

Hiring Our Heroes: How to Employ Dependable, Critical Thinking Veterans in a 21st Century Workforce

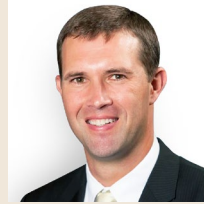
PAYCHEX
Business
Series

Coronavirus



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Full transcript

Gene Marks:

Hey, everybody. Welcome. I'm Gene Marks and this is the Paychex Business Series podcast and video, if you're watching me on video right now. Very, very happy that you are joining us. We've got a great guest coming up. Eric Eversole is the president of Hiring Our Heroes. I had a really interesting conversation with Eric recently about what his organization does. The fact is that they take veterans, people that are serving in the military, that are getting out of active duty, and they place them with employers, and they do a lot of work with small businesses and, listen guys, our biggest issue right now is finding good employees. You know that is becoming more and more of a problem and here is a resource that will help you do that. So we'll talk all about the ins and outs of it and what you should do to be prepared and the pros and cons of hiring people from the military. So, Eric, thanks, man, for joining us. I'm really pleased to have you on.

Eric Eversole:

Oh, it's my honor. I'm really glad to be with you today.

Gene Marks:

Where are you speaking from right now?

Eric Eversole:

So just outside of Washington, DC in McLean, Virginia. So just the capitol.

Gene Marks:

Very cool. Very cool. So let's start. Let's talk a little bit about Hiring Our Heroes. What exactly is the organization? Give us a history. Tell us a little bit about what you guys do.

Eric Eversole:

Well, Hiring Our Heroes is a national grassroots organization that works to help connect service members and military spouses with great employers across the country. And we really started out when there was a national crisis in veteran unemployment back in 2011, when a lot of our service members, especially those under the age of 25 were being shipped overseas, coming back home, and transitioning out and finding a really tough job market. Unemployment at that time for veterans under the age of 25 is nearly 30%, and so from the Chamber's perspective, we are part of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. We wanted to leverage what we had at our fingertips immediately to help these service members.

Eric Eversole:

And for us, it all started with hiring events, leveraging our state local chambers, coming into town and hosting great hiring events for companies across the country. And that's how we really got started. As we've grown and the veteran unemployment situation has been less about employment, but more about a strategic opportunity. We've shifted our tactics significantly to really connect transitioning service members and military spouses with companies that are looking to really amplify their workforce to meet the needs of a 21st century workforce.

Gene Marks:

You talk about connecting with companies, so initially I think larger companies, but our audience are small businesses and small business owners. Do you discriminate in any way?

Eric Eversole:

No. In fact, we started as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, really thinking about the small and medium-sized business and quite candidly, the reason we'd made a decision back in 2011 not to charge companies regardless of their size to participate in our events, was thinking about that small and medium-sized business. So all of our programs are open for small, medium-sized businesses. There's no charge, which is important for these small, medium-sized businesses. And we really want to connect that talent regardless of what size you are, because we know 70% of service members go to small, medium-sized businesses.

Gene Marks:

So you had mentioned about charging fees or whatever. So if I wanted to get involved, if I'm looking for somebody from my company, I have 10 employees in my business, you know, am I being charged anything by you guys? Is there any cost to the employers?

Eric Eversole:

No.

Gene Marks:

Not at all. How do you guys get funded?

Eric Eversole:

Well, through corporate philanthropy, quite honestly. So a lot of our partner companies are large companies that philanthropically know that from a strategic point of view, helping service members and their families find meaningful career opportunities is not only good for their businesses, but it's good for their supply chains. It's good for the country. So we rely heavily, almost exclusively, on corporate philanthropy to meet the larger needs of our... from a money perspective.

Gene Marks:

You know, when I hear corporate philanthropy, I just got to be straight out with you. So I'm a business owner. So many of my clients are also small business owners. We are struggling to compete against big corporations for good people, so as soon as I hear like, "Oh my God, you guys are, you're getting corporate money from big corporations." I'm thinking, "Well, they're going to get first dibs and all the best talents, and we're going to be left with nothing." So respond to that and maybe ease my fears a little.

Eric Eversole:

Well, look, you have to understand and I think this goes to the larger military population, when you look at military talent, this isn't just some big blob of people. They're coming from small and medium-sized towns. They're coming predominantly from a blue collar background. So big corporations scare many of them to death. I mean I grew up, my background, neither of my parents graduated from high school. We own a dry cleaners in Bluffton, Indiana. I came from that small business, that blue collar hardworking background, and big businesses, the process of getting into big businesses and oftentimes the concerns about feeling left out are really top of mind for a lot of service members. And so what I would tell you and any small businesses listening to this podcast is that it's really about understanding the population that you're trying to recruit.

