concedes that veterans face a learning curve: “They’re so used to following orders that it takes them longer than most people to develop a sense of thinking outside the box,” he says. “But once they’re on the job for a while, they normally exceed the expectations of their supervisors.”

Employers must also be ready to deal with a high degree of impatience in their new military hires. “They are given so much responsibility in the service,” observes RecruitMilitary vice president Mike Francomb, “that they tend to feel they are immediately ready for greater responsibility in their new jobs.”

—VADIM LIBERMAN