

CASE STUDY

Prudential's Veterans' Program Focuses on Building Careers



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Former Army cook Shelton Kelly tried to find a civilian job after finishing a two-year tour of duty in Kirkuk, Iraq. The only callbacks he got were from fast-food restaurants. Then Kelly heard from Prudential Financial, Inc. and learned about mentorship opportunities and training in information technology—the kind of career that fit perfectly with his leadership skills, attention to detail and work ethic. Today, Kelly is a process management associate at Prudential's operation in El Paso, Texas, working on computer coding projects—and on a long-term career track.

Recognizing that those kinds of job opportunities are all too rare for military veterans, Prudential has made a commitment to help veterans build lasting and rewarding careers. Beyond that, the company has created flexible opportunities for military spouses to allow them to balance a career with the unique demands that come with being in a military family, including accounting for the possibility of frequent moves.

By the end of 2017, Prudential had hired more than 180 employees in El Paso, where it opened its Business and Technology Center in 2014. More than half of those employees are veterans or military spouses. To accommodate the growing operation, the company has already moved into a larger building, allowing for further expansion of the workforce.

Prudential has been formally building its veterans program since 2010. Going well beyond simply recognizing the value of having former military personnel on staff, Prudential works to embrace veterans' leadership abilities across the organization. Its Veterans Initiatives group has garnered support from all levels of management, developed nonprofit partnerships and fostered an interest among Prudential employees to explore opportunities for veterans while also dispelling harmful stereotypes of veterans in the workplace.

"It's critical to educate hiring managers and human resource professionals about the skills and leadership that veterans bring," said Jim Beamesderfer, Prudential's vice president of Veterans Initiatives. "You first need buy-in from senior leadership, but it's also important to develop allies among middle managers and others who have the authority to hire.

"As a program begins, it's better to crawl, walk and then run, taking care to avoid getting ahead of yourself. We've found it's best to build on initial successes and proceed one step at a time. We also recognize it's important to learn from others who have gone down this road before. We're very much interested in helping other companies because there's no sense in reinventing the wheel."

How It Began

Prudential has enjoyed a long history of commitment to the military, stretching back to 1919, when its president served as the American Legion's first commander. In World War II, the company donated the use of its downtown Newark, N.J., building to support troops. And in 1965, the company began providing financial security to active military through its Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance unit, which continues to provide life insurance coverage for members of uniformed services.

Before launching its current veterans program, Prudential focused attention on veterans by honoring them at Veterans Day and Memorial Day observances, or by holding employee events featuring remarks by veterans. In 2010, the company doubled down on this work with a focus on helping veterans prepare for civilian careers and, in the process, bring promising talent to Prudential.

"Our chairman and CEO, John Strangfeld, asked that we put together a committee to examine how we could have an impact," said Chuck Sevola, head of Prudential's Veterans Initiatives Office. "That resulted in the creation of our Veterans Initiatives Office.

"The company's motivation for establishing this comprehensive program for veterans was twofold," Sevola said. "First, Prudential sees talent as a differentiator in the financial services space and wants to ensure that the company has the best and brightest employees," he said.

"Having access to the skills that veterans and military spouses have to offer is a great talent play for Prudential," Sevola said. "It makes tremendous business sense for us to do this. Second, it's the right thing to do. We believe we have an obligation to help veterans establish a civilian career after they have had a career protecting our freedom."

"I never thought for a moment that I would see myself doing something this technical. To put that trust and that faith in veterans, to send them to school and work with them all the way through, there's no way to repay that."

—U.S. Army veteran Shelton Kelly, process management associate for coding products at Prudential

Facing Challenges in the Hiring Process

“Once its senior leadership team was on board with the company’s work with veterans, Prudential began training hiring managers,” Beamesderfer said. “This training included educating HR professionals about the value veterans bring to the job, as well as dismissing stereotypes associated with servicemen and servicewomen. Prudential also developed a curriculum for hiring managers to dispel myths about military service and has begun to roll out a web-based training program focused on the value veterans bring to the workplace.”

That segment of the process—educating hiring managers and dispelling stereotypes—may present some of the biggest hardships for companies that want to establish initiatives for veterans.

“We debunked myths about PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], for example, through training administered by an employee who is a veteran,” Beamesderfer said. “Participants came to understand that while there are certainly incidences of veterans suffering from PTSD, there

are also occurrences of it outside of the military. In fact, the rate of occurrence in the military is not much different than what you see in the public. Without education about the facts on this issue, hiring managers only go with what they think they know, and that can box out capable veterans.

“Another important piece of this process,” Beamesderfer said, “is the two-way translation of skills. Veterans need to be able to speak about their skills and experiences in a way that hiring managers understand. In turn, hiring managers need a better grasp of the range of veterans’ skills and how they might benefit their organizations.

