

Form100 Consulting's Hiring Manager Guide to Interviewing Veterans



Congratulations! You have narrowed down the list of candidates for a position in your organization, and you're ready for interviews. If one of those candidates is a transitioning veteran, there are a few things to consider prior to asking your first question. This guide will help frame the conversation, so you can determine if the veteran is the right person for the job.

Understanding Military Culture

Only about 7% of the U.S. population has served in the armed forces and Hollywood hasn't done veterans any favors. There are some misconceptions which need to be cleared up.

The military is a large organization and is very similar to other large organizations.

- About 80% of jobs in the military are non-combat occupations. This means most military personnel spend their time in an office, and not in the field.
- The military solves problems which look like the problems your company faces. They might use terms like "mission accomplishment" instead of project budget, but the problems are the same.
- Most military members, especially officers and senior non-commissioned officers, are proficient in the standard set of office tools. They build PowerPoint presentations, use Excel to analyze data, and manage a deluge of emails and meetings.

Military members rarely interview for their next job.

- Interviews do happen in the military, but at a much lower frequency than in the private sector. I only interviewed for one position during my 12 years of service as an officer in the Air Force. My private sector counterpart likely interviewed over a dozen times in the same timeframe.

The military focuses on the whole person concept vs specific expertise.

- Military members are certainly experts in their core competency. However, when asked, they are more likely to focus on leadership traits over specific abilities. Performance reports emphasize what they were responsible for instead of what specific process they improved.

Service members believe in respect for authority and humility.

- They default to addressing people as Sir or Ma'am, regardless of age.
- The military is known for acronyms and short, concise communication. Veterans might give short answers and pass on opportunities to expand on their accomplishments.

Military members are comfortable in dynamic situations.

- It's well known military members move often, but as an officer, I also moved jobs every year. This means every year I had to learn a new set of skills and processes.
- It's common for military members to be comfortable assuming a position without any prior experience in the specific duties of the job.

Tips for the interview

You may be wondering what these cultural differences mean for a hiring manager interviewing a transitioning veteran. Here is some advice on how to discover if a transitioning veteran is the right person for the job.

Military members are taught “if you’re not early, you’re late”.

- Don’t be surprised if a transitioning veteran show up 15-20 mins early to an interview. While it might be awkward, it doesn’t indicate anything other than a cultural adjustment...give them a pass.

Your first goal should be to put the transitioning veteran at ease.

- A job interview can be intimidating to a veteran who hasn’t done many in their career. I recommend the following start to the interview:
 1. Thank them for their service. It will help put them at ease and acknowledge you understand and support their service to the nation.
 2. Give them permission to call you by your first name. They might slip up and call you sir or ma’am...it’s a hard habit to break.
 3. Take a second to explain what you hope to get out of the conversation, and that you are interested to hear about their past experiences. Do this before asking them to “tell me about yourself.” Veterans are good at following directions, and a few seconds to review expectations will lead to a more engaging interview.

Ask them to define acronyms and clarify when you don’t understand the context.

- It’s not disrespectful to their service to ask what an acronym means.
- You need to understand the context around their experience, so you can determine how it applies to your organization.
- It’s their job to explain their experience in your terms, not the other way around. After you stop them once or twice, they will (hopefully) start to explain their answers more clearly.

Ask more probing follow up questions.

- It’s the responsibility of the transitioning veteran to explain why they are the best fit for the job. However, they may need a little guidance in the following situations:
 - A transitioning veteran might give short answers and pass on the opportunity to expand. In their mind, they gave you exactly what you asked them for. They don’t like to brag and are concerned about appearing conceited. They assume if you wanted the details, then you would ask for them...so go ahead and ask.
 - Transitioning veterans may focus more on “whole person” answers when you are looking for something more specific. This might not be common sense to the veteran because specific abilities are secondary to their overall leadership ability.
 - For example, you might hear about a large project they managed, with 150 people, four nations, and a \$1.5M budget. However, you didn’t find out if they accomplished the specific steps of gaining stakeholder buy-in, building a team, setting a cadence and WBS. They likely did these things, but in their mind, it’s secondary to the fact they were in-charge of the large project.

Feedback, feedback, feedback.

- If your company policy allows providing feedback to candidates who aren't selected for the position, please do. Even if you hire them, give feedback because they will communicate your feedback to their fellow veterans.
- It's not a waste of time. Most veterans will internalize it and adjust.

Thank you for Supporting Veterans

By taking the time to learn about the background and culture of the military, you can more clearly distinguish if a transitioning veteran is a good fit in your organization. I believe in the value of military experience in the corporate world, and I am confident you will realize the value a transitioning veteran can bring to your team. Thank you for your support!



Founded on a core belief in the value of military experience, Form 100 Consulting matches highly educated, motivated, and experienced military veterans to private sector project management consulting roles. Our associates have the foundational skills that add lasting value to an organization and bring positive cultural change to any team. We are dependable, dedicated, and disciplined. We never stop striving to deliver value. www.Form100Consulting.com.