

EDIT Group

Defence Transition Inquiry Submission

Summary

The Defence transition problem in Australia (and in other countries) is due to decision makers not understanding the entirety of the problem. Of all the attempts to address the issue, none has proven to be enduringly effective. This lack of understanding is evident today as the ADF and the Prime Minister's Veteran Employment Initiative are focused on job outcomes only as an indication of transition success. This approach only transfers the transition responsibility onto the new employer, however they aren't aware of it or equipped to deal with it. History has proven that unaddressed transition problems will eventually surface at some point later in their career. Continuing to bypass the areas of transition will keep the problem where it is. A solution that incorporates the right training at the right time, by the right people (using a flexible delivery mode) will work - and is now currently available in Australia.

This proposed solution doesn't negate Defence's responsibility to prepare veterans to be ready to undertake transition training at the right stages throughout their career.

Understanding the problem

1. Veterans

Veterans change their understanding, attitude and approach to transition at different times in their career:

Early in their Career - In the initial stages of their military career, veterans are told how good they are and how much better than civilians they are. All their training exercises and deployments confirm their understanding of this concept. They receive rugged military training which provides a tough exterior to do their job well and to handle tough situations. Telling them they need assistance to talk to someone about future employment at this stage is met with the attitude "that's for those weak people".

Mid-Career – At some point they will begin to think about re-joining the ranks of civilians and this concept of what a civilian is like then seems hard to reconcile. However, most approach it assuming they will go into the commercial workplace and prove themselves to be better than their civilian counterparts. Yes, at this point they still don't get it.

Approaching Transition – After deciding to discharge, there is little to help them remove the façade that they are better than civilians. Defence provide some theory of what it will take to effectively transition, however there is no de-militarisation training. They hear the transition disaster stories and believe they happen because others aren't as strong as they are.

Post Transition - Only once they have personally experienced the transition, do they then begin to realise that this 'transition thing' is more complex than they gave it credit for. But at this point, they have missed the transition training offered during their service. Or if they did undertake transition training, the trainers didn't relate the importance to what they were about to embark on and provide tools on how to address it.

2. Employers

Employers want staff who are professional, reliable, self-disciplined and can work autonomously. While almost every veteran will fit into this category, all previous transition programs don't equip the veteran to adequately portray this to the employer.

The social responsibility to hire a veteran is increasing, however 'best practice' commercially is to hire the best person for the job. While the veteran may actually be the best person for the job, they struggle to relay this to the employer, and in this competitive job market the employer sees better relevant skills and cultural fit in a non-Defence person who has easily identifiable commercial experience.

Unless every member of the organisation buys into the concept of hiring a veteran, there will always be people who disagree with providing a hand-out for a veteran and will challenge the veteran about their cultural fit and value to the organisation. Without transition training, the veteran has no sense of value to rebuke any workplace challenge. The negative transition statistic then begins to surface.

Where we get it wrong

The three elements that we (ADF) and other international Defence Forces get wrong are:

1. Focusing too much on the veteran being given a job (thereby assuming the transition has been successful) without addressing the transition components;
2. Using unsuitable trainers and coaches to provide effective transition training; and
3. Using programs that mimic civilian outplacement programs.

Effective ADF Transition

The solution is simply - but not easy.

The correct solution is to retrain veterans in such a way they can leave Defence and compete for jobs like every other job seeker who wishes to change jobs. This means helping them to leave behind the negative elements of their military career when entering the new job seeking process and knowing how to promote themselves to civilian employers without losing the impact of their message through military jargon.

The challenge is that a standard process (one size fits all) won't work, as each veteran's pre-Defence life is different, each veteran's military career is different, and each veteran's new vocation will be different. Helping them to know what commercial skills they have acquired in Defence that are relevant in their new chosen field is what they need. But only another ex-Defence person who has also experienced integrating into a commercial workplace is able to effectively help these exiting veterans.

Effective ADF transition is possible when combining the following:

1. **Timing** – History has shown us that even if offered free, people (not only veterans) don't understand how they can be better at engaging with other people. Hence why the right training, delivered by the right people at the right time, whilst operating within a flexible delivery model is needed.
2. **Relatable Trainers/Coaches** – Success will only come by having suitably qualified and experienced trainers and coaches who have walked the path the veterans are about to tread (i.e. it is mandatory that every trainer/coach has previous ex-ADF service, personally experienced the transition challenges and has successfully integrated into a commercial workplace).
3. **The training must incorporate:**
 - a. Helping them to choose a new career direction
 - b. Identifying all their commercially transferable skills and achievements
 - c. Provide them with a demilitarised and targetable CV/Résumé
 - d. Provide self-promotion techniques (written and oral)
 - e. Understand what employers look for in new staff
 - f. How they navigate the Cultural Fit and workplace integration aspects
 - g. Breaking down the bravado military cultural exterior
 - h. How to reveal potential negatives
 - i. Negotiating their starting salary
 - j. Assistance with job search
 - k. A Qualification Gap Analysis
 - l. On-going support - ex-Defence mentors, videos and templates
 - m. Employers willing to participate in the entire transition process – not just offer a job vacancy

By implementing this solution:

- We empower veterans to see that their military career does help prepare them for civilian life.

- They can now talk to civilians who will understand them and thereby feel a new sense of belonging and identity outside the uniform.
- They can get excited about this new chapter in their lives.
- They can again see purpose in a new career.
- It lessens the cultural shock and subsequent adjustment needed.
- They can find their new value and self-worth in knowing they are equipped for life after Defence.

The current practice is that employers with the social responsibility of hiring veterans are opening employment opportunities for exiting ADF members. While this is commendable and should be encouraged to continue (plus it is also what the veteran wants), the reality is that this is only one piece of the puzzle and neglecting the other areas only gets us where we are today.