“A hiring manager might say, ‘I only want to hire a Java developer from one of our competitors to fill a vacancy.’ While this attitude is understandable, it’s very shortsighted,” Beamesderfer explained. “Hiring managers need to be able to cast a wider net. That’s a big challenge for anybody. How do we get over that hurdle?”

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Getting a Helping Hand

The first program launched by Prudential's Veterans Initiatives Office was a work-study effort known as VETalent, primarily focused on education, training and employment for post-9/11 service members. When this fledgling program saw early successes, the Prudential team looked for a qualified partner to administer the program. According to Sevola, Workforce Opportunity Services (WOS), a nonprofit established at Columbia University and led by Arthur Langer, Columbia's academic director of M.S. in technology management programs, seemed to be an ideal partner.

"Langer had partnered with Prudential in 2005 on a work-study program designed to benefit disadvantaged youths by giving them insight into potential technology careers with Prudential. Based on this prior success, it made sense to pursue the veterans initiative with their assistance," Beamesderfer said.

"WOS is an expert in meeting the needs of underserved populations. They know how to create the right environment to facilitate learning," he said. "This program was a marriage of two ideas between Prudential and WOS. We started with just an outline of what hiring managers were expecting from candidates. From that, WOS developed a full program to transform VETalent to focus on military veterans."

The mission of WOS is to recruit underserved adults and veterans for early career opportunities through various skill-based education and mentoring programs. Since it

was founded in 2005, the New York-based organization has partnered with more than 50 corporations at more than 35 locations around the United States, with many of those companies using the WOS veterans' curriculum and training program.

"Langer, the chairman and founder of WOS, also had extensive contacts with universities and colleges that allowed Prudential to quickly establish classroom opportunities for the VETalent curriculum," Beamesderfer said.

Prudential started the program in one of its offices and has since expanded to six Prudential locations and "almost every business unit," he said.

"Every time we had an additional location, Art [Langer] had contacts who could get the program up and running," Beamesderfer said. "And WOS can tailor a curriculum to meet the business need. We started the program focused on careers in information technology and soon branched into operations, customer service, project management and other areas."

The program proved to be so effective in helping veterans and transitioning service members, like Shelton Kelly, find meaningful employment opportunities that in 2012 the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation honored Prudential with its Hiring Our Heroes Post-9/11 Veteran Employment Award.



How the Work-Study Program Operates

Although Prudential's veterans initiative has many facets, the WOS work-study program is its signature piece. For example, a business unit may have an immediate need for five quality assurance analysts. The unit's senior personnel will source hires through traditional means, but they may also approach Sevola and his staff, expressing an interest in filling the openings with veterans. Prudential's Veterans Initiatives connects WOS staffers with the hiring manager. Once WOS determines the manager's needs, the organization contacts one of its academic partners. In El Paso, for instance, WOS has agreements with the University of Texas-El Paso and El Paso Community College to establish curricula for certain positions. WOS works with the schools to start recruiting and sourcing people who have the skills and attributes required for the role.

"When working with a business, we first understand how many people and what skills are needed," Sevola said. "Based on those projections, we identify a group of people for precertification. Through testing, activities and group projects, we ultimately narrow down the field of potential candidates. It's all designed to see if the candidates are right for us—and if we're right for them."

During the next phase, candidates are selected for a course of study with WOS' academic partner. It may include several weeks of on-the-job training, which provides candidates with opportunities to work as apprentices and collaborate with mentors. Candidates who complete this phase become employees of WOS and perform consulting work with Prudential. When candidates reach the requisite skill level, Prudential has the option to hire them as full-time employees.

“It’s really hard for us, the Army wives. Most employers don’t want to spend money to train you because they know that you’re leaving in three years. Prudential works with military life. I don’t need to quit my job when my husband receives orders. The job will go with me.”

—Military spouse Patty Perez,
executive assistant at PGIM Real Estate, a subsidiary of Prudential

“Once candidates enter the classroom phase, they earn a stipend ‘because we want them to focus on learning’ and not be concerned about paying bills and putting food on the table,” Beamesderfer said.

“They’re paid from day one, and a gradual increase of pay and benefits makes for a good success rate,” he said. “The individuals get a training program they don’t have to pay for out of pocket or use their GI Bill benefits for. They learn side by side with colleagues, and they get paid to do it.”

Although Prudential does not publicly share data related to the work-study program, Beamesderfer said the company has had more than 100 people complete the program and get hired by Prudential full-time. Attrition rates for employees who are hired through the program are “on par or better” than Prudential’s attrition rates throughout the company.

