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Focus on Military Veteran Employment

Troops to Energy Jobs Template and Database Updated

A key perk of CEWD membership is access to numerous resources—such as toolkits, databases, and inspiring best practices—that allow utilities, contractors, and educators to continuously improve workforce development in the energy industry.

These tools require frequent updating in order to remain relevant. CEWD staff, along with representatives from five member companies, have recently completed updates to key Troops to Energy Jobs resources.

Military recruiters from Dominion, Entergy, Consumers Energy, Pike, and Southern Company worked alongside Rosa Schmidt, Consultant, CEWD, for approximately two months to review and refresh the Troops to Energy Jobs website, roadmap, and national template. In weekly meetings, the group reviewed documents page by page.

“We looked at it from both the veteran’s perspective as well as the industry user,” said Schmidt, explaining that each of the volunteer committee members had military experience. “We asked the group to make sure everything was still relevant, that the tools were easy to understand and useful. We also asked them, ‘What would be more helpful? What has changed? Is there anything that we’ve learned from implementing these programs?’ And then we made modifications based upon their experience. It was an extensive process.”

In all, nearly 100 changes were made, said Schmidt, “though some were minor.”

Key changes included:

- *Adding “other job categories” to the roadmap.* “Initially, we listed only our five key jobs,” said Schmidt. “But we hire veterans for other job areas, such as supply chain, human resources, and accounting positions. So we added those other job areas to the roadmap.”

701 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004-2696
202.638.5802

www.cewd.org

www.getintoenergy.com

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Troops to Energy Jobs Template and Database Updated (cont.)

- *Changing the name of the veterans database to the veterans “registration site” and purging people from the site who are “no longer interested in the industry or anyone who was in the database for more than four years.”*
- *Creating a LinkedIn page for Troops to Energy Jobs. “It’s an additional vehicle,” said Schmidt, “to raise awareness of the industry. It’s another way of connecting with veterans and servicemembers.”*
- *Creating a business case presentation for the National Template. “We felt like we needed a template that companies could easily use to talk to senior leaders about the value of hiring veterans,” said Schmidt, “so we created a presentation along with a value proposition document. This provides members a business case template they can use.”*
- *Creating a Troops to Energy Jobs presentation. “We felt we were missing an opportunity when our member companies visit military bases or meet with veterans to share the valuable tools and resources available through Troops to Energy Jobs—tools that can help them learn more about the energy industry and our great careers,” said Schmidt. “So we developed a presentation members can use to highlight the roadmap, the veterans registration site, and the one-stop shop for energy job postings.”*
- *Updating the assessment and gap analysis. “We went through each item on the assessment and added other areas of potential gaps,” said Schmidt. “For example, the gap analysis didn’t include employee resource groups as potential retention vehicles. Based on the experience of the five companies, we looked at what was working for them and made sure all of these areas were covered.”*
- *Adding a sample score card for measuring the success of veteran hiring and recruiting plans. “Understanding how they are doing is an important part of strategy implementation. How well are their plans working? How are they measuring success? The score card will help our members keep track,” said Schmidt.*
- *Adding a SHRM Veterans at Work certificate. “This tool is being used successfully already by several members,” said Schmidt. “It’s an education tool for companies that want to educate non-military employees about veteran recruiting, hiring, and retention.”*

“(CEWD) developed a presentation members can use to highlight the roadmap, the veterans registration site, and the one-stop shop for energy job postings.”

For more information, please reach out to Rosa Schmidt at rosa@cewd.org.

Understanding Military Culture: A Key Step to Greater Retention

Energy companies are increasingly looking for ways to bring military veterans into their ranks. But getting them on board is only the first step; it’s also important to look at strategies for keeping them on board.

That means providing greater support for veterans—and their families. And to do that, employers need a deeper understanding of just who their veteran employees are, what it’s like to transition from military to civilian life, and the ongoing challenges they face.

Dominion Energy, based out of Richmond, VA, is taking multiple steps to help everyone at the utility build a better understanding of their veteran coworkers and

potential job applicants with military experience. In 2018, the company put together a roundtable of 20 employees who had served in the military, representing different genders, ethnicities, branches of service, military ranks, and positions within the company. They also invited company leadership and representatives from a range of departments to join the discussion.

“We were really thoughtful in who we invited and who we had in the room, as well as which topics to address,” said Matt Kellam, Military and Recruitment Program Coordinator, Dominion Energy.

The roundtable, hosted by the company’s veterans resource group, took up four major issues: recruiting and onboarding; trust and training; capitalizing on innovation; and benefits and support.

Understanding Military Culture: A Key Step to Greater Retention (cont.)

“The roundtable discussion forum allowed veteran employees to share some of the challenges faced by veterans in the workplace, identify key areas of improvement within the organization, and offer innovative ideas for next steps,” said Kellam. “It provided a voice for our veteran employees and the opportunity to have direct correspondence with leadership, as well as to help shape and drive the company’s military and veteran program efforts.”

