



THE MANUFACTURING EXPERIENCE

Transitioning Military-Affiliated Talent into Manufacturing

February 2024

Key Findings and Insights
from Manufacturers

with Support from

Colonial Life®

THE MANUFACTURING EXPERIENCE: TRANSITIONING MILITARY-AFFILIATED TALENT INTO MANUFACTURING

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By Chad Moutray and Anjana Gigi Radhakrishnan¹

The Manufacturing Institute's Mission: We aim to build, diversify, and strengthen the manufacturing workforce for individual opportunity, community prosperity, and a competitive manufacturing industry for the future

The Manufacturing Institute helps build a manufacturing workforce resilient to the challenges and prepared for the opportunities of the 21st century. Through implementing groundbreaking programs, convening industry leaders and conducting innovative research, the MI furthers individual opportunity, community prosperity and a more competitive manufacturing industry. As the 501(c)3 nonprofit workforce development and education affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers, the MI is a trusted adviser to manufacturers, equipping them with solutions to address the toughest workforce issues.

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► Executive Summary

As labor shortages continue, underpinned by structural demographic shifts, manufacturers can gain a competitive edge by incorporating talent from the greater military community (for example, transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard, reservists and military spouses) into their recruitment pipelines.

The military-affiliated talent pool is large. There were 8.6 million veterans employed in 2022, with 12% in manufacturing. More importantly, research suggests that veterans remain with their initial company 8.3% longer than nonveterans and are 39% more likely to be promoted earlier than nonveterans. Beyond individuals who served in the military, military spouses are a significantly under-tapped segment of the military-affiliated community, with an unemployment rate of 22%.

By connecting with military-affiliated talent, manufacturers can maximize untapped capabilities, utilize different perspectives to optimize production and further develop a positive company culture that embraces individuals from all backgrounds. To capitalize on this population, manufacturers should better shape recruitment and retention efforts around the unique needs of this talent pool. In doing so, they can leverage the skills and experiences that the military-affiliated talent pool can offer.

The MI's Heroes MAKE America (HMA) initiative has stepped in as a solution provider since 2018 to support manufacturers in this effort by preparing military-affiliated talent for rewarding careers in manufacturing and by connecting companies with skilled talent. Interviewees we spoke to in this study—both HMA alumni and manufacturing companies active with the HMA initiative—shared the value they found in the certification and training programs, professional development coaching as well as facilitation of connections between talent and manufacturers.

► Topline Report Findings

- HMA has seen great success in the past five years, issuing more than 6,000 industry-recognized certifications, achieving a 90% placement rate among graduates in more than 350 companies in 48 states and introducing more than 12 million individuals from the greater military community to information about manufacturing careers through social media, VA newsletters and virtual and in-person industry events.
- As military service comprises years of rigorous training, this population offers significant value to manufacturers. In fact, manufacturing leaders reported that military-affiliated talent were disciplined and process-oriented, and they possessed strong leadership and technical skills as well as a strong work ethic.
- The top military-acquired skill that HMA alumni considered most applicable to their manufacturing career was attention to detail and precision in work (90.0%).
- The top reasons HMA alumni decided to pursue a career in manufacturing included earnings potential (60.0%) and job security and stability (58.5%).
- Manufacturing leaders are attracting military-affiliated talent through efforts such as partnering with local military installations and veteran service organizations (35.2%), providing educational benefits (28.6%), staffing their human resources team with military-affiliated recruiters (28.6%), creating veterans' employee resource groups/mentorship programs (28.6%) and working with the community on veterans' initiatives (28.6%).
- When asked what would keep them in their current role, 69.4% of HMA alumni reported increased compensation, and 59.2% reported more learning and career advancement opportunities. Following base hourly wage and salary level, top benefits that HMA alumni ranked as important and attractive included bonuses and/or additional income opportunities for existing employees followed closely by health, dental and vision insurance benefits.

➤ Introduction

Facing a persistently tight labor market, manufacturers are thinking differently about their approaches to workforce recruitment and retention. Now more than ever, manufacturing leaders are emphasizing the need to differentiate themselves in the stiff competition for workers, often looking for talent beyond traditional sources. As part of these efforts, companies have committed to attracting more military-affiliated talent, including transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard members, reservists or military spouses. This strategy goes well beyond patriotism and the need to “do the right thing” for America’s military heroes, as this population brings skills and experiences that transfer naturally to the manufacturing industry and contribute significant value.

The military-affiliated talent pool is large. With approximately 200,000 service members leaving the service each year,² there were 8.6 million veterans employed in 2022, with 12% in manufacturing.³ More importantly, research suggests that veterans remain with their initial company 8.3% longer than nonveterans and are 39% more likely to be promoted earlier than nonveterans.⁴ This valuable talent pool can be further engaged, particularly by manufacturers.

Since 2018, the MI’s HMA initiative has stepped in as a solution provider for this challenge by preparing transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard members and military spouses for rewarding careers in manufacturing and connecting companies with skilled talent. HMA offers training pathways through Department of Defense-approved SkillBridge programs that integrate certification and career-readiness training in partnership with local technical and community colleges. In addition to the training programs, HMA offers an expanded platform for manufacturers to connect with the military community through a monthly résumé distribution subscription, in-person and virtual career fairs and Heroes Connect employer spotlight events dedicated to promoting manufacturing careers in the United States and exposing manufacturers to a reliable stream of skilled military talent.

HMA has operated for the past five years, issuing more than 6,000 industry-recognized certifications, achieving a 90% placement rate among graduates in more than 350 companies in 48 states and introducing more than 12 million individuals from the greater military community to information about manufacturing careers through social media, VA newsletters and virtual and in-person industry events.

With their unique set of skills and experiences directly applicable to manufacturing, military-affiliated talent are well-positioned for success and are an attractive target for recruiters. To provide guidance for manufacturers who wish to incorporate military-affiliated talent into their recruitment efforts, the MI (with support from Colonial Life) conducted a research study from September to November 2023 to examine the experiences and key insights of manufacturers that have successfully transitioned military-affiliated talent into the sector. This study also assesses the value of the HMA initiative for manufacturers and HMA alumni.

² **Transition Assistance Program.** Department of Labor.

³ See <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.t05.htm>.

⁴ “**Veteran Opportunity Report: Understanding an Untapped Talent Pool.**” LinkedIn. 2019.

➤ Sample Characteristics

To understand manufacturer perspectives on attracting and retaining military-affiliated talent, the MI conducted an online survey from Sept. 12 to Oct. 4, hearing from 89 respondents. The majority of respondents worked in small or medium-sized companies (59.1%). Respondents for this survey spanned a broad range of sectors including chemicals, electrical equipment and appliances, fabricated metal products, machinery, plastics and rubber products and transportation equipment, among others. (See Appendix A for the survey questions and the breakdown of responses.) In addition, insights were drawn in this analysis from interviews with six manufacturing leaders, mostly with executive leadership and human resources functions. Interviews were conducted from September to November.

To understand the experiences and motivations of HMA alumni in transitioning into the manufacturing industry, the MI also conducted an online survey during the same timeframe, receiving 66 responses. More than 60% of respondents had some college experience, including technical training or certifications or an associate degree, with 27.3% earning a bachelor's degree or greater. Just over 77% were male, with 16.7% female and 6.1% preferring not to state their gender, reflecting the gender demographics of the military, where women made up 17.3% of the active-duty force in 2021.⁵ Tenure in the military among the respondents was highly varied, with 39.7% having served 10 years or less while more than 52% said that they had served 16 years or more. (See Appendix B for the HMA alumni survey questions and the breakdown of responses.) In addition, there were interviews with four HMA alumni, whose perspectives are reflected in the report. Interviews were conducted from September to November.

➤ Skills and Experiences of Military-Affiliated Talent

Military-affiliated talent can benefit immensely from their association with military structures, both professionally and personally (Figure 1). As military service can include rigorous training in leadership, team management, critical soft skills and credentials, this underutilized population offers significant value to manufacturers searching for talent. Among those who considered military-affiliated talent to be more successful in their roles, respondents noted that military veterans were more disciplined and process-oriented, and they possessed strong leadership and technical skills as well as a strong work ethic.



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⁵ [Department of Defense Releases Annual Demographics Report — Upward Trend in Number of Women Serving Continues.](#) U.S. Department of Defense. December 14, 2022.