Prudential expanded the program to include military spouses in 2014.

“We see spouses as a hugely underutilized talent pool,” Sevola said. “We know it is good business to draw on their talents, and it’s also the right thing to do. Repeated surveys and industry data report that this group is resourceful, loyal and adaptable—all necessary characteristics for life as a military spouse but also traits that are highly sought-after by hiring managers. We’re also introducing job portability, which allows spouses to take their jobs with them when their family is transferred. It allows us to continue benefiting from their training and experience, and it lets spouses not only retain their income stream but build long-term, meaningful careers.”

Prudential developed a strategy built on five pillars:



Education, Training and Employment

“We want to develop a talent channel of veterans into Prudential to support our staffing needs. We also are looking to reinforce our leadership role in eliminating barriers to veteran employment,” Sevola said. “Part of our mission is to work with other organizations to help them establish their own veterans initiatives.”



Employee Engagement

“This is how we harness the passion of our employees to work on veterans-related issues,” Sevola said. “A big part of this effort is Prudential’s business resource group, VetNet, which has grown from just 50 when it began in 2010 to more than 600 members across the country. VetNet’s membership includes veterans and reservists, but also boasts an even larger number of civilian employees who are interested in supporting veterans and their causes.”

In 2015, Prudential partnered with the USO to open a new hospitality center for traveling service members and their families at Newark Liberty International Airport. Today, it has more employees volunteering at the USO facility than any other company.



Thought Leadership

Prudential works with a variety of organizations and academic institutions to bring insight about the employment and financial challenges that are unique to veterans and transitioning military service members and their families. The company partners with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University—a think tank devoted to advancing the lives of veterans and their families—which recently produced a three-part research series on the barriers to employment for military spouses. Prudential is also collaborating with the University of Southern California to create a series of publications called “The State of the American Veteran,” intended to help hiring managers and HR professionals better understand how to hire and work with veterans.

Prudential is working with the Henry Jackson Foundation on a study that examines the challenges veterans face during their first three years after leaving the military. An initial finding from the study is that far fewer veterans suffer from PTSD than generally thought.

“We’re helping to educate and inform people on this issue and others like it,” Sevola said. “It’s important for us to do everything we can to identify and understand problems veterans face as they seek and enter employment.”



Corporate Giving

Prudential provides grants and sponsorships to several organizations, like the USO facility at Newark Airport, to support activities for veterans and service members. It has also supported the TAPS program, which provides assistance to surviving family members of deceased service members and veterans.

Sevola explained, “We want to address veterans’ issues broadly. We know that providing them with much-needed services can make a tremendous difference to them and their families.”



Veteran and Military Business Support

This pillar concentrates on veterans’ financial readiness as they enter civilian life.

“We hear anecdotally that as veterans make the transition, they need better preparation to deal effectively with financial matters,” Sevola said.

To help, Prudential partnered with the USO’s Pathfinder program, a concierge transition service, to assist with matters such as legal support or insurance protection. A counselor refers veterans to providers that can help meet these needs, including Prudential’s financial wellness and education platform.

3 Key Takeaways:

Transferring the success at Prudential to your company

1 Start at the top

Engage your company’s executives to be the driving force behind your veteran employment program.

Prudential’s Chairman and CEO lead the charge by developing a committee to examine the impact of their veterans program.

Need a resource? Share “The Business Case Study for Hiring Veterans” in the SHRM Foundation’s guidebook, *The Recruitment, Hiring, Retention & Engagement of Military Veterans*.

2 Educate your team

Implement training for employees and supervisors to highlight the value that veterans can bring to the workplace and to dispel common myths and stereotypes associated with service members.

Prudential was able to educate its HR professionals and hiring managers by developing web-based training to address the knowledge gap.

Need a resource? The SHRM Foundation partnered with PsychArmor Institute®, a nonprofit that offers free online training, and designed a program to educate HR professionals on best practices to earn a Veterans at Work Certificate.

3 Build your network

Expand your reach and contact local nonprofit organizations that work with veterans to learn more about job fairs or job boards that focus on veterans in your community.

Prudential’s work-study program may be unique to the company, but any company can successfully replicate its creative approach to target and recruit veterans.

Need a resource? Contact the SHRM Foundation or your local SHRM chapter to learn how you can collaborate and give your company a creative and competitive edge in the community.



The SHRM Foundation Presents: **Veterans at Work Certificate** Sponsored by Comcast NBCUniversal

This educational program from the SHRM Foundation will share best practices to attract, hire, and retain veterans in your workplace. This FREE program – developed for HR professionals, hiring managers, and front-line supervisors – will help you better understand the value veterans bring to your workplace and how to engage and integrate veterans into your organization.

