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How One Dallas Company is Making It a Top Priority to Hire Veterans

By Rachel Russell, Director of Marketing for Epic Health Services

When 23-year-old Leah Nicholls joined Dallas-based Epic Health Services in December 2014, she felt like she was better prepared for combat than she was for her new role as a junior talent acquisition specialist for the company.

"I was so nervous," Leah said. "I had been a machine gunner in the Marine Corps and was

comfortable in that setting, but *this* made me nervous. I had no health care experience at all when I joined the company."

Having spent more than three years in the Marine Corps, Leah was medically discharged in December 2014, armed with a wealth of experience and a slight uneasiness surrounding how her military skills would transfer to

the civilian workforce, a common concern among many veterans.

What Leah didn't realize at the time was how relevant her military training was to a professional career. Skills like leadership, effective communication, and the ability to stay calm under pressure are all taught in the military. And that's why companies like Epic—a provider of pediatric skilled

nursing and therapy services, as well as adult home services—has made it a top priority to seek out these highly trained and disciplined individuals.

Helmed by nearly 11-year Army veteran Chris Roussos, Epic is led by a CEO who knows firsthand the struggles veterans face when transitioning into the civilian workforce.



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"For me, transitioning from the high-operating tempo of the military to the less intense civilian sector was a challenge," Chris said. "I had to find other outlets, like working out, to focus my excess energy after I left the Army."

Insight like this is what makes Epic such a welcoming place for veterans. At any given time, the company has up to 3,000 veterans on staff, ranging from nurses and therapists to sales

executives and customer service representatives. One thing they all have in common? The majority of them didn't come to Epic with the technical skills they now possess.

these events in July 2014 that Leah met Chris, who piqued her interest in the company. "I'd never had that level of interaction with a CEO before," Leah said. "Even today, he's one of the most involved leaders I've ever had." That type of commitment left a mark on Leah, and she stayed in touch with him for five months before joining full-time in December as a junior talent acquisition specialist.

or adults in the home, and our personal needs are on the back burner. We never have to question that value with veterans. They've clearly demonstrated this principle through their military experience."

It's this attitude of selfless service that has led Leah to steer the company's Epic Veteran Employment (EVE) program, an initiative that launched in January and focuses on how to best recruit even more military veterans to the

experience."

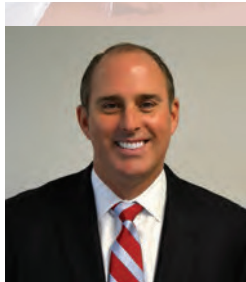
They found that person in Leah, who helps to oversee the extensive training and support that veterans receive once on the job. Besides a mentorship program with leadership, Epic has created career ladders in order to keep veterans—who are characteristically highly motivated—engaged, mapping out clearly where and how each employee can advance. Another welcome sight: Anyone who is in a supervisory role must go through Epic's leadership development program, which uses the Army's leadership guide, the FM 6-22, as a training tool.

"It's a way to remind veterans that their leadership skills can transition to the civilian workforce," Kristian said. "We realize the military creates outstanding leaders through structured programs, and it's something we can utilize here at Epic."

This dedication to the company's veteran workforce is what allows employees like Leah to advance from a junior role to a management position in less than a year.

"Chris didn't come to me and ask for my resume," Leah said. "He asked about my service. Employers want people who are going to go above and beyond."

And it just so happens that military veterans know a thing or two about that.



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—Epic CEO Chris Roussos

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"We understand that veterans bring strong operating skills to the workplace but may lack the specific technical skills," Chris said. "We're responsible for training them to be successful. If you take the time to train veterans, you'll have very talented teammates for your company."

So how does Epic recruit veterans? Attending job fairs plays a key role, and it was at one of

"When I was first introduced to Epic, I didn't even know home health was really a thing," Leah said. "I had no idea there were so many kids and adults who were sick and dependent on us to provide care."

Leah's lack of the technical knowledge wasn't a concern for anyone at Epic, though.

"What we've found among our veteran employees is an attitude of selfless service," said Kristian Daniels, the talent acquisition director for Epic. "Our company serves families that have dependent children

company. Since its formal rollout, Epic has hired an additional 300 veterans this year, with no plans of slowing down. Next year, the company plans on attending nearly triple the amount of job fairs and career events compared to previous years.

"When we decided we wanted to strategically hire more veterans, we knew we wanted a veteran to lead the program," Kristian said. "To make it credible, we needed someone who had lived through the transition from military to civilian life and could talk veteran-to-veteran about that shared

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