



The Wisconsin Veterans Network Press Release

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Area businesses identify best practices, areas to improve in local Veteran hiring practices

Milwaukee -- The same week corporate America celebrated *National Hire a Veteran Day*, local Milwaukee-area businesses joined [Lt. General Brian Kelly](#), the U.S. Air Force's officer in charge of manpower and personnel, in discussions about best practices and gaps in hiring veterans. In an executive roundtable meeting, the Air Force's head of talent management cited reasons why veterans make good employees.

"They bring leadership, (transferable) skills learned in the military, communication, positive work habits and patterns of discipline," said Kelly, noting that every year more than 30,000 Airmen retire from the active duty Air Force, or transfer to the Guard or Reserve. He said many seek a work-life balance, and they leave the military in search of stability after numerous deployments.

The executive group, comprised of 15 different businesses and nonprofits, also noted the transition can be difficult. Several of the executives who had served in the military said they found that private industry doesn't always hold the same values or team focus as the Armed Forces. While businesses are profit-driven, the Armed Forces fall into a public servant role serving a greater good, one said. Other executives cited the need to remain flexible with veterans who may need to schedule doctor visits from medical issues incurred while serving, and remain flexible with veterans who still serve in the Guard and Reserve.

Quentin Hatfield, executive director of [The Wisconsin Veterans Network \(VetsNet\)](#), said "employer fatigue" and stereotypes also make it difficult for veterans to transition to the civilian workforce, especially if they continue to serve in the Guard or Reserve and an employer doesn't understand the commitment.

"We are in the most prolonged conflict in the history of the nation," he said, referring to ongoing missions in the Middle East and Afghanistan, dating back to the U.S. military response following the Sept. 11 attacks. "And our service members continue to deploy and redeploy. Employers who initially supported their Guardsmen and Reservists may not have the same level of support as they did two decades ago."

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The executive group identified several best practices, including:

- Connecting veterans with other veterans through an Employee Resource Group (ERG). Several of the larger companies have ERGs for veterans and other affinity groups.
- Leverage veterans' abilities to work in teams and lead. From basic training on, the military trains its people to work in teams and lead, and this could be valuable for employers.
- Capitalize on veterans' ability to problem-solve and think outside of the box. With a wide array of experiences across the world, veterans are remarkably resilient and creative, and demonstrate mettle when faced with adversity.
- As a company, familiarize yourself with the [Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act](#) of 1994. USERRA is a federal statute that protects service member and veteran civilian employment rights. Among other things, under certain conditions, the law requires employers to put individuals back to work in their civilian jobs after military service.
- Be mindful - invisible wounds, are not always evident from the outside. Also be careful of stereotyping and assuming veterans have issues.
- Look at total compensation packages as a whole for veteran employees. For example, if a Reserve or Guard member declines health insurance, consider other ways to increase compensation since they are saving your company money.
- Show Leadership – while most veterans have served in some type of leadership role, they also look up to leaders in the workforce. Be mindful of how the leaders in your company act.
- Consider the role of values at your organization. Veterans have served with military services that emphasize integrity, selfless service, excellence, respect and honor. They often look for these attributes in company core values.

Among the participating companies, the amount of veterans in the organizations varied widely, with one business reporting 34 percent veterans in the workforce, and others citing none. Not surprisingly, larger companies tended to have more formal programs for veterans, like employee resource groups, and a better understanding of veterans issues and the law protecting service members.

The executive roundtable discussion was organized by the Wisconsin Veterans Network (VetsNet) to coincide with General Kelly's visit to Milwaukee. VetsNet is a nonprofit organization staffed by veterans to serve veterans. VetsNet bridges a major gap in the veterans benefit system: identifying and connecting at-risk veterans and veterans in need to the benefits and programs they earned through their service to our country.

Participating businesses and organizations included Baird, Foxconn, Founders3, G4S Secure Solutions, The Greater Milwaukee Foundation, House of Harley, Jewish Family Services, The Laureate Group, Mueller Communications, Northwestern Mutual, Revitalize Milwaukee, TopLine Results, Waterstone Bank, and Wells Fargo. The group plans to meet again to continue the discussion of best practices.

For more information on VetsNet and best practices for working with Veterans, contact Quentin Hatfield at 414-257-3624

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