Out of the meeting came several recommendations, all of which are in the process of being implemented, said Kellam. Dominion is continuing to review, address, and make improvements to its military leave policies and other benefits for veteran employees; improve military skills translation for company leaders, employees, and potential employees, to help them better understand how skills learned in the military align with those needed in energy jobs; create a military fellowship through the Department of Defense’s SkillBridge program, which allows transitioning servicemembers to intern with civilian companies prior to separating from the military; and roll out a “Veterans at Work” certificate to help Dominion employees with military culture and awareness.

The certificate is offered by the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) Foundation and requires the completion of two surveys, two learning segments, and a short quiz. It includes reading a short guidebook and watching videos that accompany each chapter, put together by PsychArmor, an organization that provides free, online training videos that educate civilians about military culture. The course is designed to assist employers with recruiting, hiring, engaging, and retaining military veterans.

Kellam, also a veteran, said he test drove the certificate program to see whether it would be appropriate, before recommending it for broader use at Dominion. “It was spot on, from what I have experienced,” he said. He then asked a few veteran colleagues to take the course. “The best summary of what the group thought was that it was ‘relatable.’ I think that’s pretty telling,” said Kellam.

Although the program is targeted at civilians, Kellam said he found it useful for those who had been in the military,

as well. “I think everyone can benefit from it,” he said. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been in the military, and I learned a lot.”

Dominion will now require all of its recruiters to earn the certificate but will also offer it to others throughout the company. All of its veteran resource group leaders have taken the course, as well as some of the company’s leadership. Employees who go through the program have also been invited to sit down with veteran coworkers to discuss some of the segments, said Kellam.

“It’s important for all employees, especially the leader and team members of that (deployed) employee, to understand the value of what that servicemember is doing and how they can be supportive.”

Kellam said having employees outside of Human Resources complete the certificate is beneficial to everyone. For example, he said, when an employee is deployed, “it’s important for all employees, especially the leader and team members of that employee, to understand the value of what that servicemember is doing and how they can be supportive. What can they do to back that person up while they are deployed? It’s important for them to understand these things for all of the same reasons that broader topics of diversity and inclusion are important.”

Darius Johnson, Vice President of Employee Engagement and Development, Dominion Energy, said all of these efforts are part of Dominion’s longstanding commitment to veterans and servicemembers.

“The commitment that our company has to the military, to veterans, and to servicemembers, it starts at the top,” said Johnson, noting that Dominion was one of the founding companies for the Troops to Energy Jobs initiative and had kept its commitment to ensure one in five new hires would be a veteran. “It’s something we’re proud of. Our history has shown that veterans are often great employees. We strategically target them for that reason; therefore, it supports our company. We also know that it supports our country.”

Military Makeover Features Consumers Energy as Veteran-Friendly Employer

Raising awareness of energy careers is a key component in building and maintaining the energy workforce pipeline, and CEWD members are continuously looking for new ways to do so—especially among veterans and transitioning military servicemembers.

So when Montel Williams offered Consumers Energy the opportunity to tell its story on his nationally televised *Military Makeover* program, they couldn't let the opportunity slip away. Though they almost did.

"As a Michigan-focused company, our communications department initially didn't see the value in it," said John Broschak, Vice President of Generation and Compression Operations, Consumers Energy. "There were production costs and other factors to consider."

It was the company's Veteran's Advisory Panel—a group of employees with military backgrounds—that convinced the utility to jump at the opportunity. "They convinced us that national exposure to the great work we're doing for veterans would benefit us on the recruiting side. We don't get many opportunities for national exposure," said Broschak.

Exposure outside the state of Michigan is critical to recruiting for high-demand jobs for which there is insufficient supply in-state, said Amber Fogarty, Energy Talent Pipeline Specialist, Consumers Energy. "All of us are vying for quality talent and there's only so much of it in Michigan," she said. "This opportunity allowed us to get our name out there, to let people know that Consumers Energy is a great place for veterans to work."

Landing a segment on Lifetime's *Military Makeover: Operation Career*, which aired in July of this year, did exactly that: It garnered more than 3,200 YouTube views in less than four months; 37 company website direct links; significant internal company positive feedback and reactions; and provided a tool for ongoing recruiting efforts.

The segment highlighted the many ways in which Consumers Energy supports the military veterans they hire. "In 2018, 11 percent of this company's new hires

were military veterans. When they say that they actively recruit veterans, they put their money where their mouth is," Williams announces at the beginning of the segment.

"Consumers Energy shares a culture that is based on many of the same tenets as the military. They have a sense of service, and all their employees exhibit an accountability to each other and to the people of Michigan," he goes on to explain, before the segment launches into interviews taped with Broschak—himself a Navy veteran—and two other veteran employees at the company.

All three interviews spotlight the benefits to military veterans of working at Consumers Energy: support as they transition from the military to civilian life, support for their families if they have to redeploy after being hired, job security, and a career that utilizes many of the same skills learned in the military, for example.

"This is the place you want to be if you are transitioning out of service," Broschak says in the video. "Honoring everyone's service is really what it's about."

