

THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE OF HIRING VETERANS



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Equipped To Play A Key Role

Many arguments in favor of hiring veterans hinge on it being the right thing to do. But we know it's equally important to consider how hiring veterans is right for your business. What strategic advantage do veterans bring to you as an employer? Why are veterans not only as good as other hires, but in many aspects better? And how has the changing nature of the work force, and hiring practices, naturally lent itself to capturing veteran employees

Given the number of veterans who occupy the highest executive levels in the civilian workforce, it may well be that veterans have always outperformed their counterparts in the business sector. However, the need to create new kinds of strategic advantage both today and tomorrow is now making the hiring of veterans an even more compelling necessity for companies and organizations of all sizes and across all industries.

Why? Because the way the world works—*how we are compensated, motivated, trained, organized, and managed*—will soon be unrecognizable when viewed through the lens of today's best practices. These changes are already playing out at a rapidly accelerating pace in the sharing economy. And veterans are equipped to play a key role in creating the kind of corporate culture that thrives under constant change. Their training, attitudes, skills, motivations, and character uniquely suit them for building and leading teams to accomplish critical goals that drive businesses forward.

While there are always companies that hope tomorrow looks like yesterday, most have had to face the reality that the future is at risk if they aren't prepared to adapt. In fact, when CEOs are asked to identify their top strategic priorities, the vast majority answers: innovation. Despite the overwhelmingly consistent recognition of this priority, only 25% of executives say their company is good at innovation.

Define the Challenge, Calculate the Risk

Innovation is the umbrella term for planning, training and arming against the onslaught of disruptive change. In an MIT survey, executives of large companies said that 32% of their revenues were at risk of disruption. In late 2013, two Oxford academics published their prediction that 47% of current American jobs are at high risk of being automated within the next 20 years (NYT Mag. p.58, 2//28/16). Gartner predicts that human-machine relationships will drive better customer outcomes, but there is already widespread concern about whether a shrinking population of middle-class earners can support the consumer economy. Everyone sees the necessity of change, but few have figured out effective methods for achieving it.

Name the Goal: *Transformation*

Many very smart people are working to create innovative cultures and processes to catch up with expectations of the future. Some are managing to connect idea generation with commercialization and build the needed processes that result in new revenues. However, organizations that evolve to assure stability, predictability, and profitability are ill suited to breaking the molds that have defined past success. Fans of optimization, we realize innovation cannot substitute for real transformation – and that there is a commensurate difference between evolution and revolution for obvious reasons. Failure to admit the critical need for major transformation will create inadequate solutions and increasing vulnerability.

Obviously veterans can't solve all of these problems, but they can be part of every solution. They can help companies choose effective transformation— cultural, corporate, professional, and personal—over the continuing optimization of outdated strategies, processes and policies aimed at incremental improvements on the status quo.



DEFINING STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT

Let's begin with a few universal truths. The first is *"he who dithers is out of business."* The adoption curve is going to narrow, with later adopters turning into laggards at best. The future belongs exclusively to those who achieve strategic clarity about what it will take to survive and thrive and then reinvent the enterprise and muster its resources to create that reality.

Second, success rests on the behavior of our employees—from the CEO to the most junior-level position. The competition for talent is intense. Recruiting can no longer focus on finding someone who has done the job before. The job may change before the person hired for it even begins.

The question is not “what are the job responsibilities?” but rather “how will the work get done?” What new technologies will employees need to master? How flexible must employees be about location, hours, reporting, and rewards? Clearly the most critical competence is to embrace change—and we appreciate more than most that human beings hate change. We also recognize, for that reason, that it’s one of the primary challenges facing organizations intent on transformation.

Past Era of Talent Transformation

This isn’t the first time companies have rethought their talent needs. Forty years ago, business was finding strategic advantage in the new talent pool of MBAs. The top graduate business programs aggressively upgraded their admissions standards and core curriculum, branding their degree holders with the promise of exceptional performance and unmatched potential for future leadership. Demand accelerated from both applicants and employers, as did salaries.

The breadth and depth of studies across the full range of functional business activities promised smarter decisions, superior professionalism, and readiness to fill any role and solve any problem. Almost all of the business leaders hiring these wunderkinder were WWII veterans who believed in the value of training focused on hard work, discipline, confident decision-making, and effective execution. It was the birth of Operations Analysis and the Robert McNamara era.

For decades, the MBA was widely valued as the right credential for making a confident hiring decision. But questions about the relevance of the MBA’s training have increased, with many top schools revising their curricula to balance quantitative-heavy analytics with increased field experience, particularly opportunities to lead and participate in teams.

The Value of the Right Credential

If the MBA is no longer the one-size-fits-all credential for the future of work, new hires destined for a future in management must expect constant demands for agile reinvention, always faster turnaround times, unexpected challenges of all sorts—competitive, regulatory, technical, and financial. Whatever the challenge, our best employees need to contribute to new solutions, new processes, new procedures, and new policies. As never before, ideas have to come from everywhere, and they must be heard. We claim confidently, “there’s no monopoly on good ideas based on title, age or experience.”

