



Movement as an Industry to Support Our Veterans

Nicole Sharp



I remember the final conversation and tears like it took place just last week. It had been something our family had been considering for some time as we reflected back on a humbling 13 years of active duty military service in the United States Marine Corps (USMC).

Throughout their military careers, the men and women of our armed forces train extremely hard to be mission ready and to meet and exceed military goals. Yet, as they and their families face transition from active duty service to the civilian workforce, they are faced with a brand new set of challenges and defining moments.

Our fearless leaders, retired Army Col. Garry Bradford, retired USMC Col. Greg Maisel, and their families know this transition and the associated obstacles all too well. So much so, that, over the years, they have made it a priority to leverage their firsthand experience, as well as our team at UniqueHR, to help the transitioning men and women of our armed forces.

A Little History

In the early 1990s, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commissions recommended closure of 98 major bases and hundreds of smaller installations and the realignment of many other bases and facilities throughout the United States. This reorganization resulted in operational commander status of COMINWARCOM, the consolidation and development of the dedicated mine countermeasures. Our South Texas community gained the South Texas Mine Warfare Center of Excellence in 1992,



Greg Maisel, Garry Bradford, and Grady Sharp at the USMC 239th Birthday Ball.

with the first two mine countermeasure ships (MCMs) arriving for home porting at Naval Station (NAVSTA) Ingleside. Soon after, the MINEWARCOM headquarters was also relocated from Charleston to Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi. Both brought military personnel to the region.

As you can imagine, these were uncertain times for those serving at those bases. Men, women, and spouses alike did not know our area or the opportunities that might be available for them here. Our PEO sprang into action and organized 57 different businesses in Texas to travel and participate in multiple job fairs in these areas. These job fairs created opportunities not only to work with military spouses, but also with transitioning military personnel with the goal of helping them

navigate the shift. We spent a lot of time working with those bases and Corpus Christi's bases to help people who were leaving the military find placement in our region within our PEO clients and local businesses and industries.

A Tremendous Opportunity

Fast-forward 15 years and it is a very different transition for military personnel. However, uncertainty remains. The current administration has made some severe cuts to the military. The USMC alone cut about 40,000 active duty personnel. While this figure may not seem substantial at first glance, the impact is better realized when considering that the Marine Corps only has 200,000 Marines.

As a PEO industry, we literally have access to thousands of organizations that

stand to benefit from the skills and experiences of our transitioning service men and women. Collectively, we have an extensive network of mentors, HR resources, tools, technology, and training to offer.

The Department of Defense (DoD) and other federal agencies have also worked hard to put programs in place that empower exiting military personnel to set and achieve personal goals, plan for their futures, and succeed in the next phase of life. One such program is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which helps veterans gain valuable career readiness skills that support continued success in virtually any career endeavor.

Perhaps An Industry Movement?

Over the years, we have transitioned our efforts to complement the programs that have since been put in place. Via our Chamber of Commerce, we stay heavily involved in our military community by getting to know the commanders here in our region for the Navy, Army, and the Marine Corps and letting them know we are here to help our transitioning military and family members in any way we can. Likewise, volunteering on our local community's charitable and leadership-based boards allows us to connect with many business leaders. They know we are in the HR and employment business and that we are more than willing to help returning veterans and their spouses find their next opportunities.

We also understand that many transitioning personnel move away from our region, in which case we help connect them and network on their behalf with PEO clients we have throughout the U.S. We also seek to serve these men and women in a mentorship capacity. If they do want to stay local, we work hard to help them create and critique their resumes and connect them with local businesses, as well as continually networking with present and past business contacts on their behalf.

Over the years, our efforts (as informal as they may be) and the great relationships we continue to foster have led to almost weekly calls about one transitioning hero or another.

Veterans and family members who we've helped over the years have found

great homes and success with smaller businesses and have since become strong advocates for hiring transitioning military personnel in their places of business. We feel very fortunate to have played a role (small as it may be) in that success. We feel it's our responsibility as a business to try to help these veterans successfully transition.

I encourage other PEOs that have a passion for building bridges and eliminating the language barrier between military and civilian entities to connect with local leaders in their:

- Economic development committees;
- Chambers of Commerce;
- Local military affairs/facilities task force committee (usually in municipalities that have local bases);
- State Veterans Commission local representative or office;
- Local congressional representative office;
- Veteran's associations;
- Public affair officers (PAO) at local bases;
- Wounded Warriors; and
- DoD Transition Assistance Programs.

Together as a PEO industry, we can make helping transitioning veterans a movement! On this Veteran's Day, may we always remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and the others who continue to put themselves in harm's way so we can enjoy the freedoms we do each day.●

Nicole Sharp is director of marketing for UniqueHR, based in Corpus Christi, Texas.

further reading




A recent HR article is available to NAPEO members at www.napeo.org/members/insider/may15/hr.cfm.



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