Figure 1: What specific skills or experiences do you have that you believe could be applied to a career in manufacturing? (HMA alumni)



Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

HMA alumni's perspectives on the skills and experiences that they contributed mirrored the ones suggested by manufacturing leaders. The top military-acquired skill that HMA alumni considered most applicable to their manufacturing career was attention to detail and precision in work (90.0%). This was closely followed by the ability and flexibility in learning new processes and procedures (86.7%), problem-solving skills and the ability to think critically (86.7%), communication and interpersonal skills (83.3%) and leadership and management experience, including leading teams or projects (81.7%). Having technical skills (70.0%) and an ability to work with your hands and in a hands-on environment (66.7%) also ranked highly. A recent study conducted by the MI notes the importance of such skills in strengthening the competitiveness and agility of manufacturers in responding to customer demands, strategically planning for future potential business disruptions and addressing future skill needs.⁶

Interviewees similarly noted how the skills, experiences and mindset of military-affiliated talent can significantly enhance manufacturers' efforts. From a manufacturing leader's perspective, there were several qualities that facilitated the transition between military to manufacturing. Jennifer Ball, senior recruiter at Union Pacific, appreciated how military veterans were process-driven with an appreciation for safety, "In railroading, we follow processes and have rules to protect worker safety. Those with military backgrounds have spent years in an environment with similar processes and rules. They understand process- and operations-driven work on a deep level." Ball added the fact that military talent tends to enjoy working outdoors was an additional bonus, particularly for a company like Union Pacific, which operates over 32,000 miles in 23 states, the equivalent of a massive outdoor factory. Tania Reed, talent acquisition and people development manager at Fuchs Lubricants, observed that military-affiliated talent have the "right attitude" and "come into work on time."

⁶ ["Future Skill Needs in Manufacturing: A Deep Dive."](#) The Manufacturing Institute. October 2022.

Those affiliated with the military can also bring much-needed skills to the manufacturing workforce. Amy Spanske, talent acquisition specialist at Atlas Copco, noted that “people with a military affiliation tend to have strong STEM skills or experience in skilled trades. We place them in maintenance and inventory tracking positions. They also come to us with discipline, which is key to success.” John C. Buckley, II, outreach programs lead at Koch Industries, has targeted military-affiliated members through HMA because of the skills training individuals receive from both the military and the initiative itself. “The skills required in the military are very similar to what we’re looking for particularly in our operations & manufacturing and Skilled Trades & Maintenance roles. Additionally, punctuality, attention to detail, the ability to work under pressure and with teams, and their pursuit of excellence are very attractive characteristics in contribution motivated individuals. Military employees can be a leader at any level and be successful in roles like production and maintenance supervisor positions.”

HMA alumni had similar perspectives as manufacturing leaders, finding connections between their training and experiences in the military and their roles in the manufacturing industry. Ben Novak, technical manager and HMA alumni at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Kansas City National Security Campus (operated by Honeywell), stressed the importance of the leadership skills he gained in the military to his ability to manage a team and contribute to the sector. He found that coming into a manufacturing role associated with national defense made the transition from service easier and noted the transferability of soft skills, such as communication, problem solving, conflict resolution and priority management. James Goppert, human resources business partner at WestRock, noted that respect and leadership were qualities that many with military talent were trained in. “Beyond that, the cultural diversity of the military allows us to be put in any situation with any group of people and be able to work together to reach the end goal. We offer an adaptable mindset,” Goppert added.

The structured, service-oriented mindset that military-affiliated talent can bring to the industry can also be valuable. Dwight Lamar Thomas, warehouse manager and HMA alumni at Martec, shared how the results-oriented culture of the military shaped his approach to his new role in manufacturing. “It’s all about building the relationship with the customer and filling the needs. In the Army, you’re put into leadership positions early on in your career and you’re taught to build good rapport with your soldiers. In manufacturing, I use the same skills to build good rapport with our customers.” Ernie Reyes, global procurement senior manager at Caterpillar, echoed this sentiment. “The Department of Defense has everything that corporate America needs today: structure and governance. Military talent are trained in that mindset and bring that experience. We’re stress-tested and adaptable. Those are qualities that are great for manufacturers.”

Although most military-affiliated talent have skills and experiences that prepare them for a career in manufacturing, many need support in navigating the transition into a new industry. The HMA initiative is particularly effective in providing a solid foundation for military talent who had no previous experience with the manufacturing industry. “Even from the first course, you learn useful information like the terms people use in manufacturing. You can conceptualize how a warehouse should run. It’s very helpful for someone who has never worked in that environment,” shared Thomas. The HMA initiative provides additional resources for military talent looking to enter the manufacturing industry, including in-person and virtual career fairs, résumé and interview coaching, workshops and direct connections with manufacturing and supply chain companies that are hiring.

Beyond individuals who serve in the military, military spouses are a significantly under-tapped segment of the military-affiliated community, with an unemployment rate of 22%.⁷ Manufacturers can capitalize on this talent pool by broadening their recruitment strategies through efforts like hosting family events at military posts and matching military spouses with roles that can eventually transition to remote modalities in case of relocation.⁸ Koch Industries has seen success in hiring military spouses, particularly in human resources and recruiting, which offer the flexibility this population values. In addition to filling talent gaps, military spouses provide referral

⁷ [The Hidden Financial Costs of Military Spouse Unemployment](#). Hiring Our Heroes. 2022.

⁸ [The Manufacturing Institute Solution Series: Military to Manufacturing Workshop Notes](#). The Manufacturing Institute. July 2023.

networks that can drive recruitment rates. “We’ve seen that when you hire one military spouse, word spreads in the community. We’ve had a lot of interest from other military spouses as a result of our work with this population within the military community,” noted Buckley (Koch Industries).

While military-affiliated talent enter the manufacturing industry with a congruent mindset, a broad suite of technical and soft skills and significant leadership experience, the transition itself can present unique challenges to both those in the military community and to their potential employers in manufacturing. We explore this topic and highlight successful solutions in addressing these aspects of hiring military-affiliated talent in the following section.

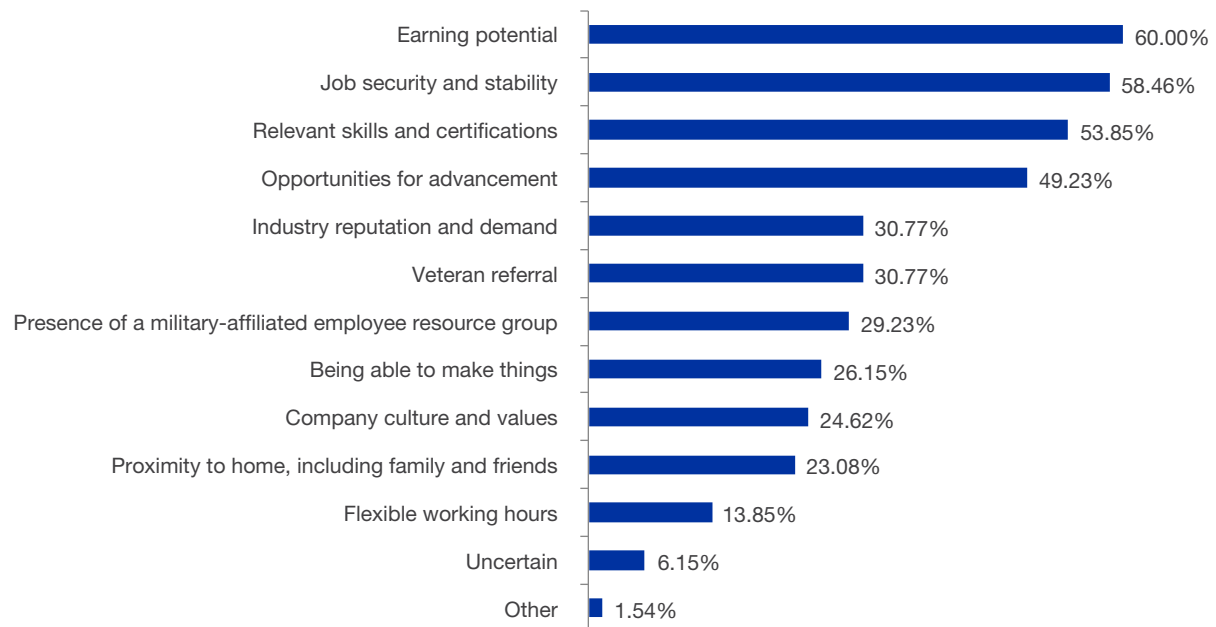
► Transitioning into Manufacturing

For military-affiliated talent who have actively served, transitioning out of the military can be a challenging time defined by uncertainty. After working for years in a highly structured environment, returning to the civilian world without a clear idea of what careers best fit their talents and facing different company cultures can be daunting for such individuals. Most prioritize stable jobs that utilize their skills and experiences, provide opportunities for future growth and career development and recognize the needs and support required to optimize the contributions of this working population. Manufacturers can step into this gap and address their workforce shortages by providing the types of opportunities that meet this population’s needs.

