

# Ready to Work

## Why military veterans benefit businesses both as employees and suppliers

**MILITARY VETERANS TYPICALLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE LATER THAN MOST, BUT WHEN THEY ARRIVE, THEY'RE READY TO GO AND READY TO LEAD. THE CHALLENGE FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS UNDERSTANDING THE SKILLS VETERANS BRING TO THE TABLE. THE MILWAUKEE BUSINESS JOURNAL SAT DOWN WITH A PANEL TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES VETERANS FACE WHEN ENTERING THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE, HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HELP THEM MAKE THAT TRANSITION AND HOW IT WILL BENEFIT THE FIRM AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY.**

## TABLE *of* EXPERTS



**Moderator**  
**ANA SIMPSON**  
Director VBOC  
WWBIC

The Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Program is designed to provide entrepreneurial development services such as business training, counseling and resource partner referrals to transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard & Reserve members and military spouses interested in starting or growing a small business.



**SAUL NEWTON**  
Founder  
Wisconsin Veterans  
Chamber of Commerce

Saul Newton is a native of Waukesha, WI and US Army veteran. Saul served in the Army from 2009-2012, and deployed to Afghanistan for 13 months from 2010-2011. In 2015 Saul founded the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce and currently serves as the organization's Executive Director. He serves on the Board of Directors of the U.S. Veterans Chamber of Commerce, Feast of Crispian, and the Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative. He is a member of the Wisconsin Veterans Network Advisory Board.



**BILL BALL**  
President  
Grunau Company

Grunau is a mechanical construction, fire protection, and specialty metal fabrication firm, headquartered in Oak Creek, Wisc. Prior to joining Grunau, Bill served nine years in the U.S. Army, first as an Infantry officer with the 101st Airborne Division and then as a Green Beret commander with the 10th Special Forces Group. Bill served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.



**TOM PALZEWICZ**  
Business coach and partner  
ActionCOACH

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Tom Palzewicz is a certified business coach and partner at ActionCOACH of Elm Grove. Tom is an author, international speaker, community leader and business expert. Tom's passion for job creation consistently ranks him as one of the best business coaches globally.



**LAURIE E. MEYER**  
Davis and Kuelthau's Labor  
and Employment Team

With more than 20 years of experience, Laurie combines her human resources management experience with her employment law practice to provide creative, strategic counsel and defense to employers of every size. She assists clients on a full range of employment matters including performance reviews, terminations, reductions-in-force, wage-and-hour issues, discrimination and harassment complaints. She takes a practical approach to helping her clients achieve their goals.

**ANA SIMPSON (MODERATOR): PAINT US A PICTURE OF VETERANS IN THE WORKPLACE TODAY. HOW MANY ARE THERE? WHAT ARE THEY DOING? AND ARE THERE CERTAIN TYPES OF OCCUPATIONS THEY GRAVITATE TOWARDS AFTER THEY COMPLETE MILITARY SERVICE?**

**SAUL NEWTON:** We have just over 350,000 veterans from all generations, and another 50,000 National Guard reserve and active-duty. And there's a whole new generation of veterans returning to the civilian workforce. They aren't gravitating towards one type of occupation or industry more than another, but they are gravitating toward leadership opportunities, toward opportunities for continued service and toward opportunities that provide a continued sense of purpose.

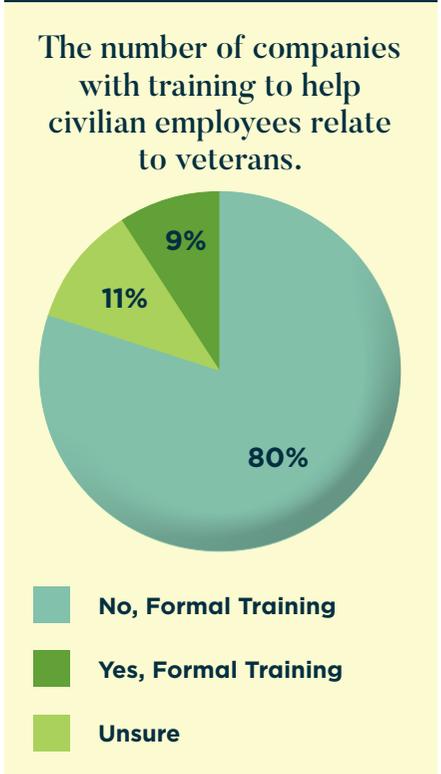
**BILL BALL:** We are a construction company, so we have veterans both in the field and in the office. Like Saul said, they are looking for leadership roles. While they were in the military, they were required to lead people in austere environments and make decisions in ambiguous situations. The challenge for a corporation is taking their experience and skill sets and molding them to the type of work you do. That's what we have tried to do - give the individual enough latitude and authority to exercise their decision-making ability.

