

Military Personnel Have the Collaborative Skills That Are Vital to the Building and Construction Space

Deliver Better Projects: Hire a Veteran

By Charles G. Wendt, PE, LEED AP and Todd Cole

In its annual 2015 Top 20 Hot Jobs for Veterans¹ survey, G.I. Jobs magazine once again noted that engineering, as well as IT and operations management, lead the way in career choices for those finishing their tours of duty. Look a bit below the surface at the skillsets that are required for these positions and you'll see why military veterans are so well equipped to fill them.

One of the greatest skills that a veteran brings to the civilian world, particularly the building and construction industry, is his or her ability to work in a team environment to solve problems. Working as team is ingrained in the military—and teamwork is essential to complete any project regardless of complexity.

Every construction project team is made up of people with varying skillsets and responsibilities, much like a military teams, squads, platoons, etc. Individuals with a military background know the importance of operating as a high-functioning unit, working together to complete a job successfully, typically in a close environment and often under a tight schedule and budget. Their lives have often depended on that learned skill.

From master planning and design to construction administration and building systems commissioning, military veterans provide a necessary and valuable benefit that many construction companies may not realize.

As an example of an occupation well-suited to military veterans with an engineering-like background, consider the building commissioning process.

Solution-Oriented

Building commissioning requires the careful and complete evaluation of building subsystems that include mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire/life safety, building

envelope, interior systems as well as co-generation, utility plants and sustainable systems—and for best value, it begins in the pre-design phase of a project.

Engineering firms such as NV5, commission new or renovated structures per owner requirements, with heavy emphasis on energy efficiency and optimized operation and maintenance. In many cases, a commissioning process benchmarks a facility's baseline energy consumption.

A commissioning team essentially bridges the planning/design/construction activities with maintenance/operations. This is where a military veteran's 'soft skills' really come in handy.

These skills range from an ability to manage teams and push projects to successful completion to client and project team interaction. The daily life of a service member is focused on developing skills, such as communication, that meet overall team objectives, whether that's operating a Navy ship or practicing maneuvers on land. Soft skills, such as communication, are honed on a daily basis.

Engineering skills are a given in today's business. A degree in engineering is a demonstration of technical credibility. Similarly, advanced degrees or experience in project management or logistics can help develop the necessary knowledge base for life in the civilian sector. Just as important, it's those soft skills developed during military service that can help guide a project to quality completion, on time, on budget.

A Process-Oriented Mindset

The construction industry is also highly process-oriented, and dependent on leaders to achieve milestones to get to a final product.

A structure, for instance, begins with a foundation and steel framing and then moves to concrete floors, mechanical equipment, walls, windows, until a project is built and ready for commissioning. Project managers must keep current activities on track while looking many steps ahead to make sure the equipment, materials and people are in place for the next phase.

In turn, the individual groups must manage their tasks in such a way as to best support the overall process. Unfortunately, very few construction jobs are completed without an unexpected challenge that requires some innovative thinking and problem-solving.

Military personnel are particularly good at process-oriented activities. There's been considerable talk in recent years about more collaborative teams and in fact the development of more collaborative project delivery mechanisms. In some cases, companies are introducing multi-person collaboration sessions to better manage projects...in the military, we call that a squad, flight or company

For every construction project, the goal should be to meet the owner's needs as directed by the plans and specifications. The focus for every team member should go beyond completing an individual task. Now, you get to the real sweet spot of a military veterans skillset. Service members are trained from their first day at boot camp to work as a team to achieve an objective.

If that means helping your fellow soldiers complete a task, then that's what you do. It's about getting the entire project or activity complete, owning up to their responsibilities and their teammate responsibilities, until everything is done to the satisfaction of the client. Our military veterans are uniquely equipped to 'serve' the building, construction and commissioning industry and, their unique skills can dramatically improve the delivery of projects. Let's leverage those skills. Hire a veteran!

¹.<http://www.gijobs.com/top-20-hot-jobs-veterans-2015/>