While manufacturing jobs can provide the stability and long-term growth that transitioning military talent look for, this population can have unclear perceptions of what manufacturing is and what career options are available to them. In the survey of HMA alumni, two-thirds of respondents said that they had never considered a career in manufacturing before entering the program, with 26.6% suggesting that they had and 6.3% uncertain. Goppert (WestRock) shared his understanding of the industry prior to engagement with HMA. “I was told about manufacturing growing up, but I had no conceptual idea of what it really was or what manufacturers did. You know, I loved playing around with parts and learning how things are made when I was a kid, but I had no idea that manufacturing involved that kind of thinking. I think that unless you’ve grown up in this industry or had family in this industry, you cannot fathom what it is that manufacturers do until you see it. That’s why the plant tours that HMA organizes are so critical.”

In terms of what specifically influenced HMA alumni to pursue a career in manufacturing, those completing the survey noted earnings potential (60.0%) and job security and stability (58.5%) as their top reasons, followed closely by the job offering relevant skills and certifications (53.9%) and opportunities for advancement (49.2%). (See Figure 2.) Other important factors included industry reputation and demand (30.8%), veteran referral (30.8%), the presence of a military-affiliated employee resource group (29.2%), being able to make things (26.2%), company culture and values (24.6%) and the proximity of the job to home, including family and friends (23.1%).

Figure 2: What factors influenced your decision to pursue a career in manufacturing? (HMA alumni)



Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

Reyes (Caterpillar) also shared the importance of publicizing support, such as employee resource groups, for military talent. “If a manufacturer has a military ERG, they probably have the other resources military talent need.” When Reyes was looking for career opportunities, he prioritized companies that had active military ERGs and publicized their support of the military via website pages or social media. Union Pacific offers a military-affiliated employee resource group (ERG) called UP VETS across their different locations. “It’s a great resource and attracts military talent and is important for building community. We hold multiple ERG events in various locations across our territories.” shared Ball (Union Pacific). Buckley (Koch Industries) similarly noted the importance of establishing networks among military community employees to provide opportunities for people to connect. Goppert (Westrock) agreed. “Having the ability to talk with people who have the same mindset is so important. It’s like having a family within larger WestRock family.”

From the manufacturing leader perspective, the key factors that attract military talent to the company include the inclusive, forward-thinking culture, strong leadership and open communication. In addition, the internal mobility offered by manufacturers enhances their competitiveness with other industries. Spanske (Atlas Copco) shared the offerings that attract military-affiliated talent. “We require forty hours of training a year based on a topic of the employee’s choice. Military talent can focus on career development, and we offer flexibility in career options. We encourage folks to apply to open positions across the company, even if it’s in a new strength. For internal applications, if we’re unable to offer the position, we schedule a meeting with the employee to map out what they need to do to achieve the position in the future.” Spanske shared that the positive company culture that Atlas Copco has cultivated makes a difference at recruiting events at military posts. “At the Fort Riley job fair we recently did with HMA, we had military talent walking up to us and asking why we all look so happy. It’s because we genuinely like working at Atlas Copco.”

The HMA initiative, as mentioned in previous sections, offers a wide variety of resources to military-affiliated talent looking to transition into a career in manufacturing. These resources include plant tours, which can provide a window into the day-to-day experience of working in the industry, training programs, where military-affiliated talent can gain the credentials needed to slot into skilled jobs, and professional development opportunities that sharpen soft skills, such as résumé writing and interview preparation. In addition to education and training, the HMA initiative connects participants with manufacturers interested in hiring graduates, creating a direct talent pipeline that meets the needs of both populations.

Goppert (WestRock) shared how HMA supported his transition from the military into manufacturing. “The program gave me something to focus on. Transitioning after serving in the military for 25 years was scary. I had no idea what I was going to do. The HMA program opened so many doors.” An HMA alumni survey respondent echoed this sentiment in an open-ended response. “The experience and ability to translate that experience with the help of this program allowed my company to see the value of my experiences. This has allowed for not only my job offer but the continual promotions during my time here.” Several interviewees also shared the importance of the camaraderie they experienced in the HMA program, including staying in touch with their cohorts, and that this network has been helpful beyond the transition from HMA into their manufacturing roles.

Once military-affiliated talent are incorporated into the workforce, manufacturing careers provide opportunities for continued learning and a similar environment to the military. For many, the challenging and dynamic roles in the industry keep individuals engaged. The HMA alumni survey indicates that the majority (62%) felt that their military experience or affiliation helped them in the transition into manufacturing. Goppert shared his passion for the manufacturing industry. “There are just so many cool things that manufacturers do. When I was on the plant tours with HMA, I realized that I really like this type of environment. It was something new and different.” Goppert also noted that the ability to use training he received in the military in manufacturing made a significant, positive impact on his sense of job satisfaction. “I love my job because I can be down-to-earth and engage with everyone. I walk the floor all the time. I think of our employees as our customers. I love engaging with my associates because I see them as my team.”

Additionally, as Reyes (Caterpillar) shared, “The culture of high standards and professionalism in the manufacturing industry is almost identical to military standards. Manufacturing can offer a home to military talent.” From a manufacturer perspective, Ball (Union Pacific) commented, “In addition to the competitive salary and benefits we offer, we’ve found that military talent are really looking for structure in the workplace and appreciate that standard in the manufacturing and transportation industries. The similarities of our roles with what military talent were doing in service eases the transition.”

HMA alumni shared other perspectives on the role of military training in easing the transition to the manufacturing sector. One respondent said that “employers automatically assume the leadership, conflict resolution and supervisory skills claimed on my resume are legitimate. They also appreciate the discipline and mission focus of military affiliated employees.” Another respondent focused on how their background in the military allowed them to have the ability to quickly transition. “The extensive training, discipline, order and skills [I gained in the military] gave me what I needed to improve myself to succeed in that kind of fast paced environment.”

There were a few survey respondents who also found their military experience gave them opportunities to progress quickly in their manufacturing careers. “My military experience helped in having management skills and experience since I’d been in a similar position as a production supervisor when I was an operations manager,” shared one respondent. Another had a similar experience. “I was a mechanic in the army and was hired on as the assembly supervisor. Managing people and working on things are my strong suits. Now I’m the assembly manager.” These examples demonstrate the high potential that military-affiliated talent bring to the workforce. When manufacturers hire from this population, their investment can be returned many times over as military-affiliated talent transition into the private sector and integrate their skills and experiences from the military into a new environment.

Opportunities to Improve the Transition

While the military and manufacturing industry do share similarities in the structure with which they approach work and professionalism, there are differences in hierarchy and leadership culture that can pose challenges during transition. Novak (KCNSC) noted, “The private sector where organizations are more fluid in their structure can provide significant learning curves as part of the transition process.” In his experience, he found that, unlike in the military where procedures and decision-making are highly structured and set in stone, the policymaking process in the private sector was more fluid, with more nuanced communications. Thomas (Martec) added that “it can be difficult to get a solid grasp on manager expectations, especially when you first transition. The military is far more structured, and the thought processes are different.” From a manufacturing leader perspective, Buckley (Koch Industries) shared that moving from the military to the private sector will be initially challenging to navigate, often due to differences in the environmental culture, structures and language. “Military personnel can be used to a very hierarchical structure from their time in service. In the private sector, there isn’t the same level of oversight and rigidity, and reliance on directive authority. It becomes the employees’ prerogative to collaborate with leaders, peers, and stakeholder to get things done which is a different mindset from the military.”

Another challenge military-affiliated talent and manufacturers can face during the recruitment process is a location mismatch between where individuals currently are or wish to be and where open roles in manufacturing are available. Overcoming this particular challenge can be difficult, even with incentives to help with relocation and hiring bonuses. From an HMA alumni perspective, Goppert (WestRock) noted, “Veterans may want to be rooted in a particular location. With those folks, I emphasize that they’ll find a new home if they come work with me.” However, manufacturing leaders have been implementing innovative solutions, including consolidating roles in regions that are close to military posts or may be more attractive to transitioning military talent, offering opportunities for individuals to transfer to a more ideal location after a training period at the primary facility and opening their efforts to connect with military-affiliated talent to more military posts across the country. By expanding recruiting efforts, providing flexibility and sharing clear guidance on future opportunities, interviewees shared success in increasing hiring and retention of military-affiliated talent.

The HMA alumni we interviewed shared a few other challenges in transitioning to the private sector, including learning the standard operating procedures of a civilian organization, which often differed from military structure, as well as navigating relational dynamics, particularly as there could be divergent life experiences within the workforce. Buckley (Koch Industries) indicated that “there can be a communication and culture gap if manufacturers are not intentional in the ways they integrate military-affiliated members into their workforce.” Koch Industries has addressed this challenge by providing mentorship opportunities to new military employees.

Having a deeper understanding of both the skills and training that military-affiliated talent can bring to the manufacturing workforce as well as the transition experience from both the talent and manufacturer perspective enables manufacturers to make a compelling business case for the need to target recruitment and retention of this key population. In the following section, we delve into some of the challenges that manufacturers may face in reaching this population and present tested solutions that address these concerns.