It is widely known that mental health is an area that needs significant improvement. An effective transition solution must be applied to all veterans, not only those with mental health, as many leave the ADF with mental health issues, or are susceptible to having mental health issues if their transition isn't successful.

Case studies highlighting the current flawed system

Case Study 1 (CS1)

CS1 had served 19 years in the Army. While he continued to receive treatment for his PTSD, he was an independent contractor to Telstra in Canberra. As a contractor, he didn't disclose his PTSD to Telstra, however he wasn't turning up to work on time and became increasingly unproductive. When questioned about his timeliness and productivity, he gave reasons that were unacceptable to Telstra. He was told that his services were no longer required and was to be escorted from the premises. However, CS1 refused to leave. Only after an in-depth discussion by someone with empathy, was his PTSD revealed. He was attending appointments for his PTSD which is why he wasn't turning up to work on time. This guilt then made him feel worse about himself and his productivity suffered as a result. When his condition was known, a restructure of his work hours enabled him to be more productive and the guilt was removed.

His bravado exterior was the barrier to an effective transition solution being provided.

Case Study 2 (CS2)

CS2 served 12 years in the RAN as an officer and decided to leave at his own request. Using his CTAS entitlements he sought assistance through an approved organisation on the ADF Transition Panel of providers. Excerpt from CS2 – "The person assisting me seemed to have no idea or experience about military roles or jobs (and their equivalents)...he admitted as much and said that his company had "less than a year" worth of experience in dealing with anyone from military...the person also informed me that he was used to dealing with much lower ranked members most commonly on medical discharges. When I showed him the RPL / Diplomas which I was able to obtain (from independently having my service record assessed by College of Law and Education Training [CLET])...he seemed to have no experience or idea on ANY of the diplomas, and could only seem to offer 'WHS Assessor' or 'Training Manager' as a job. The structure of the assessment process seemed very unadapted to anything more than someone with very LIMITED experience or formal qualifications or skills...the person seemed to be pulling individual jobs and then typing in random jobs into a "Job Search" website. He asked me, for example, "How about Training Manager"? (pause in conversation)...and I responded, "Ok, what's that?"...and he then proceeded to type "Training Manager" in 'My Job Search'. CS2 contacted us after this meeting and paid for our services out of his own pocket. We assisted CS2 into a Project Manager's role in Fujitsu within three weeks.

While the items to be delivered in a transition program might look the same, the delivery and ability to relate to each veteran is key in building trust and breaking down the barriers to effective transition. This is an area that lacks governance by Defence (globally) in ensuring the quality of transition training delivered is commensurate with the need of the customers. Transition success can only be measured by the changes in the veteran, not the components delivered.

Case Study 3 (CS3)

CS3 completed 25 years in the Army and discharged at own request as a WO1. He had a Masters of IT and several Diplomas. His first employment outside Army was with Boeing Defence, where he was employed for three years before being made redundant (as was his entire team). CS3 then started to apply for jobs. After three months CS3 contacted us to say that he had applied for over 30 jobs without success. He sought our help to get a driving job, as he was desperate and needed to pay the bills. We put him through our Defence transition program, helped him to understand his transferable skills and his commercial value. This resulted in him gaining two interviews from two applications and he was rapidly recruited into an IT Manager's position.

Employment without transition assistance does not solve the transition problem.

CS1 could have been a tragedy (potential suicide) if handled differently. It is a shame that he never felt comfortable enough or was provided tools to be able to explain his PTSD to an employer without it being to his detriment. He now has some of those tools.

CS2 could have been a transition failure (under-employment) if he relied on using only his CTAS entitlement - the vetted services of the ADF Transition panel of providers (yes there are many other similar cases).

CS3 could have been considered a transition success up to three years after his military service. However, he almost became another negative transition statistic.

EDIT Group (Ex-Defence Integration Team Inc) is a Not-For-Profit, Australian veteran-owned organisation that delivers a formal Defence Career Transition and Workplace Integration Course which is aligned under the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF). It is designed to specifically assist ADF members in their transition from the uniform into meaningful civilian employment. This course is a full time three-day course with two additional 1-2 hour sessions to hone and practice job interview performance that is specifically targeted to the job and industry type for each individual. It is designed to be delivered once the individual has begun thinking about leaving Defence.

Details about the course content and the employer engagement model are available upon request.

The EDIT course shows ADF members their new purpose in life, their true value in a civilian context, provides empathy and tools to assist with the necessary cultural adjustment and provides a new identity outside the military uniform.

The concept of the EDIT course is to be a self-funded social enterprise through sales of 3Elements Coffee, donations from industry and government assistance. EDIT boasts trainers with over 200 years personal military service and over 100 years post-Defence commercial integration experience. The team have provided Defence-specific transition services in Australia and New Zealand since 2004.

Barriers that prevent EDIT from effectively engaging with ADF members to provide more effective support to ADF Personnel as they transition out of service include:

- Not being part of the ADF Transition Panel of Providers;
- Not being able to attend ADF Transition Seminars; and
- Restrictions placed on veterans to engage with external providers.

Barriers that prevent EDIT from effectively engaging with the Department of Defence to provide more effective support to ADF Personnel as they transition out of service include the fact that the ADF Transitions Panel of providers was already in place when EDIT was formed (formed in Jan 2017).

Barriers that prevent EDIT from effectively engaging with the Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide more effective support to ADF Personnel as they transition out of service include the fact that the department is unable to engage with a non-Comcare accredited organisation. As a Defence-specific career transition organisation it will never be Comcare accredited.

If DVA are moving into the space of providing transition assistance to veterans that don't have a medical claim, then they need provision to engage with organisations that don't require Comcare accreditation.

When these barriers are removed, the EDIT course will have a significant and positive impact on ADF transition.

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