The Force Behind the Force: A Business Case for Leveraging Military Spouse Talent

This is a graphic showing statistics regarding the number of military spouses. In the U.S. there are: more than 1 million active, guard, and reserve military spouses, more than 15 million military veterans’ spouses, and an estimated 5.8 million surviving spouses of veterans. Military spouses are largely overlooked as a part of a talent pipeline – even despite the fact that they are well-educated and there is a compelling business case to hire them. There is limited research and data available about military spouses, and a business case for hiring military spouses has never fully been articulated. Below, we outline ten abilities, attributes and characteristics of military spouses in an effort to outline a potential business case for hiring them.

These are statistics regarding ‘Who are military spouses’.

93% Female – Gender: active duty military spouses are predominately female

Average Age 33 Years-Old – Age: Active duty military spouses are significantly younger compared to their civilian and veteran counterparts. Active duty military spouses are, on average 33 years of age compared to 47 years of age for civilian spouses and 60 years of age for veteran spouses.

74% have children 18 and under at home – Childcare: Active duty military spouses are more likely to have children (18 and under) at home compared to their civilian counterparts (74 percent versus 59 percent). Having young children, especially when a service member is deployed, necessitates the need for childcare, is associated with decreased earnings, and a higher likelihood of unemployment.

Move 10 times more frequently than their civilian counterparts – Frequent Relocations: Active duty military personnel move on average once every two to three years, 2.4 times as often as civilian families. Military spouses move across states line 10 times more frequently than their civilian counterparts and sometimes overseas. Frequent relocation can create gaps in employment, inability to start or complete education, unemployment, or underemployment (working in a position inconsistent with work experience or education).

These are statistics regarding ‘What is the employment landscape for military spouses’.

Unemployment and Underemployment: Military spouses have higher unemployment rates, estimated as much as 3 times higher than their civilian peers; military spouses are also underemployed; 33% report they are underemployed based on their educational background.

Earnings: Active duty military spouses earn roughly 38% less than their civilian counterparts. The higher the education level, the larger the income gap between active duty spouses and their civilian counterparts.

Licensure Transferability Issues: 35% of spouses work in a field that requires licensure, and of the 78% of spouses who reported they had experienced a military move during their husband or wife’s active duty career, only 11% acquired a new professional license or credential after their last move.

Access and Cost of Childcare: 67% say lack of childcare has impacted their ability to pursue employment or education.

Parenting Responsibilities: Military spouses are often de facto single parents due to spouse deployment, geographic separations, or unpredictable service member work schedules sometimes limiting employment choices.

This is a graphics looking at attributes and answering the question ‘Why hire military spouses’.

Resilient: Military spouses face challenges including family separations, frequent relocation, separation from friends and family, and difficulty finding employment or finishing their education. Yet, despite juggling multiple responsibilities, they report better coping than the average civilian.

Adaptable: Military families live with consistent uncertainty. Spousal deployments often occur without warning; families may be asked to move without notice; benefits and allowances frequently change unexpectedly. Despite these challenges, 68% of active duty spouses say they are satisfied with the military way of life.

Team-Oriented: Military support infrastructure largely depends on at-home spouses relying on one another through social activities, help with childcare, and overall social support.

Civically Engaged: Blue Star Families, in their 2014 survey of military families, found that 68% of their respondents reported that they had either formally or informally volunteered in the past year – significantly higher than the 21.8% of the general public who formally volunteered with an organization in 2015 as reported by the Department of Labor.

Diverse: The active duty military spouse community has a larger proportion of ethnic and racial minorities as compared to the broader civilian population.

Resourceful: Military spouses are often learning to use the resources they have available to them, and they create unique and innovative solutions to problems despite obstacles or challenges.

Entrepreneurial: 28% of military spouse respondents have either been self-employed or operated their own business, and 34% indicated they had an interest in online or work-from-home opportunities.

Educated: 84% have some college education or higher. 24% have a bachelor’s degree. 10% have an advanced degree.

Multi-Taskers: In a study of over 6,200 military spouses, despite juggling multiple responsibilities, 75% reported feeling confident in their ability to handle problems.

Socially Aware: Military spouses often interact with a variety of people of different cultures, backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities. The military exposes spouses to a variety of cross-cultural and social experiences, and interactions with VIP’s and the press. Military spouses also are asked to maintain sensitive information for security reasons and understand norms around operational security and safety.

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