➤ Recruiting and Retaining Military-Affiliated Talent

While there is often a strong desire among manufacturers to hire more military-affiliated talent, identifying efficient ways to reach this population can be a challenge, particularly for those new to recruiting from this talent pool. An easy way for manufacturers to plug into this community would be to connect with existing programs like HMA and the Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program.⁹ In fact, the HMA alumni we spoke to largely heard of HMA and the opportunities that the manufacturing industry offers through engagement with the Transition Assistance Program. Novak (KCNSC) shared how helpful his engagement with the virtual HMA program was during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the utilization of Oculus headsets to give participants a sense of factory work. He also appreciated the high placement rate achieved through HMA. For his own placement, he leaned heavily on HMA to help him with writing his résumé and getting the attention of recruiters, finding success with KCNSC.

Figure 3: What are you doing to attract military-affiliated talent into your company? (manufacturing leaders)



Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

The HMA alumni we interviewed also noted the importance of incorporating engagement with the manufacturing industry at earlier, more visible points in military service to build awareness before individuals decide to

⁹ See <https://home.army.mil/ria/my-fort/all-services/sfl-tap>.

transition, whether through establishing a presence at military posts, career fairs or in the community. Thomas (Martec) noted, “Manufacturers could go to different military posts, tie in more closely with the Soldier for Life TAP program and even come into classrooms with young soldiers.”

Efforts that manufacturing leaders are currently using to attract military-affiliated talent include partnering with local military installations and veteran service organizations (35.2%), providing educational benefits (28.6%), staffing their human resources team with military-affiliated recruiters (28.6%), creating veterans’ employee resource groups/mentorship programs (28.6%) and working with the community on veterans’ initiatives (28.6%). (See Figure 3.)

From the manufacturer perspective, Koch Industries and Atlas Copco highlighted ways manufacturers can utilize HMA to expand and deepen recruitment efforts. Buckley (Koch Industries) shared the importance of targeting attraction efforts through programs like HMA. “We are very involved with our partnership with HMA. We provide transition lessons, tips, best practices, and create opportunities to share our experiences and vignettes to highlight the benefits of working for Koch. By studying and analyzing the needs of military-affiliated members, we tailor our approach, and therefore our messages resonate more strongly with this audience.” Buckley also noted the manufacturing plant visits, facilitated connections, résumé and interview coaching as well as the program’s ability to fill certification gaps offered by HMA make the transition from military to manufacturing easier for both new military-affiliated employees and manufacturers.

Spanske (Atlas Copco) echoed these sentiments, “Because we know the value of the initiative, we contribute to some of the materials covered in the program. We go on-site to military posts, attend on-site job fairs as well as lunch-and-learns. We give an overview of our company and provide concrete information on the jobs that are available, when we’re hiring and at what locations. Military talent want to know what we’re paying, when they can start and what we can do for them as an employer.” Spanske emphasized the importance of recruiting female military talent. “There are a lot of women who are coming out of the military. Manufacturers are not tapping into that population as much as they could.”

Reed (Fuchs Lubricants) shared that her company was relatively new at recruiting military-affiliated talent. They have utilized HMA and CIRCA, a technology solution company that pushes job postings to military-affiliated talent as well as other populations. Fuchs Lubricants has found HMA useful in tapping into the military talent pool. The primary challenge that Reed identified was in understanding how military skills could translate into manufacturing roles. Other interviewees echoed this sentiment, with Union Pacific using an innovative solution to address this issue. At Union Pacific, recruiters who had previously served in the military worked to develop a “Find Your Fit” card, an effective tool that maps out how military skills correspond with roles within the company.¹⁰

“What military talent and manufacturers need is a bridge. Military talent need to be able to translate their skills to civilian equivalents and on the flipside, manufacturers need to translate what they need into military language so the two can connect faster.”

— Ernie Reyes
Global Procurement
Senior Manager, Caterpillar

10 The Union Pacific [website](#) provides a useful example of how to convey a company’s commitment to the military community, reflecting a long history of hiring and cultivating military talent. It reads: “Some of Union Pacific’s first employees were Civil War veterans, and throughout our more than 160-year history, we’ve consistently supported the military – whether by moving troops and supplies, or by providing good jobs for veterans and active-duty soldiers. We recognize that members of the U.S. military are dedicated individuals who bring unique experience and skills to Union Pacific. Currently, approximately 20% of our employees have military experience, with some still active in the National Guard or Reserves.”

In addition, Union Pacific focuses its recruitment efforts on events like military career fairs, information sessions and hiring events at military posts and workforce centers. Ball (Union Pacific) added, “We’ve found military recruits are attracted by the continued ability to serve their country – by moving the goods Americans use every day – and they appreciate working outdoors around heavy equipment. That is a selling point.” Koch Industries also has a separate military careers webpage. This page lists the same career opportunities available to all interested individuals, but features a transition guide, military perspectives and profiles of the recruiting team as well, which help to facilitate the military-affiliated talent pipeline.¹¹

While resources like HMA can quickly bridge the gap between military-affiliated talent and manufacturers, a few interviewees noted the importance of taking it a step further by having a proactive versus reactive approach once connected with talent. Spanske (Atlas Copco) observed, “We have access to a lot of great information on military-affiliated talent through programs like HMA. Manufacturers could do a better job of keeping this talent pool in mind when new positions open up and reaching out proactively. Sometimes military-affiliated talent will apply to one position that may not be the best fit. Our role as human resources or talent acquisition is to think across the spectrum and see if there are other openings where that person may be a better fit.” Spanske also noted the importance of using a variety of formats to reach military talent. “While job fairs are the best way to talk to the greatest number of people, some may be too shy to ask questions. It’s important to create spaces to have one-on-one conversations. Having individual booths on virtual career fairs where you can talk individually to people for five to ten minutes is a great way to have that kind of interaction.”

Social media can be another proactive and effective way to attract military-affiliated talent. “I spend around seven to eight hours a week actively engaging with military community members and other populations that we are targeting for recruitment on social media. This is in addition to a few other folks on my team who amplify these messages. I find it important to drive a significant portion of online engagement as I am closely connected with the military community and know what messages will resonate with them,” shared Buckley (Koch Industries). Buckley emphasized the importance of spotlighting ambassadors, individuals at the company who are affiliated with the military, through these engagements. “People like to see folks who are like them working here.”

Luis Velez, training coordinator and HMA alumni at Schwan’s, similarly emphasized the importance of having a military-affiliated presence at career fairs. “We were interviewing automation technicians and I shared my story, how great Schwan’s had been. Out of a group of 30, I had 25 people come up to me, interested in joining. What they told my supervisors was they wanted to join because Schwan’s was the only company to bring a military person to give their insights.” Atlas Copco has been successful in reaching military-affiliated talent through general advertisements on LinkedIn as well as by associating with LinkedIn groups and communities related to the military.

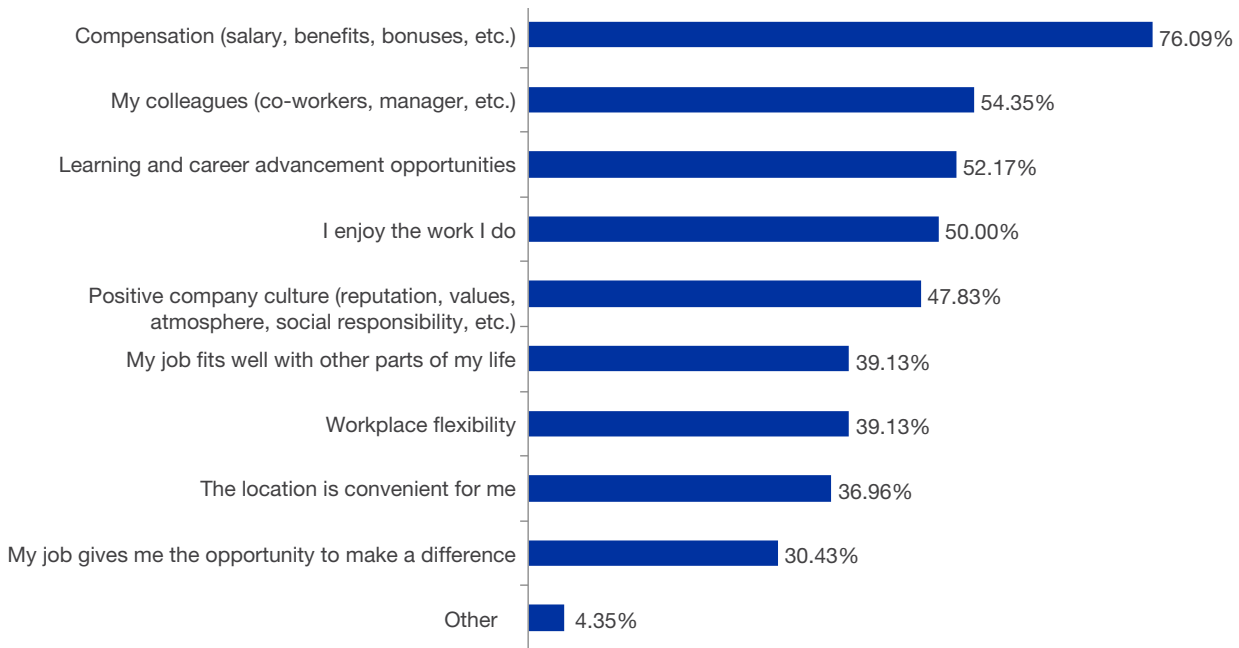
Leveraging military talent who have already made the transition to the manufacturing sector in the recruitment process can be highly impactful. “Military talent may not know what comes next and they want a helping hand. Having someone with the same background at recruitment events can make a huge difference. We can show how military talent can put value to their skills and articulate how the job opportunities the company is offering can relate to the role the person currently has, while laying out a growth plan,” Goppert (WestRock) noted. Reyes (Caterpillar) similarly stressed the importance of shared language in recruiting military-affiliated talent. “What military talent and manufacturers need is a bridge. Military talent need to be able to translate their skills to civilian equivalents and on the flipside, manufacturers need to translate what they need into military language so the two can connect faster.”

