



Armed Forces: Mentoring program matches veterans with private-sector bigwigs

Fox News, May 20, 2017 – The third Saturday of May is Armed Forces Day, a day designated to honor Americans serving in the military. There are thousands of veterans' organizations that assist those who have served every single day.

American Corporate Partners (ACP), a non-profit organization in New York City, is the only group that matches veterans with mentors at major corporations in the country.

"Many of the people we work with have never been in the private sector before. They've never had a resume that's been written for a private sector person," said Sid Goodfriend, chairman and founder of American Corporate Partners.

Goodfriend started ACP in 2008. After working as a banker for many large U.S. companies for 25 years, he wanted to move onto something more meaningful. He was looking to give something back to the country.

Goodfriend approached many business leaders he had worked with in the past. The first person he approached was the chairman of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi.

"I told her I wanted to start a program a little like Big Brothers Big Sisters [of America], except in this case the little brother might be 250-pound Marine sergeant," he said. "It's really hard finding a job that leads to a meaningful career. A big part of what we do is we help people explore what the careers are and then we help them get there."

When the organization first launched, six corporations committed to Goodfriend's idea.

Today, up to 70 companies work with ACP, including Deloitte, VISA, UPS, and Liberty Mutual. Fox News Channel's parent company, 21st Century Fox, also participates.

"Karl Rove has been a supporter of ours, but so has David Axelrod," said Goodfriend. "We've had great results from companies that would in normal cases not be in the same room with each other."

Right now, nearly 2,700 veterans are mentored by someone in the corporate world through ACP. More than 9,700 have completed the program.

Most of ACP's funding comes from their corporate partners. The cost of mentoring a veteran is \$1,000 a year. Participants apply online and ACP staff reaches out to everyone who inquires. Most of the mentorships are done virtually.

“As long as they have served since 9/11 and we believe they would be appreciative of the time of their mentor, we've taken everyone,” said Goodfriend, who has never earned a salary as chairman of the organization.

He estimates their participants make an average of \$70,000-a-year to start.

ACP protégé Jamilla Smith, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan as a member of the U.S. Army Reserve, is working as a recruiter for Bloomberg in Manhattan.

“One of the first things I learned is how to navigate the corporate landscape and how to interact with my co-workers in a professional, technical manner,” said Smith.

Her mentor is Rose Lanard, chief diversity officer, at S&P Global. She says mentoring is a big part of her company's culture. Her corporate responsibility team approached her about ACP.

“I just jumped right at it. I knew it would be a big win,” said Lanard.

Lanard's commitment to veterans is a personal one. Her father served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War and her cousins served in Vietnam.

“I think that I would have a lot more anxiety in terms of how to interact with the professionals in corporate America and how to have those difficult conversations, how to make the decisions, how to garner different opportunities,” said Smith, who joined Bloomberg earlier this year.

Smith, who was raised in New York City, says her military background prepared her for the demands of corporate life.

“The biggest one I can think of it is attention to detail. That's something huge in the area of recruiting,” said Smith.

Lanard said working with Smith has been a two-way experience.

“Jamilla has been remarkably open, open to feedback, creative, thoughtful, and dynamic,” Lanard said. “I look forward to our conversations.”

The pair expects their partnership will go beyond the conclusion of their one-year commitment.

“We're both ready to keep going. I think that's a really important mark of a good partnership as well,” she said.

Smith aspires to work up the ranks in her career, either in management or a role in corporate diversity.