

# Heroes MAKE America Playbook

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Executive Summary



Every year, about 200,000 men and women transition out of the military, and many need assistance finding a new career that utilizes their talents and supports their growth. The Manufacturing Institute is committed to empowering today's American Heroes to become tomorrow's manufacturing leaders. Veterans often possess the hardest-to-find employability skills requested by manufacturers and are well positioned to succeed in a manufacturing career with the skills, talents and training that are highly valued in the industry. Yet, despite these qualifications, veterans continue to face barriers to employment, and it can be particularly difficult for them to translate the skills developed while in the service to those that are required in the civilian workforce.

### **So what can manufacturers do to tap into this pool of experienced talent with the skills and competencies necessary to be immediately effective on the job?**

The Manufacturing Institute (MI) with the support of the Arconic Foundation has developed the Heroes MAKE America Playbook (The Playbook) to answer exactly that question. The Playbook draws upon the MI's experience with its Heroes MAKE America initiative, which builds connections between the manufacturing industry and the military community which includes transitioning service members, veterans, Guard members, reservists and active-duty military spouses. Through those relationships, the MI has identified manufacturers who are implementing best practice strategies around the recruitment, hiring, and retention of members of the greater military community. The Playbook highlights these best practices through case studies that can serve as examples of actionable approaches by which other manufacturers can begin or enhance their efforts in these areas.

No two of these manufacturers are in the same place on their journey with veterans – some are implementing their first initiative, while others have been doing this work for decades. The manufacturers vary in size, location, and in the type of industry sector. Still, clear themes began to take shape throughout the interview process. The MI will continue to add examples as we learn of additional “best practices” to inspire and empower other manufacturers interested in supporting this population.

## **› Communication and Culture Gap**

Though neither side is directly at fault, a communication and culture gap exists between veterans and manufacturers that, if left unaddressed, can derail even the best-intentioned veterans initiative. The valuable skills and competencies developed through military service can often get lost in a veteran's resume. Jargon related to military experiences often does not align with what a hiring manager typically expects to see from a qualified candidate. To effectively address this obstacle, manufacturers should not assume that it is simply the role of the veteran to adapt to the realities of the job market. Instead, successful managers, recruiters, and leaders strive to become educated about military culture and language. This allows them to bridge the

communication and culture gap, positioning them to identify and utilize the value that veteran employees can bring to their organization.

Leadership at Koch Industries have developed a Veteran Transition Guide to help transitioning service members successfully make the leap from the military to the civilian workplace. Dow Industries has taken a unique approach with its adoption of a Military Degree Equivalence program, which grants veterans equivalency to educational requirements on their job postings based on their military experience. This program benefits not only the veteran, but also the hiring managers who can widen their talent pool and more clearly crosswalk military experience to educational credentials in the hiring process.

## ➤ Opportunities for Veterans to Build Connection

Manufacturers with successful veterans' initiatives understand that support cannot end on their hiring date – the communication and culture gap does not go away when someone signs a work contract. Internal engagement and connection with other veterans and staff are a critical piece of supporting veterans while they are on the job. This type of internal engagement can take many forms, but two of the most popular are Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and leadership/management development programs.

ERGs are internal groups where employees come together based on shared life experiences or identity. Most companies interviewed for The Playbook have implemented ERGs and see them as an important strategy to provide mentorship, support, and personal and professional development opportunities to veterans. Smithfield Foods found that their veterans' ERG, Smithfield Salutes, is also an important recruitment tool that enables current Smithfield veteran employees to provide outreach to the military community through service projects and volunteerism.

Veterans often come to employers with a variety of high-level skills, but also with the occasional uncertainty about how to best put those skills to use. These are the ideal candidates to participate in rotational, leadership development programs. These programs provide selected participants with structured training across the organization, a clear path for advancement, and access to senior leaders and mentors who can help veterans along their career pathway.

## ➤ Robust Veteran Pipelines Don't Happen Overnight

The number of qualified veterans entering the workforce each year is sizeable, but they make up less than 1% of the American population. As a result, traditional recruitment strategies may not deliver the robust pipeline of veteran talent for which companies are searching. Manufacturers with successful records of recruiting from the military community have found that they must design and implement strategies specifically targeted for veterans.

For some companies, this means joining forces with established partners and programs who have expertise and close relationships with the greater military community, such as partnering with military bases to have onsite recruitment, outreach, and job fair events for active military personnel who are nearing the end of their service. Many companies, like National Gypsum, have partnered with the Heroes MAKE America training program which provides the company with candidates who have the technical and career readiness skills to be immediately successful on the job. For other companies, their recruitment efforts have meant developing a reputation of goodwill with the military by contracting with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, and others and/or using their procurement processes in support of the veteran community. Fender has developed one of the first supplier diversity programs in the instrument manufacturing industry and plans to use it as an opportunity to invest in Veteran Owned Businesses.

## › Focus on Outcomes

For the manufacturers interviewed, the recruitment, hiring, and retention of veterans and the broader military community was not only a moral imperative, but perhaps, more importantly, a business imperative. Many of these manufacturers recognized the positive impact that veterans have on their company culture, morale, and, in turn, their bottom line, but in many cases, this impact was difficult to quantify. In order to continue making the case for the prioritization of veterans in hiring, data and outcomes related to this work are critical. Some of the companies featured in The Playbook adopted a “from the ground up” approach to their veteran initiatives, re-envisioning the totality of their strategies. For Smithfield Foods, this meant taking a closer look at how they were defining the term “veteran” itself and expanding their data tracking to include military spouses and reservists. This led to a more accurate approach to tracking the broader military community throughout the hiring process and gave unique insights on how to approach recruitment and retention.

The best practices and strategies contained in The Playbook come directly from some of the best innovators in the manufacturing industry. Whether they are from a small, family-owned business in California, a multi-national employer, or one of America’s largest private companies, the practices collected here are likely to inspire new approaches and grow the body of knowledge that will benefit both manufacturers and the military veteran community.