Eric Eversole:

Military members and their family members, more so than anyone are looking for a family to join when they leave their military service. They're used to being a part of something that's bigger than themselves, and a lot of small, medium-sized businesses, being the pillars of their local communities is exactly what they're looking for. So I think it really comes down to what small businesses do well and that's your sales pitch. Make it about their personal experience and not something other than that.

Gene Marks:

So you and I are having this conversation now. It's April of 2021, already the headlines, Eric, and this is going to be released right before Memorial Day and I am betting, it doesn't take me a crystal ball to know that the headlines are going to be, as they will be for the rest of this year, businesses having trouble finding people. Right? I mean, already, we're hearing retail, construction, manufacturing. So fix that for me. How are you guys gearing up to respond to that and to help businesses? It seems like you've got resources for us to take advantage of. How are you going to make those available?

Eric Eversole:

Yeah. That's a great point. The recovering lawyer in me has to talk a little bit about the opening question. I can't help myself. But there was a there was a viral video of someone who posted a sign in a McDonald's that basically-

Gene Marks:

You saw that, yeah. I saw that as well. They were like, "Please don't yell at our existing employees. They're here. People don't want to come to work."

Eric Eversole:

Yeah. And I think that as we think about this as a business community and as a country, we're going to have to think about ways to incentivize people to get back to work and understand that there are near and longterm opportunities. I think for most military members, and I think this is one of the strategic advantages of military service, is that they're hardwired to really work through a lot of adversity and a lot of change. And so when you think about a lot of the challenges that have faced most, if not all Americans related to work at home environments and kind of a changing work landscape and jobs that may have been there two years ago, aren't necessarily the same as what they are now. Service members, I think one of their greatest attributes that we've seen is their resiliency and their commitment to lifelong learning.

Eric Eversole:

They know that in order to be competitive in a 21st century work environment, they, along with all Americans, need to think about upskilling and reskilling as a way of life and not just something that you do once and you kind of wash your hands of it. So I think that as we think about this new workforce and think about, how do we meet those needs? Understand that there's about 200,000 active duty service members who are transitioning out each year. There's another half a million military spouses who still face 30% unemployment, and businesses much like our service members have to think differently about recruiting talent.

Eric Eversole:

We can't recruit talent the same way that we did 30 years ago. Otherwise, the job posting in the classified ad is probably not going to work the same way it did 30 years ago. Sign out is not going to work like it did 20 years ago. We have to be more strategic and we're going to have to sell ourselves. I mean, we saw this with veterans, and I'll wrap this up quickly, we saw this with our veterans 10, 15 years ago when companies started this effort. They said, "Look, we got all these great paying jobs. I can't recruit any veterans." And I said, "Look, what are you selling them? What are you giving to them?" You just have great pay, great benefits. That's not going to be enough for this current generation in my view. c and where it leads to greater opportunity across the workforce.

Gene Marks:

You're raising, I made a note to ask you this tonight, you're jumping right into it now. So, okay. I do want to talk to you a little bit about the process for doing this, but outside of the process, tell me, what should I keep in mind when I'm looking to hire somebody from the military? In other words, what mistakes do employers make? What things do they do that they shouldn't be doing? Give me some advice for hiring somebody out of the services.

Eric Eversole:

Well, wipe the slate clean and don't come at the service members with any preconceived notions of what they can and cannot do. I think it's a mistake that happens more so than not. We either have our preconceived perceptions of service members based on what we've seen on TV, those are highly inaccurate, or we get stuck in this viewpoint of looking at their resumes like we do with so many underserved populations based on the four corners of what's in their resume. It's a huge mistake. I mean as we look for 21st century workforce, and I would say this with veterans, there are things like grit and determination and willingness to problem solve and work in teams that you can't measure on paper anymore. It's a mistake. It's a huge mistake. And then, we see this especially with the military spouse population who, because of their own service as a military spouse, they're moving every two to three years.

Eric Eversole:

And I'll tell you right now, a lot of these military spouses, highly educated, highly motivated to work, can't get through an initial screening process on a resume because they have these gaps in their resume because they've moved or they've raised children. And so what I would tell you is we have to get past the traditional way of how we look at resumes and that's especially true with service members. Simply because they were in the combat arms, an infantry person in the military, doesn't mean that they want to be a police officer the rest of their lives. It couldn't be farther from the truth for most of them. And so, to me, that's the thing that companies have to really think about differently, and think about pathways of taking a look at them differently, because this is a tough problem in this country is how do we get past resumes?