**TOM PALZEWICZ:** Vets have a built-in work ethic that they learned in the military. They show up to work and they know they need to get something done. An employer does not have to teach them that. The military also teaches people teamwork - the ability to get along with co-workers. I worked on a submarine, which is pretty close quarters. I did not have to like the 99 other guys that were on the submarine with me, but I had to respect them and what they were doing, because their life was in my hands and their life was in mine. Those kinds of experiences teach you to work as a team.

**MODERATOR: ONE OF THE ISSUES YOU HEAR ABOUT IN REGARD TO VETERANS IS UNDEREMPLOYMENT. IT'S ACTUALLY A BIGGER CONCERN THAN UNEMPLOYMENT. DO YOU WANT TO SPEAK TO THAT?**

**NEWTON:** It's something I think that a lot of veterans experience. Employers don't understand the qualities, strengths and attributes veterans bring to the table. A lot of times veterans get funneled into jobs for which they are overqualified.

**LESS THAN 20% HAVE FORMAL TRAINING**



SOURCE: U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION. (2016). VETERANS IN THE WORKPLACE

**MODERATOR: TOM, HOW ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU SEEING FOLKS COMING TO YOU FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COACHING IN GENERAL?**

**PALZEWICZ:** I have done some entrepreneurship counseling with veterans to help them understand things they might want to try to do. The transition that a veteran goes through coming out of the military is challenging. There is a real gap between "here is where my life was" and "here is where my life is going." Navigating that gap is a very uneasy and challenging process. It also can be tough to transition to a civilian workplace, because the organizational structure is so different than the military. There's typically less accountability and veterans are often not used to working with people who don't do what they are told to do. Finally, there are a lot of military veterans who aren't sure they want to work

for somebody else because of the leadership skills they developed. They have proven they can lead, and they want to be their own boss. The challenge is that, because they've been gone awhile, veterans often lack the local relationships they need to start a business. This is one of the things that Saul and I have been working on - creating more connectivity between veterans and between veterans and the community. It's a challenge.

**MODERATOR: THAT'S A REALLY GOOD POINT. THE SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION RECOGNIZES THAT GAP, WHICH IS WHY THEY HAVE VETERANS BUSINESS OUTREACH CENTERS - TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO NETWORKING AND VARIOUS RESOURCES, INCLUDING BUSINESS COACHING.**

**NEWTON:** The lack of a professional network is what brought me to start the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce.

**MODERATOR: WHAT HURDLES DO VETERANS ENCOUNTER AS THEY ENTER THE WORKFORCE?**

**Laurie Meyer:** There can be a disconnect between the transitioning military service member and the hiring manager. The veteran doesn't necessarily know how to translate their skills to a resume or application, and the person reading the resume or application doesn't understand how to translate military experience into civilian job skills.

**NEWTON:** In some cases it's a literal language barrier. There can be a cultural barrier as well. The veteran may be very rigid or formal in the interview. They may not expound on answers in ways that the interviewer is used to. That's not a reflection of the person's personality. It's how veterans have been trained to communicate and present themselves.

**PALZEWICZ:** And then there are some things that you learn in the military that you just can't talk about. I went to a nuclear power school, but because it was classified, I couldn't get college credits for going.

**MODERATOR: ANY OTHER HURDLES?**

**NEWTON:** Employers have to check their preconceptions

**“The transition that a veteran goes through coming out of the military is challenging. There is a real gap between ‘here is where my life was’ and ‘here is where my life is going.’”**

**TOM PALZEWICZ**  
ActionCOACH

and stereotypes about what it means to be a vet. Veterans are not robots who just follow orders. They have immense critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, some employers have inaccurate assumptions about issues like mental health that make them look at veterans as more of a liability than the asset that they actually are.