Once they have hired military-affiliated talent, manufacturers should consider strategies to effectively retain them and capitalize on their unique skills and training. In the survey of HMA alumni, respondents were asked about what they like in their current job. (See Figure 4.) Not surprisingly, compensation—including salary, benefits and bonuses—ranked highest; it was cited by more than 76% of those completing the survey. Other top choices

11 See <https://jobs.kochcareers.com/military>.

mentioned were colleagues, including co-workers and their manager (54.4%), learning and career advancement opportunities (52.2%), enjoying the work that they do (50.0%) and a positive company culture (47.8%). These findings are generally consistent with other MI reports, including recent analyses on compensation¹² and the importance of company culture and employee engagement.¹³ In addition, respondents feel that the job needs to work for them: they noted that their job fit well with other parts of their life (39.1%), provided workplace flexibility (39.1%), was in a convenient location (37.0%) and gave them the opportunity to make a difference (30.4%).

Figure 4: What do you like about your current job? (HMA alumni)



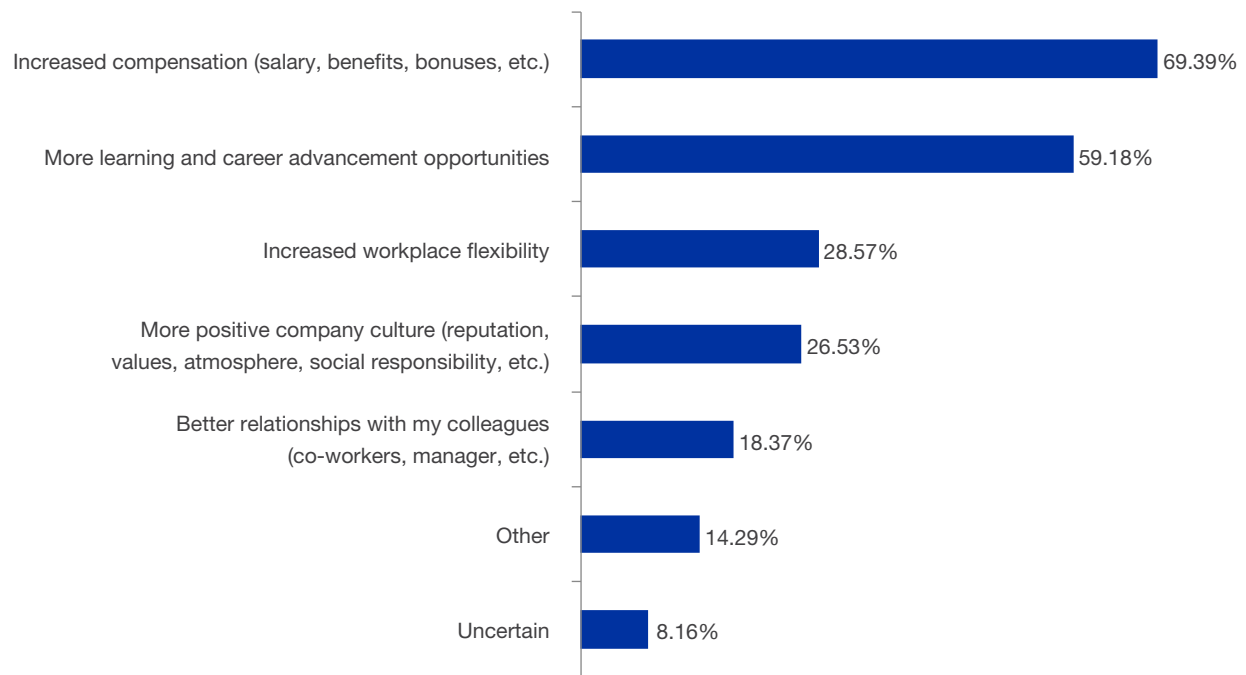
Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

When asked what would keep them in their current role, 69.4% of HMA alumni cited increased compensation and more learning and career advancement opportunities (59.2%). (See Figure 5.) Workplace flexibility, a positive company culture and strong relationships with colleagues were also important.

12 “[The Manufacturing Experience: Compensation and Labor Market Competitiveness.](#)” The Manufacturing Institute and Colonial Life. May 2022.

13 “[The Manufacturing Experience: The Role of Culture and Employee Engagement in Workforce Attraction and Retention.](#)” The Manufacturing Institute and Colonial Life. September 2023.

Figure 5: What factors would make you more likely to stay in your current role? (HMA alumni)



Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

HMA alumni we interviewed suggested additional retention strategies that they found impactful, including initiatives like quarterly career counseling meetings to discuss professional development and career advancement as well as military appreciation from the company level. Martec, for example, reaches out to veterans on Veterans Day with messages of support. Reyes (Caterpillar) emphasized the importance of managing the whole life cycle of an employee during the onboarding process and onward, focusing on providing training and support for military-affiliated talent from day one. A holistic approach to creating a positive employee experience has a strong correlation with how satisfied employees are at work, and thus how likely they are to be engaged.¹⁴

Military-affiliated talent also appreciate the potential to develop in their careers rapidly. “Anecdotally, I would say that when we can keep military-affiliated employees for 18 months, if we can keep them engaged and interested, they tend to be very successful,” said Buckley (Koch Industries). “They tend to get promoted quickly, take on decision-making responsibilities, earn higher salaries and stay longer. When they see they have value and see the connections between their skills and experiences and our company’s needs, military community members can significantly contribute to our mission.”

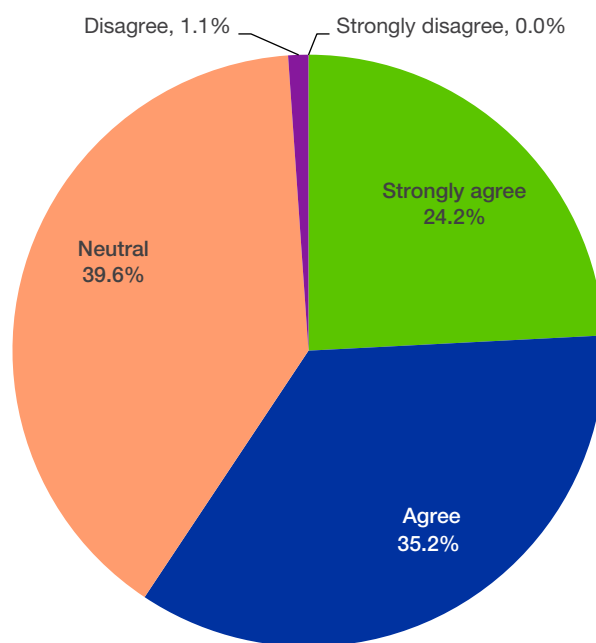
Novak (KCNSC) appreciated his company’s commitment to providing flexibility, work–life balance and a strong culture—aspects that are effective in recruiting and retaining manufacturing talent in general as well. “With a career in manufacturing, I can lead a comfortable life. I enjoy working on something that I know how to do and

¹⁴ [“Manufacturers are looking to improve the frontline employee experience. Here’s how.”](#) The Manufacturing Institute and PwC. November 2023.

that I am good at.” He noted that a major factor in staying at his company is the support he receives in growing professionally, including helpful conversations that are part of his biannual career counselling. Reed (Fuchs Lubricants) agreed with the importance of company culture, noting how her company actively sells its culture and the “family atmosphere” to possible recruits. Such actions, Reed noted, convey to employees the message that “you are important.”

