



Bringing Entrepreneurial Veterans into the Supply Chain

Veterans must find a way to transition into civilian life as productive citizens. Many call upon their entrepreneurial spirit and start businesses with the goal of entering government and corporate supply chains.

Every year thousands return home or leave the military and find themselves asking, "What's next?" They are getting help from government agencies and corporations that are offering high quality entrepreneurship training and opportunities to meet corporate decision-makers. These opportunities are important to all veterans and service-disabled veterans (SDVs) interested in succeeding in the business world. Knowing the veterans are motivated to succeed and have critical skill sets, it is important to maintain a strong corporate effort to actively seek and utilize the veteran and SDV-owned businesses. Companies are getting familiar with the resources offered to veteran entrepreneurs and developing supplier processes that specifically speak to the unique needs of veterans.

Knowing Where to Go

The military does things differently compared to the civilian sector, and that extends to activities like procurement and contract negotiations. Fortunately, there is a wealth of entrepreneurial training resources available today that are designed to give the veterans and SDVs considering entrepreneurship the information needed to make the transition from military employment to civilian business ownership. Corporations can outreach to veterans and service-disabled veterans (SDVs) who have completed any of these programs to actively recruit suppliers for their supply chains.

One of the largest set of available programs is through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). As an example, there is *Boots to Business* which is a two-step program with part one, "Introduction to Entrepreneurship" offered online or at military institutions to active military, and part two offered online as the "Foundations of Entrepreneurship" once the service member returns home. Similar training is offered to all veterans through the "Boots to Business-Reboot." There are several programs that help veterans access capital and learn to successfully compete for government contracts.

The SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development has *Veterans Business Outreach Centers*, the *Veteran Institute for Procurement*, *Women Veterans Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship*, *Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities*, and the *SCORE Business Mentor*, to name a few. The SCORE (acronym for Service Corps of Retired Executives) association is a nonprofit association of thousands of business counselors who volunteer to serve as advisors, mentors, and counselors.



Developing Supplier Processes for Vetpreneurs

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, veteran-owned and SDV businesses account for approximately 9 percent of all firms and are found in most industries. There are millions of successful businesses ready to grow and new businesses started regularly, many owned and operated by veterans and SDVs who have taken advantage of the government resources. Veterans bring excellent problem solving skills and innovation to their businesses and can contribute the same assets to corporations.

There is a large network of programs offered by nonprofits, government agencies, and universities assisting veterans. Corporations are realizing that veterans and SDV owned businesses are an excellent fit in supply chains because they bring the exact qualities they need – new perspectives, ability to adhere to schedules, innovative ideas, and community connections. Corporations actively seeking veteran and SDV-owned businesses are taking advantage of government agencies like the SBA to locate diverse businesses. Other good sources include certifying associations. The National Veteran Business Development Council is a third party Veteran Owned Business Certification program and offers access to Supplier Diversity opportunities at companies and government agencies worth an estimated \$80 billion annually. Another important association is the National Veteran Owned Business Association (NaVOBA) which also certifies businesses.

Finding what the NaVOBA refers to as 'vetpreneurs' is only a first step. Helping the vetpreneurships succeed is the next step, and there are companies that have established processes to ensure the supply chain and the veteran or SDV-owned business succeeds. There are big corporate names on the list like ADP, Lockheed Martin, AbbVie, Merck, AON, AstraZeneca, AT&T, Cargill, Johnson & Johnson, Nielsen, and too many others to list. Companies are developing unique approaches designed around specifics of their operations.

Proactively Finding and Assisting Veteran-Owned Businesses

A good example is Comcast, which has a proactive approach to attracting and retaining veterans, in the workforce and as suppliers. The company created the Joint Diversity Advisory Council with members coming from community businesses and leaders. The Council advises the Comcast C-suite on diversity initiatives, including developing and strengthening relationships with SDVs. Comcast depends on veteran-owned businesses to help the company remain innovative and ahead of the competition. Companies like Comcast have found that veterans and SDVs are comfortable with technology and the speed of technological change because of their military experiences.

Comcast is just one example of a large company that decided to proactively attract and assist vetpreneurs. Johnson & Johnson uses business analytics to identify veteran and SDV-owned business and to find the best fit for them in their supply chain. AT&T developed a mentorship program for SDVs that is executed by the John F. Kennedy Institute of Entrepreneurial Leadership. It assists SDVs with meeting the challenges of competing for contracts in the global marketplace.

As firms search for the most innovative suppliers, they would do well to look first at veteran-owned businesses because many of them are tech companies. Forbes named the "Top 25 Veteran-Founded Startups in America"* in November 2016, and reading down the list makes it clear the veterans are



using their military technology skills to develop innovative tech products. RedOwl combines sentiment analysis with behavioral analytics to identify potential unwanted behaviors like data theft. UniteUS designed, built, and deployed case management and care coordination technology. Rhumbix developed a smartphone app that digitizes construction foreman's data collection processes so that it is immediately available on the web portal for use by project administrators. Sensei developed software for mobile devices that large organizations use to stay in contact with constituents. There are many other veteran and SDV-owned businesses that offer precisely what corporations are looking for – innovative suppliers.

[Taking More Action](#)

Multiple resources already exist. Many corporations are actively working with veteran and SDV-owned businesses to bring them into the supply chain and help them build capacity. What is needed is more effort among the companies that are not sure where to go or how to begin developing their own unique pathways. The military men and women returning to civilian life have the talent, skills, and entrepreneurial spirit. What they deserve is equal opportunity to succeed.