Seek Out the Right Talent

The talent we need is not the specific job on the resume, but the ability to learn fast and show others what they need to accomplish. We don’t need someone who knows everything, but rather someone who can figure things out quickly. Someone who can adapt and overcome. We want someone who can judge options and resources effectively, preferably with some imagination and a splash of creativity for good measure. And then, with total focus on the mission’s objective, make it happen and own the outcomes.



YESTERDAY'S MBA IS TODAY'S MBZ



Look for the MBZ Degree

What if you could find these people already trained with deep experience in leading teams and achieving goals under high-pressure, uncertain conditions? What if there was a different kind of credential that could make it easy to identify, recruit and integrate these can-do managers? There is. We call it the MBZ degree—which stands for Mission Bravo Zulu, meaning mission well done—and every veteran has earned one.

What Does the MBZ Degree Buy You?

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University conducted a review of hundreds of academic studies, summarizing the conclusions in “The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Cliches.” Their findings focused on the traits valued by businesses, linking attributes and characteristics found

among veterans with the organizational impact delivered. They discovered that veterans bring a wide range of critical traits to their employers including:

Entrepreneurial Spirit

This encompasses a set of traits that predict business success: a high need for achievement, a strong belief in oneself and one’s abilities, and confident decision-making in fast-changing and uncertain environments.

Strong Organizational Performance

Veterans have inherent trust and faith in coworkers and their supervisors—a key ingredient for high-performing teams, organizational cohesion, good morale, and strong governance, all of which leads to enhanced organizational performance.

Flexibility in Skills Transfer

Veterans show good judgment and intuition about how to use existing skills for new applications, making them a valuable organizational resource. Military training and experience allow veterans to quickly recognize and act on opportunities to apply skills and knowledge to a whole new set of needs and circumstances.

Applying Technological Learning

Ongoing advanced technical training equips veterans to recognize technology-based solutions to organizational problems and find applications as needed across new work areas.

Coolness Under Fire

The veteran's ability to act quickly and decisively in the face of uncertainty and change is a critical quality for business organizations. Military experience develops accurate evaluation and quick decision-making, especially among combat veterans.

Take a Lickin' and Keep On Tickin'

Veterans are better equipped to take failures in stride, making them a great resource in business cultures learning to “fail faster, fail better.” Their training in adaptation in the face of adversity, hardship, trauma, and finding ways to excel in even the most difficult circumstances puts business challenges in perspective.

Joining Identity and Commitment

A powerful part of joining the military is the sense of camaraderie – of belonging - and the intense identification with the goals and behaviors shared by the group. Veterans in the civilian workforce are looking to experience that again—to unite in a common mission with shared values. If given the opportunity, they'll be your most committed and loyal employees.

Diversity Skills

The military is a deeply heterogeneous organization, and this experience makes veterans extremely accepting of individual differences in the workplace. Because they're exposed to virtually every socio-economic and geographic segment within their first five years in the military, bolstered and reinforced by cultural awareness training, they exhibit a high level of cultural sensitivity in interpersonal relationships on the job

Talent for Team Building

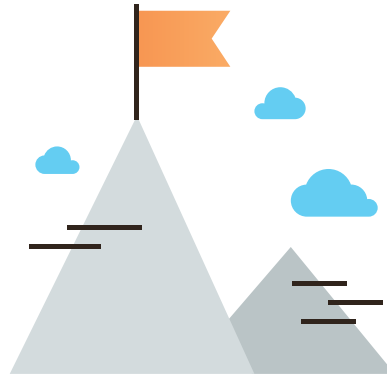
Veterans have an enduring belief that they can efficiently and effectively integrate and contribute to a new or existing team. They enable high-performing teams in the organization with their superior ability to:

- Organize and define team goals and mission
- Define team member roles and responsibilities
- Develop a plan for action

Given the essential role teams play in achieving business goals, this aptitude may be the greatest asset veterans can bring to your organization.



SUCCESS IS EVERYBODY'S MISSION



Making the Transition

What do you need to do to fully capitalize on this talented pool of employees and gain a strategic advantage for your company? Take the leap and commit to seeking and hiring MBZs. Offer support. Veterans are managing a major shift in culture and will need assistance to thrive in corporate life. The most successful transitions come when a company has a genuine sense of mission toward veterans and provides mentors—who are ideally other veterans—to help these skilled individuals acclimate to the new environment.

It's a small investment to make in return for a trained, motivated, agile workforce that will allow you to turn the promise of innovation into the reality of success—now and into the future.

Meet the authors



John Mustin
Founder, CEO

As Founder and CEO of Wasabi Rabbit, and as a Captain in the US Navy Reserve, John's vision is focused on building a culture that blends the best of his training as a naval officer with the deep curiosity and energy that sparks innovation.



Pat Costello
EVP, Brand

For Pat, all strategy begins with in-depth customer knowledge as the key to sustainable competitive advantage. She believes that every business problem benefits from looking for solutions through the brand lens.



Wasabi Rabbit is a veteran-owned marketing communications firm specializing in strategy, brand and sales-driving campaigns. The agency's expertise in customer behavior, digital technology, analytics, and today's complex media ecosystem leads to award-winning creative that stands out in today's multi-channel, multi-screen, and social marketplace. Wasabi Rabbit's B2B and B2C clients appreciate the delivery of innovative, business-building plans leveraging unique insights and fresh thinking to connect with target markets.