Mentoring can be another key tool for retaining military-affiliated talent through providing support during transition, as well as professional development opportunities. In surveying manufacturing leaders, the majority of respondents (59.4%) said that structured programs were beneficial to advancing the careers of military-affiliated talent in manufacturing. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6: A structured mentoring program is beneficial to advancing the careers of military-affiliated talent in manufacturing. (manufacturing leaders)

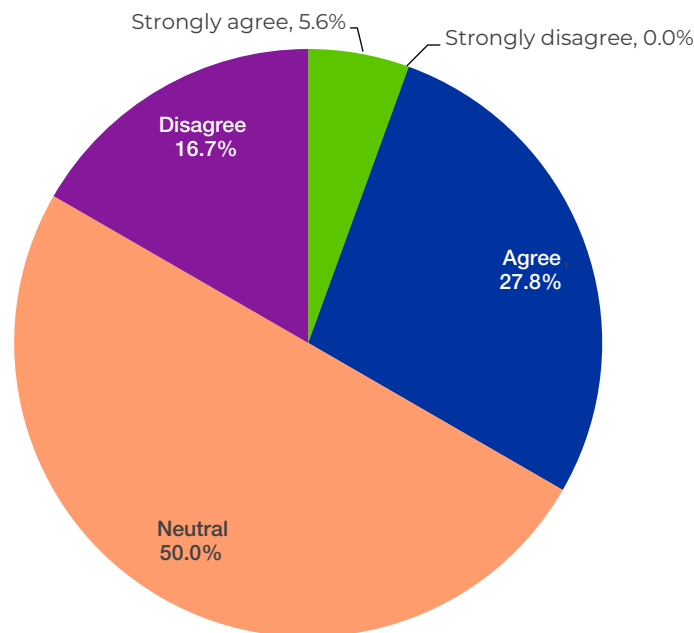


Note: These percentages might not total 100% due to rounding.

Respondents expressed mixed views as to whether mentors needed to be military-affiliated themselves. (See Figure 7.) Indeed, although nearly one-third of survey-takers agreed with the statement that it was important for military-affiliated talent to be mentored by another military-affiliated individual, half were neutral and 16.7% disagreed.

HMA alumni we interviewed shared their experiences of being mentored as well as mentoring others in the manufacturing industry. Thomas (Martec) explained his approach to leadership and mentorship. “It’s about giving the purpose and direction. I try to lead my guys to the best of my ability. As a leader and mentor, you have to understand the people you work with. Being understanding, that’s what’s important.” Goppert (WestRock) found his military background had trained him to be a mentor to everyone on his team. “It’s really about engaging with everyone. I don’t sit behind my desk. I walk the floor. I love engaging with my associates and being someone that people can talk to.”

Figure 7: For structured mentoring programs, it is important for military-affiliated talent to have a mentor that is also a military-affiliated individual. (manufacturing leaders)



Note: These percentages might not total 100% due to rounding.

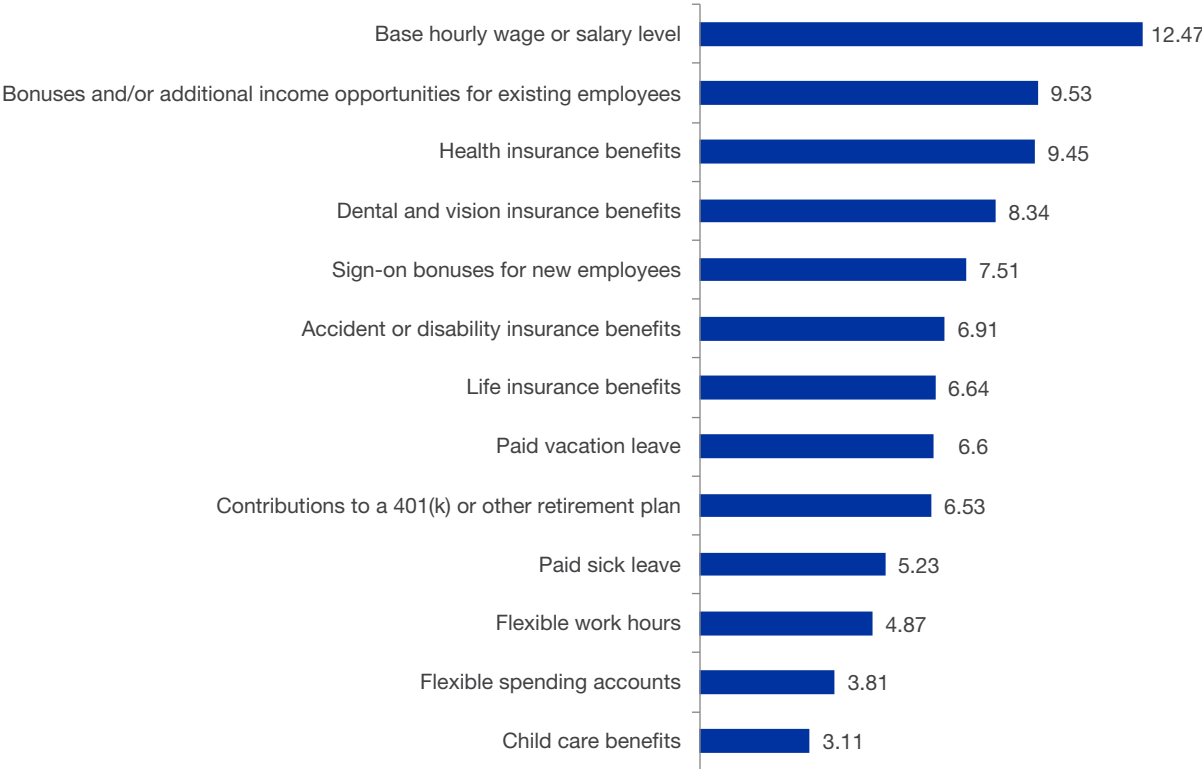
Manufacturing leaders have been leading the charge in providing mentorship resources to military-affiliated talent in addition to their general workforce. As mentioned above, Koch Industries runs a mentorship program for military-affiliated employees, assigning a local employee with previous military affiliation to aid in transition. Koch Industries uses the EverLearn platform to generate matches based on these criteria. Buckley (Koch Industries) shared the multiple, positive impacts of the program. “We have found the mentorship program to be beneficial in connecting dots between new organizational structures, pointing employees to resources and ensuring people can access accommodations, if needed.” Other companies have more informal approaches and leverage ERGs. Ball (Union Pacific) noted that while her company did not have a formal mentoring program, when anyone affiliated with the military joins the workforce, there is often an immediate connection to their military-affiliated ERG and open lines of communication which provides support to those transitioning into the industry.

“ We have found the mentorship program to be beneficial in connecting dots between new organizational structures, pointing employees to resources and ensuring people can access accommodations, if needed.”

*— John C. Buckley, II
Outreach Programs Lead
Koch Industries*

Another key aspect of retention for military-affiliated talent can be the compensation and benefits package that they receive from manufacturers. In surveying HMA alumni, the top-ranked benefits elements, in terms of importance and attractiveness, included base hourly wage and salary level, bonuses and/or additional income opportunities for existing employees followed closely by health, dental and vision insurance benefits. (See Figure 8.) Other benefits that ranked highly included sign-on bonuses for new employees, accident or disability insurance benefits and life insurance benefits. Manufacturers who are looking to attract and retain military-affiliated talent can highlight or incorporate these benefits.

Figure 8: Please rank the following compensation and benefits elements as to their importance and attractiveness for you at your company. Think of how these elements keep your compensation competitive with others in the local labor market. (Higher numbers are more important.) (HMA alumni)



Note: Respondents were able to check more than one response; therefore, responses exceed 100%.

Effectively attracting and retaining military-affiliated talent require adapting general strategies to the unique needs and interests of this population. However, companies that have undertaken these efforts have seen success in hiring and developing skilled talent who bring immense value in technical and soft skills and progress rapidly within the company. Resources like the HMA initiative can provide well-researched guidance to manufacturers interested in hiring and retaining this population, while also facilitating connections with current job seekers.