Gene Marks:

You know, Eric, I mean, what I'm taking from you though, is that the military itself, when people go serve their skillset may be different even significantly different than maybe what specifically an employer was looking for, but it's not something that can't be taught. And if you're looking to hire somebody that has that grit, determination, is a problem solver, would be a good team member, those are things that are very difficult to teach people. When you hire somebody that has those kinds of skills, you're pretty much on third base at that point as far as getting them home and teaching them what they got to do the job, which basically means, and again, correct me if I'm wrong...we shouldn't be stopping at just the resume. Is that right? And I guess you're encouraging employers to say, "Listen, you need to talk to these people. Don't just disqualify them because their resume looks like it doesn't have as much weight as some other resumes."

Eric Eversole:

Or stop when they say, and this is a thing that we work really aggressively with service members, is that on the other side of this equation they're not very good at selling themselves either. Talking about what the opportunity is and what their passion is and why they think they can get it done to get the job done, that's on them—but it is a two way street here and the companies really have to think differently. Even if you're a small or medium-sized business, which that's a large segment of who we're talking to here, think about reaching out to the Department of Labor and its apprenticeship program. Apprenticeships are a great way to bring someone in and apprenticeships aren't limited to... There's this notion that they're simply blue collar pathways. The Department of Labor significantly revamped these so big companies like Amazon, AWS is using its apprenticeship pipeline to train service members and others in technical skills.

Eric Eversole:

And a lot of times these are off-the-shelf remedies that companies can bring in that they can up apprenticeship opportunities, train them for nine months, make sure that they have the skill sets that the person needs. But we have to think differently about it. And so that's my bottom line on that one.

Gene Marks:

Eric, walk me through the process then. So I want to use Hiring Our Heroes. I'm thinking of a client right now, they're a manufacturing company. They need some good people, not only on the production floors, but also management in their facility as well. So I tell them about hiringourheroes.org. What can they expect to happen next? What would the process be?

Eric Eversole:

It depends on what they're trying to achieve. And so if they're looking for some one-off hires certainly we can help companies with that. We have great hiring events nationally. We do most of our events on military installations. We plan to get back full steam ahead sometime in September. That's one pathway. It's a great pathway for companies just looking to hire floor talent, hourly talent, and a lot of manufacturing facilities, especially if these events are in your local area. The other option is our virtual events. We've seen great turnout from the virtual events. One thing that we do differently than anyone else, we screen all of our candidates before they even show up at our events. We know that they have a clear view, or a pretty clear view of what they want to do and what they signed up for so we know the interactions are higher. So if we're doing manufactured events, they do that.

Eric Eversole:

But I'd be remiss, I think the best program right now, especially in a race for competitive mid-level talent, is our Corporate Fellows Program and our Spouse Fellows Program, which allows us to take active duty service members and place them with companies for up to 12 weeks in an internship program. It sounds too good to be true because it is in part, because the Department of Defense pays their salary the entire 12 weeks they're with the company. We have 16 programs nationwide. It doesn't matter what size you are. We do ask companies to say, "Hey, look, you don't have an obligation to hire them, but we want you to give them a fair shake. Consider them for a position." But 85% of our fellows get hired with an average salary of \$95,000. And so for a small or medium-sized business that's having trouble looking between the lines on a resume, give them a try out, give them the 12 weeks. Won't cost you anything, and 85% likely says that you're going to hire them.

Gene Marks:

That's great. That's great. So Eric, what companies wouldn't want to hire a vet? I mean, where would the match not work out? Why waste everybody's time or risk a bad relationship together? Tell me about your experiences so we can disqualify potential employers.

Eric Eversole:

I'm not sure that I can think of anyone that would not be a good fit. I mean, if you think about it from an employment opportunity, and you're looking for resiliency, people who go beyond just showing up for work, I mean, they will. They're going to work hard. I don't know of a company in America doesn't want that talent set. Now, I think some companies have some challenges onboarding some service members. I think that oftentimes it stems from those preconceived notions of what service members are. And over the years, we've seen some places where this has happened in the interview. This happened to me with a company, a medium-sized manufacturing firm a couple of weeks ago, who said, "Hey, look, I don't know if we want to hire all these service members because we think they're all broken."

Gene Marks:

What does that even mean?

Eric Eversole:

What does that mean? Do they have PTSD, are they going to... And I'm like, "Not any more so than the general population." But it's this notion that we've sent them all to combat, and so somehow they've come back broken. This is a charity.

