

Finding Meaning

A talking points brief on underemployment of ex-service personnel
prepared for Post Transition Ltd

Second of a series of reports based on a survey conducted by Post
Transition Ltd and Massey University

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Finding Meaning - an Introduction

In early April 2019 Post Transition Ltd, an organisation specifically designed to improve the transition of personnel moving from the military to a civilian life, contacted Massey University School of Management for assistance in a large survey. Post Transition was asking for suggestions concerning the sort of questions to ask and help in providing analysis of the results. The survey was completed in late May and resulted in just over 1400 valid responses. In the following brief, a quick analysis related to the experience ex service personnel have with civilian employment is presented. This document is a specific 'highlights' document and is the second such document in an ongoing series.

Service personnel find meaning in their service. Courage, Commitment and Comradeship being the three core values of all the three services. When part of the military, they are involved in an occupation that by its very nature is altruistic and centred on service in the true meaning of the word. When a service person resigns and seeks civilian employment they are suddenly without the security they have had.

Although NZDF provides transition programmes for military personnel, these programmes have not been seen by the individual as being 'useful'. It is this desire to be useful that makes an ex-service person a valuable employee. However most service personnel leave without a civilian or trade qualification. It takes them a long time to get a job. In addition even those that leave with a qualification that is recognised in the civilian world find themselves 'starting over' and their years of service ignored or discounted.

There is frustration that NZDF have not provided them with the overall skills they need in the civilian workforce. There is also a great frustration that the civilian employers don't understand the worth of what has been learned while in service. There is a need to have a more inclusive and 'honest' transition programme. Above all there is need to assist the ex-service person to find meaning within a civilian environment. Presented below are simple numbers and more detailed explanations of the trials an ex service person goes through whilst trying to find a job.

Key Findings

Only 25% of those surveyed, 356/1405 left the services due to civilian employment opportunities. 74% therefore left without secure employment opportunities.

The average age of leaving was 33 and were more likely not to be employed directly upon leaving service.

The survey indicated that employment was positively associated with length of time since the respondent had left, thus over time most ex service personnel were employed.

Whilst most participants had no qualifications upon leaving, those that held a civilian qualification, be it trade or academic were more likely to find employment. For those who held such a qualification, around 83% of them are employed. This percentage of those employed is relatively higher than those who have not held a qualification.

Injury sustained while in service, physical and mental had a significantly negative effect upon civilian employment.

There was no significance between the services as to employment. All services were affected equally.

Specific Comments Regarding Civilian Employment

There are many partnerships that can be formed with the community so when a seaman, airman or soldier are ready to leave they have a pathway that they had worked toward to assist them with continuing their self worth and sense of honour.

Civilian employers need to be educated about skill set good ex soldier can bring to the organization. There are a large number that think you run around shouting at people and want to kill others. Can be funny but is mostly frustrating.

Its all water under the bridge now nearly 13 years down the track but i went to many many job interviews including just with recruitment companies to discuss industries and types of jobs as i didnt really know what i was looking for. Recruitment companies tended to look down at you thinking military people were a waste of their time, despite having civilian quals. Luckily it worked out in the end, through a ex military contact connecting me with a company who were hiring. It was a challenging period. Unfortunately i found recruitment companies a complete waste of time except building my resilience.

Unfortunately being in the Army for six doesn't mean shit on a CV. Especially if you didn't do any management courses. You also leave with bad habits that allow you to be taken advantage of by employers.

I joined when I was 17. and all I knew was yes sir . yes sarg. yes corp. but actually in a civvies job. you can say no. if your employer ask you to do something not consistent with you contract and is unwilling to pay you can say no. not interested. Look sorry I've got plans but could be keen next time. I was taken advantage of by employers for over two years before I got the nuts to say no. These are some of the bad habits we leave with.

Commentary Regarding Assistance Possibilities

Joining the service directly from school, I had no idea how to write a resume, secure work, negotiate salary, housing, etc. Sounds so silly now but I was a totally naive 30 year old

Help to find work, seemed I was either apparently overqualified or more experienced than other staff members and it scared off a lot of potential employers, I ended up having to take a manual labour job and not mention my Air Force career to secure initial employment

Be more transparent and open to the services that ex servicemen and women have at their disposal while transitioning. Unfortunately my skill set in the infantry wasn't of much use to civilian employers so I had to start all over again

When I left to study and find work I didn't know how to write a CV and list my military skills, I didn't have a referee to vouch for my service when potential employers wanted to call. I had to start from the bottom as a labourer while studying when in fact I was able to be so much more than that if I had of had a little help with those sorts of things. I left with no resources or pathways or guidelines to follow to forge my civilian life with. I joined straight from high school so this was a challenge for me. When it could have been so much easier given a little help and push in the right direction.

Commentary on the Effect Job Seeking Had/Has on a Person's life.

You become desensitized to a lot of things and when you leave people can have strong opinions on your surface and harsh judgement. It is difficult to relate with the people you knew before your service. You can feel very much alone and isolated

How to be a civilian, eight years later and I still do not know. How to get a job, applied for over 360 in 10 months only got 3 interviews and no job. Got contracted for 4 years back into the NZDF, have been unemployed since

Provide as much pre-employment training for the individual prior to discharge as I had no civilian employment assistance or financial assistance offered to me prior to discharge. I had to spend all my superannuation refunds on paying for my own employment training courses and subsistence until I found a job

Put a system in place to help us. We leave the nzdf with no rank, no support unless you were in a war zone if any. no meaning nothing. And companies don't know the value of ex nzdf personal and how committed we could be to a job if we had the chance.

I did not know that my former military, mental state would cause me to contemplate suicide. I was very fortunate a former military boss of mine would come to my rescue and ended up as my WINZ Agent. Today at 65 yrs young, my GP and Health Provider have my best health and wellbeing at hand

Conclusions

This brief 'talking points' document addresses the issues ex-service people face when attempting to find employment in the civilian sector. The above figures and commentary are drawn from a larger body of work. This survey is as far we know one of the first to ask for candid comments from a wide sector of the ex-service community. The survey elicited responses across all services and ranks.

The major issue in terms of civilian employment faced by the ex-service person is not just finding a job. It is one of acceptance and finding a new mission. There is it would appear a shortfall in the expectations of a recent ex-service person and the civilian reality. Equally there is evidence that a great deal of employers are ignorant of the worth ex service personnel bring to their business.

Overall the most telling result is the large number of ex service personnel who are unemployed upon discharge and the mental and economic hardship this brings. Service personnel are being told by NZDF that their military service will stand them in good stead. This has not been borne out in reality, leaving the individual distraught, frustrated and possibly, as mentioned in one of the quotes above – suicidal.

Fixing the issue is not straightforward. However simple things like 'real world' honesty could help. Programmes whereby the NZDF engages with industry to assist a service person during transition. Programmes whereby the Employers are educated as to the possible worth of employing ex service personnel could be introduced. Finally, civilian recognition of military qualifications is needed.

Recommendations

R.1. MSD or NZDF needs to provide more nuanced assistance with finding employment.

R.2. Pre-employment assistance needs to go beyond simple C.V writing

R.3. Involving MSD early in the process by assisting in 'life transition' rather than 'job' transition.

R.4. MSD seriously consider an education programme targeting the employers regarding the benefits of hiring ex service personnel

R.5. Translation of military qualifications into civilian equivalents should be seen as priority