➤ Conclusion

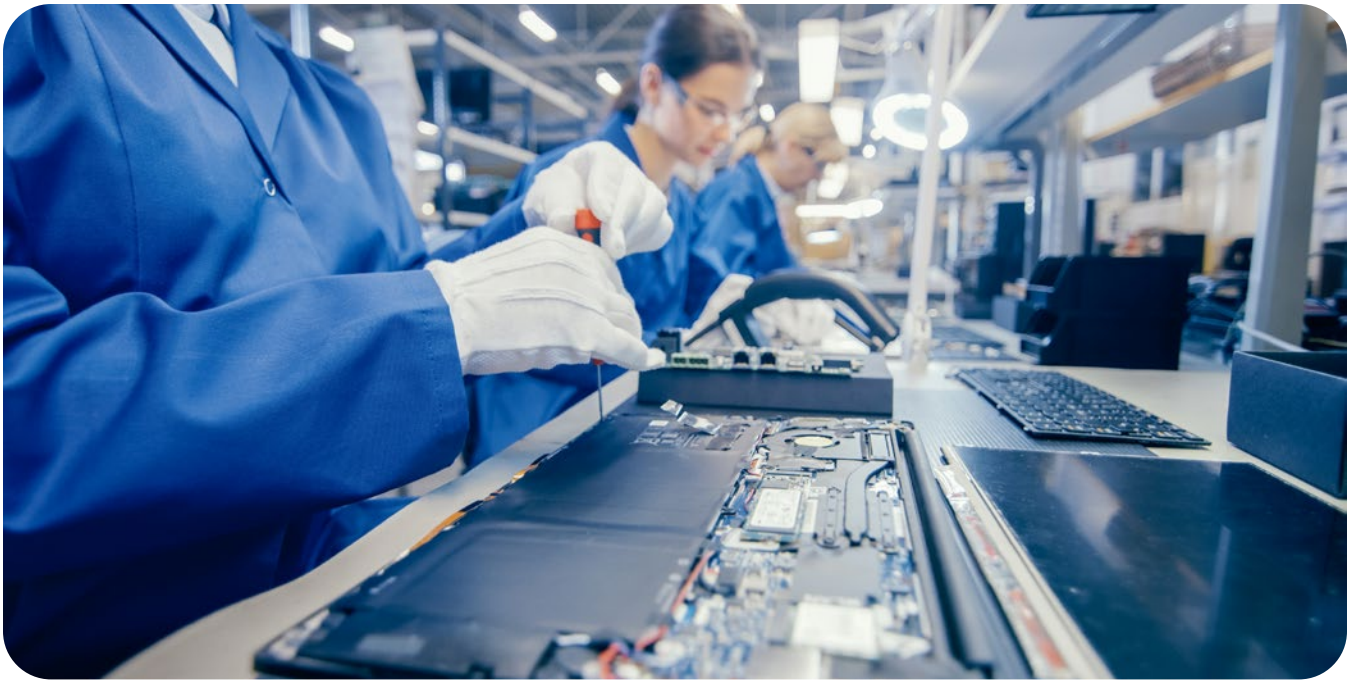
Military-affiliated talent offer considerable skills, talents, experiences and benefits to manufacturers who are looking to address labor shortages. By connecting with this population, manufacturers can hire talent who are not only trained with technical skills in roles that often translate naturally to manufacturing positions, but who also bring discipline, attention to detail and precision in work as well as experience in leadership positions. The wide range of professional qualities that this population offers makes efforts to attract and retain military-affiliated talent a worthwhile investment.

From our conversations with HMA alumni and manufacturing leaders, a few aspects of recruiting and retaining military-affiliated talent emerged that could be expanded and further developed to increase the impact of current efforts. For one, manufacturers would benefit from developing more structured and targeted methods of collecting and analyzing metrics related to attracting and retaining military talent. Most interviewees collected metrics related to self-identified protected veterans but noted that only a certain percentage of this population self-identify. Developing a system that tracks the number of military talent applicants, hires and tenure can bolster the business case for focusing recruitment efforts on this population, keeping in mind that it is voluntary for applicants to report if they have previously served or are currently active residents.

HMA alumni underscored the importance of manufacturers understanding the skills that military-affiliated talent brought to the table and mapping out a career path that took these professional capabilities into account, noting that those with military experience would be best-positioned to build that bridge. Employers can strengthen their recruitment efforts with military-affiliated talent by emphasizing opportunities and pathways for rapid career growth that are available within their organizations.

The HMA initiative is a useful resource to help manufacturers gain insight into smart practices and in-depth guidance on how companies can effectively connect with military-affiliated talent. Interviewees we spoke to—both HMA alumni and manufacturing companies active with the initiative—shared the value they found in the certification and training programs, professional development coaching as well as facilitation of connections between talent and manufacturers.

Manufacturers should leverage the skills and experiences that military-affiliated talent have acquired from engaging with military structures, facilitate the transition of this population into the manufacturing workforce and shape recruitment and retention efforts to fit the unique needs and motivations of this talent pool more strategically. In this way, manufacturers can maximize untapped capabilities, utilize different perspectives to optimize production and further develop a positive company culture that embraces individuals from all backgrounds. Manufacturing leaders we interviewed for this study have seen the numerous and significant benefits that come from tapping into the hidden population of military-affiliated talent. As labor shortages are projected to continue, underpinned by structural demographic shifts, manufacturers who focus on incorporating populations like military-affiliated talent into their recruitment pipelines can create a competitive edge that will have positive ripple effects within the industry, the military community and beyond.



➤ Appendix A: Survey Responses

1. **Do you have unfilled positions within your company for which you are struggling to find qualified applicants?**
 - a. Yes – 84.62%
 - b. No – 10.99%
 - c. Uncertain – 4.40%

2. **What percentage of your current employees are military-affiliated talent (veterans, reservists, military spouses, etc.)?**
 - a. Less than 3% – 21.98%
 - b. 4% to 6% – 23.08%
 - c. 7% to 9% – 8.79%
 - d. 10% to 12% – 14.29%
 - e. 12% to 15% – 6.59%
 - f. 16% or more – 7.69%
 - g. Uncertain – 17.58%
 - h. Weighted Average = 5.88%

3. What are you doing to attract military-affiliated talent into your company? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Partnering with Heroes MAKE America or other similar programs – 23.08%
- b. Partnering with local military installations and veteran service organizations – 35.16%
- c. Working with the community on veterans' initiatives – 28.57%
- d. Our company provides incentives to veterans and military spouses – 4.40%
- e. Veterans' employee resource groups/mentorship programs – 28.57%
- f. Human resources team with military-affiliated recruiters – 28.57%
- g. Integrating military training and experience in the job requirements – 4.40%
- h. Human resources training for better understanding military experience – 16.48%
- i. Offering pay incentives for Guard/Reservists (supplementing pay during deployments) – 16.48%
- j. Relocation assistance – 24.18%
- k. Educational benefits – 28.57%
- l. Flexible shifts – 15.38%
- m. Military-specific career page information – 7.69%
- n. We are not actively recruiting military-affiliated talent – 23.08%
- o. Other – 10.99%
- p. Uncertain – 10.99%

4. Does the military-affiliated talent you have hired generally have the necessary qualifications needed for the job you were hiring them for?

- a. Yes – 82.42%
- b. No – 3.30%
- c. We do not have any military-affiliated talent as employees – 7.69%
- d. Uncertain – 6.59%

5. Were the military-affiliated talent you hired generally more successful than non-military hires?

- a. Yes – 28.57%
- b. No – 17.58%
- c. We do not have any military-affiliated talent as employees – 6.59%
- d. Uncertain – 47.25%

- 6. If so, in what ways? [Open-ended]**
- 7. If there was a recognized standard matching of a military occupational specialty with a credential in the manufacturing sector, would this be useful to you in your recruitment efforts with military veterans?**
- a. Yes – 75.28%
 - b. No – 5.62%
 - c. Uncertain – 19.10%
- 8. What obstacles keep you from hiring more military-affiliated talent? [Open-ended]**
- 9. Is retention of military-affiliated talent over the past year an issue for your company?**
- a. Yes – 7.78%
 - b. No – 61.11%
 - c. We do not have any military-affiliated talent as employees – 7.78%
 - d. Uncertain – 21.33%
- 10. Does your company have a military-affiliated employee resource group?**
- a. Yes – 27.47%
 - b. No – 61.54%
 - c. We do not have any military-affiliated talent as employees – 5.49%
 - d. Uncertain – 5.49%
- 11. Does your company have a formal mentoring program?**
- a. Yes – 32.97%
 - b. No – 64.84%
 - c. Uncertain – 2.20%
- 12. A structured mentoring program is beneficial to advancing the careers of military-affiliated talent in manufacturing.**
- a. Strongly agree – 24.18%
 - b. Agree – 35.16%
 - c. Neutral – 39.56%
 - d. Disagree – 1.10%
 - e. Strongly disagree – 0.00%

13. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: For structured mentoring programs, it is important for military-affiliated talent to have a mentor that is also a military-affiliated individual.

- a. Strongly agree – 5.56%
- b. Agree – 27.78%
- c. Neutral – 50.00%
- d. Disagree – 16.67%
- e. Strongly disagree – 0.00%

14. What aspects at your company (e.g., company culture, other perks, career potential, family-like atmosphere) do you feel are critical selling points in attracting and retaining military-affiliated talent? [Open-ended]

The next few questions reflect your experiences with the Heroes MAKE America program.

15. Have you worked with the Manufacturing Institute's Heroes MAKE America program or other similar initiatives to recruit military-affiliated talent at your company?