Another way Consumers Energy supports those transitioning out of the military is to provide training that puts them on a career path they can follow down numerous roads, said Fogarty.

The Enhanced Infrastructure Replacement Program (EIRP), offered once each year, provides three weeks of training to those coming out of the military that teaches them how to dig up and replace aging natural gas pipeline. The course is followed by a paid, 90-day internship. Upon successful completion, graduates are hired as gas line laborers.

"We have put 136 veterans to work this way over the past four years," said Fogarty. "It has been a springboard for a lot of veterans. They do the labor work and then find additional opportunities within the company. Some have found welding jobs or heavy equipment operator jobs. There's a variety of pathways they can then move into based on their interests."

Fogarty noted that veterans have a much higher pass rate than non-veterans for a physical assessment that is requisite to being hired. And, she added, the EIRP program has a 97 percent retention rate for veterans.

Military Makeover Features Consumers Energy as Veteran-Friendly Employer (cont.)

“This is now our primary source of recruiting into the ranks,” said Broschak, explaining that pipeline infrastructure replacement has replaced meter reading as the company’s biggest entry-level position. “Once they come through this pathway, they are working their way into other higher-paid jobs in other parts of the company. It’s an evolution of the career progression pathway and it helps us get high-quality talent into the company in a very meaningful way.”

“Veterans are absolutely amazing. They are the best employees you could ever hope for.”

“Veterans are absolutely amazing,” he emphasizes at the end of the *Military Makeover* segment. “They are some of the best employees you could ever hope for.”

Watch the TV segment here: <https://youtu.be/UcZCWszYSP4>.

Learn more about the Veteran’s Advisory Panel at Consumers Energy here: <https://youtu.be/ARNnSQn0CWM>.

Learn more about how Consumers Energy supports veterans: <https://youtu.be/H82AXK-ly-I>.

Soldiers to Sidelines: A New Troops to Energy Jobs Partnership

Veterans and military servicemembers transitioning to the civilian world are looking for many things—jobs, further education, a home they don’t have to leave every two years. What that looks like for everyone is different. But one thing that consistently tops the list of things they seek, said Rosa Schmidt, Consultant, CEWD, is “a sense of purpose.”

“In the military, they have that sense of purpose,” she said. “When they leave, it creates a big gap. They feel like they’ve lost that.”

Enter Soldiers to Sidelines, an organization dedicated to educating, developing, and certifying transitioning servicemembers and veterans to become coaches in community sporting organizations all over the country.

“This gives them a sense of purpose that allows them to get involved in the community,” said Schmidt, who recently brought Soldiers to Sidelines on board as a Troops to Energy Jobs and CEWD partner.

The partnership appealed to Soldiers to Sidelines, said Harrison Bernstein, Founder and Executive Director, because high school and community coaches “are not rich. In order to keep military coaches in the community, we have to support them with careers that support their desire to serve the community. We don’t want not having a job, or coaching not providing enough income, to prevent them from doing what they love to do. This is where CEWD comes in.”

Soldiers to Sidelines helps to create awareness of jobs in the energy industry among the veterans and transitioning military servicemembers they train. They put the Troops to Energy Jobs logo on their website, talk about energy careers in their presentations to servicemembers, and help connect veterans and servicemembers to energy companies looking to hire.

“Veterans who go on to their website to find out more about them will also find out more about Troops to Energy Jobs,” said Schmidt. “They’ll find us.”

Bernstein said after his organization trains and certifies someone to coach, they are there to support that coach for the rest of his or her life. “We act as their agent to get them coaching positions in their community and we do this for the rest of their life.” They help coaches find both paid and volunteer positions, “whether they want to reconnect with their son or daughter on a Little League team or they want to make this their career.”

They ask energy companies that hire their coaches to likewise support this commitment by giving them flexible work schedules when needed. Many are happy to do so, said Bernstein. He cited the example of Navy retiree Eric Allie, an Exelon employee of nearly 20 years who began working as a youth football coach and now coaches assistant varsity football for a top 20 team that travels extensively.

“Exelon has been a champion in his pursuits,” Bernstein said.

Soldiers to Sidelines: A New Troops to Energy Jobs Partnership (cont.)

“Transitioning from military to civilian life was smooth

"Transitioning from military to civilian life was smooth thanks to Exelon."

thanks to Exelon,” said Allie, who explained that Exelon had provided both professional growth opportunities and the support that enabled him

to pursue personal growth opportunities, such as the Soldiers to Sidelines coaching program. “The program has enabled me to recognize my personal value while molding successful athletes in the secondary sector,” he said.

Bernstein said he’d love to see more companies like Exelon get on board.

“We are challenging energy companies from around the country to get more involved and support more of our soldier coaches,” he said.

For more information about how to get involved with Soldiers to Sidelines, contact Bernstein at Harrison@soldierstosidelines.org.

Upcoming Events

USA Science & Engineering Festival

April 24-26

Washington, DC

[Details](#)

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