Gene Marks:

Right. That's crazy. Hiring a military person, is there any drawbacks as far as longer-term commitment? When you get out of the military, this is my ignorance, is there still a commitment to serve National Guard, continuing service, certain commitments that might take them away from their employers that an employer might think that might be a constraint on hiring somebody?

Eric Eversole:

If they're coming off active duty, the short answer is no. If they're guard or reserve members, which I spent probably 20 years in the guard and reserve. There's always a chance that they could get deployed. But I would also say to that, first of all, it's illegal to consider whether they're going to take off. That's the lawyer in me again saying that.

Gene Marks:

Good point. No, good point. I'm glad you brought that up.

Eric Eversole:

But what I would tell you is that even if that lingers in the back of your mind, if you look at the long-term commitment of service members, and I'll tell you, if there's a premium related to loyalty and what service members expect of their employers, I don't think it could be any higher, because loyalty and that commitment to... When people get deployed overseas, these young men and women don't want to go either. It's that commitment to their country that's more important. And so for employers that are worried about that long-term, losing someone for nine months or a year on a deployment isn't something you should be afraid of. You should understand the longer term relationship between you and an employee is going to yield more dividends than short-term challenges.

Eric Eversole:

This is especially tough for small businesses. When you think about, I got 10 employees and one-tenth of my workforce may get deployed. It's not an easy situation. But there are ways to work around that if we're a little bit creative, and yes, I'd be naive to say it doesn't create some short-term challenges. Think about it from the longer impact is my take on this.

Gene Marks:

Two final questions. We've been talking all along about employees, employees, employees. What if a small business wants to hire a 1099 person or an independent contractor or even just a part-time worker, is that still something that they can talk to you guys about?

Eric Eversole:

Oh, absolutely. And for a lot of military spouses who are looking for some type of part-time work or are very invested in, they have their own consulting business, 1099 employees are great solutions for a lot of these companies. And this is especially important when you have some number of employees where they may move around a little bit more frequently. And so using the 1099 route is good for a lot of military spouses. And they can do some of their consulting work on the side still and still leverage their expertise, even if they may not be physically located where the employer is.

Gene Marks:

Good. Final question also is, hot button and buzzwords for the year is, or acronyms is DEI: Diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a lot of businesses, particularly smaller businesses, their awareness of that has really been increasing. A lot of people are looking at them, what they are doing to have diversity in their workforce and all that. Tell me how working with you guys might be able to help solve that problem.

Eric Eversole:

We'll amplify it very quickly, your efforts on diversity equity inclusion. If you look at the military population as a whole, military over-indexes with minorities as compared to the rest of the civilian population, and with military spouses in the mix as well, from a gender perspective, you get right to where the American population is as well. So if you look at all of our programs, whether it's a corporate fellows program, we're seeing a larger percentage of diverse populations, and part of that's where the military recruits from, right?

Eric Eversole:

It recruits from, 85% of service members come from lower and middle income families. Two-thirds of them will be first-generation college students when they decide to go to school. So when you think about diversity equity inclusion, I would tell most companies, you certainly need to look at it from a race and ethnicity and gender point of view. But beyond that, we have to look at it based on socioeconomic impact as well. From a military perspective, you're giving someone who is more likely than not coming from that lower middle income family. They're not the poorest of the poor, and they're not the richest of the rich, but they are getting two-thirds first-generation college students when they do decide to go to school. So I think in my view, it's a much broader net to pull from as compared to some programs.

Gene Marks:

Eric Eversole is the president of Hiring Our Heroes. It's www.hiringourheroes.org. Eric, great conversation. You're doing amazing work. How long have you been there working for those guys?

Eric Eversole:

Almost eight years now.

Gene Marks:

Wow. That's a lifetime

Eric Eversole:

Yeah. Eight years. So it's been great.

Gene Marks:

It is great. And you're a former attorney and also obviously you formerly served and also with the National Guard as well, right?

Eric Eversole:

That's right. Well, I retired from the Navy reserves about a year and a half ago. So a little more than 23 years in both active and reserve component service. So it was really an honor to do so.

Gene Marks:

That's great. Well, thank you for that and for your service. And thank you for coming on. This has been a great conversation. Hey guys, look, if you'd like more information, just go to hiringourheroes.org. If you'd like some advice and tips and help for running your business, please join us at Paychex.com forward slash WORX. That's W O R X. Hope you've enjoyed listening. My name is Gene Marks and we will see you again next time.

Speaker 3:

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