

Veterans Struggle to Find Work After Military: “We Still Want to Give The Best of Ourselves”

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Major General Dustin "Dusty" Shultz is not leaving the service just yet, but she's already preparing for her career after the military.

Shultz, a two-star general for the U.S. Army, told CBS News the transition is "pretty tough."

Finding a job after their military service affects nearly 200,000 veterans every year. Only one in four U.S. veterans have a job lined up after leaving the armed forces, according to the Pew Research Center.

Shultz, who learned to speak multiple languages over her three decades of service, is looking to add something new to her toolbox — learning how to translate her skills into corporate language.

"Business is a new language, you know? In the military, we have our own terminology. I work in the G-357 and to most people, that doesn't mean much," she said. "But if I tell somebody, you know, 'I work in the operations center of the Army,' that means a lot."

It's just one of the issues service members face when transitioning to civilian life.

A U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation study from 2016 found that 53% of veterans are unemployed for four months or longer after leaving the military. Veterans who spoke to CBS News cited a lack of resources, underemployment and not having a four-year college degree as some of the obstacles that prevent them from getting a good-paying job.

American Corporate Partners, an organization that assists veterans in finding their post-military purpose through a network of mentors, helped First Sergeant Manny Morejonreyes, who served as a senior aviation leader for more than 20 years, in his job search.

"I really thought that it was going to be a little bit easier to be able to find a job," Morejonreyes told CBS News. "I concentrated my career on giving everything to the military. Most of the job descriptions do require you to have some sort of level of higher education."

Because he didn't have a four-year degree, Morejonreyes said most of his job applications were overlooked before T-Mobile hired him as a Human Resources manager.

Rich Comitz, senior vice president at American Corporate Partners, said mentors help veterans understand how they can convey the skills they learned during their military service on their resumes and in job interviews.

"They've learned some valuable skills from deploying service members overseas, the equipment maintenance, to all these different skills managing teams," Comitz told CBS News. "Oftentimes it's military jargon that they're used to explaining, and they help them translate that into what the industry is looking for in the areas that they're interested in applying to."

The New York City-based nonprofit has two free programs to help veterans: a nationwide mentoring program with more than 100 corporate partners and an online network that offers career and employment advice. More than 22,000 veterans have completed the mentoring program, according to the organization.

Veterans have qualities that should make them appealing to private corporations, Morejonreyes and Shultz said.

"The biggest advantage that a lot of veterans have are all those soft skills that most of corporate America takes years to attain — loyalty, integrity, honesty and a great work ethic," he said.

Shultz added, "They have the discipline. Sometimes they have just these phenomenally exquisite skills. And why are we not harnessing that?"

The corporate world is waking up to it, Shultz said.

"We still want to give the best of ourselves, and to be part of something bigger than ourselves," she said.