**MODERATOR: WHAT ARE THE TWO OR THREE THINGS COMPANIES SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIRING VETERANS TO AVOID DISCRIMINATION ISSUES AND TO BE COMPLIANT WITH RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT LAWS AND REGULATIONS?**

**MEYER:** Most employers are usually aware of USERRA, which is the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. But they may overlook the Wisconsin Fair Employment Act, a state law that prohibits discrimination against both employees and applicants with regard to past, current or future military service. I advise employers to review their applications and interview materials to make sure they are staying away from

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**SAUL NEWTON**

Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce

questions that have the effect of weeding out service people; questions like, “Do you expect to get re-deployed soon?” Second, going to Saul’s point, you should not have any questions that are designed to figure out if they have mental or physical disabilities - PTSD, things like that. You shouldn’t be asking about medical conditions in any job interview. Finally, employers should be aware that the federal FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act) provides leave rights to spouses and family members of deploying service members.

**NEWTON:** One issue that guard and reserve members face is employment gaps in their resumes. That can look like job-hopping to employers, but the gaps are actually due to activations or trainings.

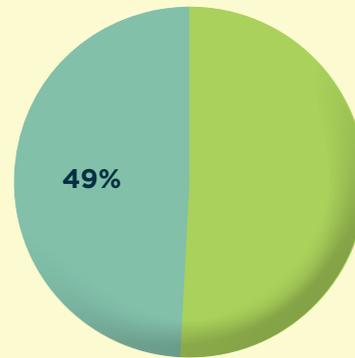
**MODERATOR: BILL, ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION IS DOING TO HELP VETERANS OVERCOME THESE HURDLES?**

**BALL:** We have a year-long leadership development program. When a veteran comes into the organization, we rotate them to different

parts of our organization. They shadow key leaders, learn about the technical aspects of our business, and see how the civilian side works and networks. At the end of the year, we have a really good picture of who the veteran is and how they can fit into the organization, and they have a really good sense of what they would like to do.

**VETERANS REPORTED MORE INCIDENCES OF NEGATIVE TREATMENT IN THE WORKPLACE**

Nearly half said they were subjected to entirely negative treatment or both positive and negative treatment.



Yes, Negative & Positive

SOURCE: U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION. (2016). VETERANS IN THE WORKPLACE

**MODERATOR: WISCONSIN WAS RECENTLY RECOGNIZED AS A LEADER IN TERMS OF ITS EFFORTS IN SUPPORTING THE RECRUITMENT OF VETERANS BACK TO WISCONSIN. WHAT KINDS OF PROGRAMS AND INCENTIVES DOES THE STATE HAVE IN PLACE? AND DOES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFER SIMILAR PROGRAMS?**

**NEWTON:** The state’s program actively recruits veterans who are separating from the military by connecting them with Wisconsin employers who are looking to hire. The companies have the opportunity to go to the military installations and promote opportunities within their organizations. There also are a number of tax credits and other incentive programs that the federal and state governments offer to employers

who hire certain categories of veterans.

**BALL:** There is a national union-sponsored program called Veterans in Piping, or VIP. It’s for veterans interested in going into the trades. The union teaches soldiers how to weld and work in the trades during their last couple of months of active duty, while they are processing out. We have hired multiple veterans who have gone through that program. They come out with an accelerated apprenticeship, and they are ready to start day one. It’s great.

**MODERATOR: LARGE EMPLOYERS LIKE MANPOWER AND ROCKWELL HAVE JOINED TOGETHER TO CREATE THEIR OWN VETERAN TRAINING PROGRAM. IS THIS SOMETHING THAT YOU FEEL COULD BE REPLICATED BY OTHER EMPLOYERS?**

**NEWTON:** What Rockwell and Manpower have done is show the value of being strategic in the hiring of veterans. They are deliberate about the roles, skills and qualities they are looking for. They are also committed to creating a culture within their organizations that supports veterans in the transition process. Making a commitment and being deliberate about hiring veterans is something employers of any size can do. The important thing is that there is a commitment in the company - from the top to the bottom - to prioritize hiring veterans and military spouses.

**MEYER:** Foxconn actually has a separate application portal for veterans, and its screeners are veterans. That solves the problem of not understanding the skillsets that are transferable from military to civilian work. Some smaller companies use employees who are veterans look at servicemembers’ resumes to help companies translate them. I think that first-year program you mentioned is definitely something I feel could be replicated by a lot of companies.