- a. Yes – 20.22%
- b. No (Skip to #19) – 68.54%
- c. Uncertain (Skip to #19) – 11.24%

16. Overall, how would you rate your experience with the Heroes MAKE America program?

- a. Very positive – 44.44%
- b. Somewhat positive – 33.33%
- c. Neutral – 22.22%
- d. Somewhat negative – 0.00%
- e. Very negative – 0.00%

17. What is your firm size (e.g., the parent company, not your establishment)?

- a. Small manufacturer (e.g., fewer than 50 employees) – 13.64%
- b. Medium-sized manufacturer (e.g., 50 to 499 employees) – 45.45%
- c. Large manufacturer (e.g., 500 or more employees) – 40.91%

18. What is your company's primary industrial classification?

- a. Chemicals – 3.37%
- b. Computer and electronic products – 1.12%
- c. Electrical equipment and appliances – 6.74%
- d. Fabricated metal products – 23.60%
- e. Food manufacturing – 2.25%
- f. Furniture and related products – 1.12%
- g. Machinery – 8.99%
- h. Nonmetallic mineral products – 2.25%
- i. Paper and paper products – 1.12%
- j. Petroleum and coal products – 1.12%
- k. Plastics and rubber products – 8.99%
- l. Primary metals – 5.62%
- m. Transportation equipment – 2.25%
- n. Wood products – 1.12%
- o. Other – 30.34%

19. While this survey is anonymous, we plan to interview a handful of companies to discuss their experiences with recruiting and retaining military-affiliated talent, especially as it relates to challenges and best practices. Would you be interested in discussing this topic more fully in such an interview?

- a. Yes – 34.83%
- b. No – 65.17%

20. If so, please provide your name and contact information.

- a. Name _____
- b. Company _____
- c. Title _____
- d. Phone number _____
- e. Email _____

► Appendix B: Survey Responses (Heroes MAKE America Alumni)

1. What is your highest level of education completed prior to the Heroes MAKE America course?

- a. Less than high school diploma – 0.00%
- b. High school diploma or equivalent – 12.12%
- c. Some college, technical training or certifications, but no degree – 34.85%
- d. Associate degree – 25.76%
- e. Bachelor's degree – 19.70%
- f. Master's degree – 6.06%
- g. Doctoral or professional degree – 1.52%

2. How would you describe your current employer?

- a. Small manufacturer (e.g., fewer than 50 employees) – 9.23%
- b. Medium-sized manufacturer (e.g., 50 to 499 employees) – 16.92%
- c. Large manufacturer (e.g., 500 or more employees) – 44.62%
- d. Uncertain – 29.23%

3. What is your gender?

- a. Male – 77.27%
- b. Female – 16.67%
- c. Nonbinary – 0.00%
- d. Prefer not to state – 6.06%
- e. Different identity – 0.00%

4. Are you a military spouse?

- a. Yes (Skip to #7) – 4.55%
- b. No – 95.45%

5. How long did you serve in the military?

- a. Less than 5 years – 19.05%
- b. 6 to 10 years – 20.63%
- c. 11 to 15 years – 7.94%
- d. 16 to 20 years – 15.87%
- e. More than 20 years – 36.51%

6. What is/was your military rank?

- a. Enlisted – E1 to E9 – 95.24%
- b. Warrant Officer – W1 to W5 – 1.59%
- c. Commissioned Officer – O1 to O10 – 3.17%

7. Prior to entering the Heroes MAKE America program, had you ever considered a career in manufacturing?

- a. Yes – 26.56%
- b. No – 67.19%
- c. Uncertain – 6.25%

8. What factors influenced your decision to pursue a career in manufacturing? (Select all that apply.)

- a. Job security and stability – 58.46%
- b. Earning potential – 60.00%
- c. Flexible working hours – 13.85%
- d. Being able to make things – 26.15%
- e. Opportunities for advancement – 49.23%
- f. Relevant skills and certifications – 53.85%
- g. Proximity to home, including family and friends – 23.08%
- h. Company culture and values – 24.62%
- i. Industry reputation and demand – 30.77%
- j. Veteran referral – 30.77%
- k. Presence of a military-affiliated employee resource group – 29.23%
- l. Other – 1.54%
- m. Uncertain – 6.15%

- 9. Do you think your military experience or affiliation helped you in your transition into manufacturing?**
- a. Yes – 61.54%
 - b. No (Skip #10) – 16.92%
 - c. Uncertain (Skip #10) – 21.54%
- 10. If so, can you elaborate on how your military experience or affiliation helped you in your transition to a manufacturing career? [Open-ended]**
- 11. What specific skills or experiences do you have that you believe could be applied to a career in manufacturing? (Select all that apply.)**
- a. Technical skills, such as experience with machinery, equipment or software – 70.00%
 - b. Leadership and management experience, including leading teams or projects – 81.67%
 - c. Problem-solving skills and the ability to think critically – 86.67%
 - d. Attention to detail and precision in work – 90.00%
 - e. Communication and interpersonal skills – 83.33%
 - f. Ability to work with your hands and in a hands-on environment – 66.67%
 - g. Adaptability and flexibility in learning new processes and procedures – 86.67%
 - h. Other – 1.67%
 - i. Uncertain – 3.33%
- 12. What was the biggest learning curve in the transition from your military experience or affiliation to manufacturing? [Open-ended]**
- 13. What can manufacturers do to improve recruiting and hiring efforts from the military community? [Open-ended]**
- 14. Do you feel like you can utilize a lot of the skills you gained in the military or by being affiliated with the military in your current role?**
- a. Yes – 81.36%
 - b. No – 8.47%
 - c. Uncertain – 10.17%
- 15. Are you satisfied with your current job?**
- a. Yes – 77.59%
 - b. No (Skip to #17) – 22.41%

16. If yes, what do you like about your current job.

- a. Compensation (salary, benefits, bonuses, etc.) – 76.09%
- b. My colleagues (co-workers, manager, etc.) – 54.35%
- c. Learning and career advancement opportunities – 52.17%
- d. Workplace flexibility – 39.13%
- e. Positive company culture (reputation, values, atmosphere, social responsibility, etc.) – 47.83%
- f. I enjoy the work I do – 50.00%
- g. My job gives me the opportunity to make a difference – 30.43%
- h. My job fits well with other parts of my life – 39.13%
- i. The location is convenient for me – 39.96%
- j. Other – 4.35%

17. What are factors that would make you more likely to stay in your current role?

- a. Increased compensation (salary, benefits, bonuses, etc.) – 69.39%
- b. Better relationships with my colleagues (co-workers, manager, etc.) – 18.37%
- c. More learning and career advancement opportunities – 59.18%
- d. Increased workplace flexibility – 28.57%
- e. More positive company culture (reputation, values, atmosphere, social responsibility, etc.) – 26.53%
- f. Other – 14.29%
- g. Uncertain – 8.16%

18. Please rank the following compensation and benefits elements as to their importance and attractiveness for you at your company. Think of how these elements keep your compensation competitive with others in the local labor market. (Higher numbers are more important.)

- a. Base hourly wage or salary level – 12.47
- b. Bonuses and/or additional income opportunities for existing employees – 9.53
- c. Sign-on bonuses for new employees – 7.51
- d. Health insurance benefits – 9.45
- e. Dental and vision insurance benefits – 8.34
- f. Accident or disability insurance benefits – 6.91
- g. Life insurance benefits – 6.64
- h. Flexible spending accounts – 3.81
- i. Contributions to a 401(k) or other retirement plan – 6.53
- j. Paid vacation leave – 6.60
- k. Paid sick leave – 5.23
- l. Child care benefits – 3.11
- m. Flexible work hours – 4.87

19. Do you have access to a military/veteran employee resource group or other avenues for networking with other military-affiliated community members at your current job?

- a. Yes – 58.82%
- b. No – 31.37%
- c. Uncertain – 9.80%

The next few questions reflect your experiences as an alum of the Heroes MAKE America program.

20. Overall, how would you rate your experience in the Heroes MAKE America program?

- a. Very positive – 82.35%
- b. Somewhat positive – 9.80%
- c. Neutral – 3.92%
- d. Somewhat negative – 3.92%
- e. Very negative – 0.00%

21. Would you recommend (or have you recommended) the Heroes MAKE America program to other military-affiliated talent (veterans, reservists, military spouses, etc.)?

- a. Yes – 90.20%
- b. No – 3.92%
- c. Uncertain – 5.88%

22. Do you feel that the Heroes MAKE America program adequately prepares military-affiliated talent for careers in the manufacturing industry?

- a. Yes – 74.51%
- b. No – 9.80%
- c. Uncertain – 15.69%

23. Do you continue to engage with others from your experience in the Heroes MAKE America program?

- a. Yes – 62.75%
- b. No – 35.29%
- c. Uncertain – 1.96%

24. While this survey is anonymous, we plan to interview a handful of HMA alumni to discuss their experiences with the manufacturing industry and the HMA program, especially as it relates to challenges and lessons learned. Would you be interested in discussing this topic more fully in such an interview?

- a. Yes – 47.06%
- b. No – 52.94%

25. If so, please provide your name and contact information.

- a. Name _____
- b. Company _____
- c. Title _____
- d. Phone number _____
- e. Email _____

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