



# THE AMERICAN LEGION

## Overqualified, unfulfilled



*Sudip Bose, MD, FACEP, FAAEM. (Photo by Brandon Thibodeaux/Getty Images for HealthLeaders)*

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Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be a doctor. Later on, as the son of grateful immigrants, I wanted to serve the country that had treated them so well. So I did both, as a doctor in the Iraq War.

When I returned home from Iraq in 2005, I was fortunate. As a medical doctor, I had a smooth transition to the civilian workforce – in no small way because my military job title was clearly understood and my medical skills acknowledged. Sadly, many of the men and women I served with had a much harder time.

Most military occupational specialties (MOS) don't easily translate. Veterans struggle to communicate their military skills and experience into language the private sector can understand. Employers are often ill-prepared to understand and cultivate a veteran's unique

ability. It's a dual dilemma, resulting in an underrated candidate who becomes an underemployed veteran whose pay is too low and skills are not used, without a bright future.

Veterans are often pigeonholed: "If you drove a truck in the Army, well, that's what you know how to do and what you should do when you get out." That seems to be the conventional thinking, which is terribly flawed for two reasons. First, 70 percent of people coming out of the military do not want to do what they did in the military. Second, if you drove a truck in the Army, you know much more than that. You've picked up skills like operation, control, coordination, communication, time management and problem-solving – skills highly coveted by employers for numerous roles: operations, logistics, project management, account management, sales and more.

And then there are the intangible qualities that make veterans great employees: discipline, work ethic, loyalty, courage, dependability, accountability, versatility and sense of mission. These ought to be the cherries on top.

Veteran underemployment has cascading effects. It leads to job dropout, high turnover, reduced employer profitability, personal discouragement, and the waning or abandonment of noble efforts. Everybody loses.

How do we change the narrative? Here are a few thoughts:

- **Expand military partnerships with organizations developing technologies to increase effectiveness and efficiency, and reduce stress.** For example, the Bridge My Return hiring platform maps skills to the MOS, automatically produces a résumé, and connects a veteran's profile to careers with military-ready employers based on skills-to-skills matching (rather than job-to-job).
- **Expand military partnerships with private-sector organizations that offer departing servicemembers apprenticeships, training and licensing in areas related to their military skills.** The DoD SkillBridge program offers servicemembers access to training, apprenticeships or internships during their last 180 days of service. DoD teams with private-sector organizations across industries to create real-world experiences for transitioning servicemembers.
- **Encourage employers to create recruitment and retention programs for veterans, train hiring managers on veteran recruiting and training, and provide transition support to newly hired veterans.** The nuances of hiring military talent need to be understood. Readiness is as crucial to employers as it is to veterans they seek to hire.

Our veterans are an untapped resource. Let's endeavor to give them better opportunities and brighter futures. If we do so, everybody wins.

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