**BALL:** Any company - small, medium or large - can have a rotation program like we have.

**PALZEWICZ:** We work with a lot of small businesses. One of the challenges they have is finding and connecting with veterans, who can be really important for building a small business. Why? Because as we discussed before,



**Business**



**Careers**



**Community**

**YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR PRIMARY MISSION**

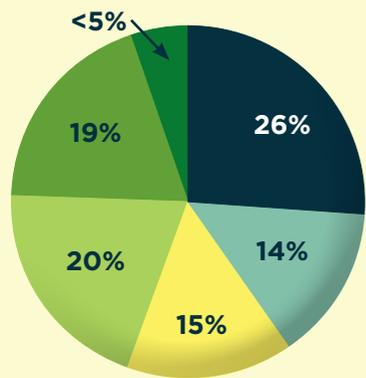
Check out web site for upcoming awards and programs



[wiveteranschamber.org](http://wiveteranschamber.org)

## TIME AT FIRST CIVILIAN JOB

44% leave within first year



- Less than month
- 2-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 12-24 months
- 2+ years
- Still there

SOURCE: U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION. (2016). VETERANS IN THE WORKPLACE

they have skills and leadership qualities that small businesses could really use. There also is a challenge on the other side - getting veterans to see that small businesses provide some of the best opportunities for them to utilize their leadership skills. When they work at a small business, they get to use the whole Swiss Army Knife and not just pieces of it.

**NEWTON:** Veterans are great recruiters. More importantly, pairing up veterans with veteran employees during the onboarding process can really help them assimilate into an organization's culture.

**MODERATOR: IN THE MILITARY YOU ARE PART OF A UNIT. HOW DO YOU SUPPORT VETERANS WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION? HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO FACILITATE CREATING VETERANS' RESOURCE GROUPS OR MENTOR/MENTEE PROGRAMS?**

**NEWTON:** Nothing has been shown to have a bigger impact on long-term retention than the existence of a resource group or peer-support group. They are especially impactful for veterans and military spouses.

My personal experience in transitioning from the military was very isolating.

**PALZEWICZ:** I would totally agree with that. The transition process - moving from an environment where you had a core group of people who always had your back to an environment where you are pretty much just out there by yourself - is tough. Getting help to navigate through that transition is important.

**MODERATOR: YOU TALKED A LITTLE BIT ABOUT FOXCONN AND THE SEPARATE PORTAL THEY HAVE FOR VETERAN APPLICANTS. FOXCONN ALSO HAS A SEPARATE PORTAL FOR VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES. FOLLOWING THIS EXAMPLE, HOW CAN COMPANIES UTILIZE VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES TO DIVERSIFY THEIR SUPPLY CHAIN?**

**NEWTON:** Incorporating veteran-owned businesses benefits supplier diversity programs, because veterans as a demographic are more diverse than the general population.

**PALZEWICZ:** From a small business perspective, it can be very difficult to learn the ropes and find opportunities to participate as vendors, especially if the business is a personal services firm. Helping veterans to understand the government's procurement process is very important, because the government purchases so many things. And because new, veteran-owned businesses often don't have as big a network as other start-ups, it's important to create opportunities that will help veterans get up and running faster than they normally would.

**MODERATOR: BESIDES THE VETERANS BUSINESS OUTREACH CENTER, WHAT WOULD BE A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES?**

**NEWTON:** The first spot would be the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce. We have done a lot of work to identify opportunities and point people in the right direction. Another great resource is the Wisconsin Procurement Institute, which is focused solely on contracting and procurement programs.

**MODERATOR: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OPPORTUNITIES CUSTOMERS AND EMPLOYERS CAN REALIZE BY EMBRACING THE VETERAN COMMUNITY?**

**MEYER:** It goes back to what we talked about before - recognizing that veterans bring both technical and leadership skills to the table. I have lots of clients in the manufacturing sector that are really struggling to find that workforce, and I encourage them to take a closer look at transitioning veterans.

**BALL:** Veterans are very resourceful. You can give them a left and right limit that's fairly wide and tell them the end state you want to see. They will figure out a way to it that your organization may not have thought of before.

**NEWTON:** It really boils down to empowering veterans, so they can achieve their potential. It can improve the company's bottom line, benefit its culture and benefit the community.

**PALZEWICZ:** I totally agree with that. One of best ways to thank veterans is to hire them and do business with them.

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**LAURIE MEYER**  
Davis and Kuelthau s.c.

Understanding your industry comes from

# walking in your shoes

And chances are, we've walked in 'em.

construction/  
real estate



finance



food & beverage



manufacturing



technology



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