Complete the program in three easy steps:

1. Read the SHRM Foundation's latest guidebook, *The Recruitment, Hiring, Retention & Engagement of Military Veterans*
2. Watch selected training from PsychArmor Institute® to boost your learning
3. Complete the short corresponding quizzes to cement what you've learned

After you complete these three steps, the SHRM Foundation will ask that you evaluate the program to receive your **Veterans at Work Certificate** – which includes an official hard-copy certificate and a digital badge.

All SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP credential-holders can earn 10 professional development credits toward recertification!

Visit the SHRM Foundation's website for more program information, and [download a free copy of the guidebook today.](#)

What It All Means

The benefits associated with hiring veterans, as well as the challenges that come with establishing a veterans' initiative, were examined at a February 2017 forum sponsored by the SHRM Foundation. Sixty thought leaders and stakeholders connected to veteran employment attended the event.

Participants were asked to identify potential strengths and opportunities with hiring veterans. The strengths cited most often were "quality of character," "business compatibility" and "skilled talent." Among the opportunities associated with hiring veterans, participants pointed to "enhanced productivity and performance," "improved market strength and bottom line" and "source of talent."

Based on the results at Prudential, it is hard to argue with those conclusions.

The creation of a veterans' program is a complex process and goes far beyond simply recognizing the value of having former military personnel on staff. It requires the backing of all levels of management, the pursuit of partnerships in the nonprofit sector and a willingness to learn more about veterans and dispel any stereotypes that may exist about former servicemen and servicewomen.

Prudential's military talent brings many of the "soft skills" they developed through their life experiences, Beamesderfer said. Teaching the hard skills that certain civilian jobs require "is the easier part," he said, adding that the right attitude and the willingness to learn make all the difference.

"We like to say that veterans develop leadership skills as a part of their military service," Sevola said. "At all

levels of the military, you are immediately exposed to the need to be a leader, whether it's formal or informal. It's a valuable trait. We also talk about their mission-focused approach. The military is a results-oriented organization, where it is extremely important to get things done on time and on budget.

"Prudential has also learned that veterans have strong interpersonal skills, an ability to work with people and default to teamwork," Sevola said. "Their time in the military strengthens their attention to detail and their experience working with complex pieces of equipment, which gives them a competitive advantage when they are asked to tackle technology on the civilian side," he said.

"These are all skills that are very valuable in corporate America," Sevola said. "I've seen firsthand some of the challenges of civilian life faced by America's veterans, particularly those whose education and job credentials may not match up with what corporate America normally seeks. I also know firsthand that Prudential is having a positive impact on the lives of veterans and their families, helping them achieve professional success, financial security and peace of mind. We welcome corporations who want to join us in this important work."



WE'RE COMMITTED TO HELPING PEOPLE WHO KNOW PLENTY ABOUT COMMITMENT.

America's veterans have worked hard to make our lives more secure.

Prudential is proud to do the same for them. We're setting a new standard for education, training and employment programs that help military families thrive today, and when they transition to civilian life. And for decades, we've been a leading voice in support of the issues and organizations that matter to veterans.



Visit [prudential.com/veterans](https://www.prudential.com/veterans)

About Prudential

Prudential Financial, Inc. (NYSE: PRU), a financial services leader, has operations in the United States, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Prudential's diverse and talented employees are committed to helping individual and institutional customers grow and protect their wealth through a variety of products and services, including life insurance, annuities, retirement-related services, mutual funds and investment management. In the U.S., Prudential's iconic Rock symbol has stood for strength, stability, expertise and innovation for more than a century.

For more information, please visit news.prudential.com.

Prudential's Veterans Initiatives program has placed more than 100 veterans in full-time employment with the company. Among the awards and recognitions the program has received are:

- 2017 Military Friendly Employer and Military Spouse Friendly Employer designations from Victory Media.
- 2017 Pro Patria Award Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve from the State of New Jersey.
- Ranked among top 15 on DiversityInc.'s Top Companies for Veterans since 2015, including No. 11 in 2017.
- Named a Best for Vets Employer by Military Times every year but one since the program's inception in 2010.

About the SHRM Foundation

The SHRM Foundation is the 501(c)(3) charity affiliate of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and is supported by tax-deductible donations from individuals, groups and organizations that are committed to empowering HR professionals to build inclusive organizations.

Visit us at shrmfoundation.org

Our Mission

The mission of the SHRM Foundation is to champion workforce and workplace transformation and inspire HR professionals to make it happen.



Learn more about the SHRM Foundation's commitment to make a measurable impact on the integration and engagement of military veterans in the workforce at shrmfoundation.org/veterans.