



INTERVIEWING WOUNDED SERVICE MEMBERS

Many civilian employers have admitted challenges when it comes to evaluating a wounded service member during a job interview. This is often because wounded service members tend to have difficulty explaining how their military experience relates to the needs of the civilian employer. While service members will be quick to praise their battalion or unit, they are typically not self-boastful in interviews, so civilian employers often feel like warrior candidates are not “selling themselves.”

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of “professional presentation” is often different for former military personnel than for civilians. Military personnel (particularly those recently separated/discharged from military service) will often present themselves with eyes forward and back straight, saying “sir” and “ma’am” (possibly without much smiling). This behavior may be misperceived as cold, distant or unapproachable, or as demonstrating a lack of social skills. Although this is generally not the case, these perceptions may cause wounded service members and veterans to be dismissed early in the interview process.

Former military personnel may need permission to “speak freely” to create a comfort level that allows them to be seen in the most positive light. Hiring managers should be encouraged to be patient with these candidates and to dig deep with follow-up questions to find qualities that are not apparent at first glance. It is worth remembering that these candidates, unlike many civilian candidates, may not be accustomed to interviewing and may require a little latitude.

INTERVIEWING BEST PRACTICE

Interviewing a wounded service member should be no different than interviewing any other candidate. It is important to ask the same questions of all candidates, without exception.

A good practice when interviewing is to ask every candidate the following question: “Have you read the job description? Yes or no: can you perform the essential functions of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation?”

By asking this question, you are not asking the candidates to disclose whether or not they have a disability, but you are ensuring they can perform the job, while making it clear that as an employer you understand the reasonable-accommodations process and are not likely to discriminate due to disability.

QUESTIONS TO ASK — AND THOSE TO AVOID

Most of the standard behavioral interview questions should be no different than those you would typically ask any other candidate. These include, but are not limited to, questions related to management style, problem solving, and strengths/weaknesses related to teamwork. Consider phrasing your questions to ensure the interviewee clearly understands that you are referring to both civilian and military work experience. For example:

Questions to Ask

- *“Tell me about the type of training and education you received while in the military.”*
- *“Were you involved in day-to-day management of personnel and/or supplies?”*
- *“How many people did you supervise?”*
- *“If you managed resources such as supplies, inventory, and/or equipment, what was the net worth of these resources – and how did you ensure their timely delivery?”*

Questions to Avoid

Questions relevant to experience or training received while in the military, or to determine eligibility for any warrior’s preference required by law, are acceptable. However, some questions to avoid include:

- *“What type of discharge did you receive?”*
 - Only federal agencies or people who assign a warrior’s hiring preference or have requirements related to security clearances should ask questions related to military discharge (especially in a pre-employment phase).
- *“I notice that you’re in the National Guard. Are you going to be called up for duty anytime soon?”*
 - This is similar to asking a woman if she is planning to have a baby anytime in the near future. Remember, it is unlawful to discriminate against someone because of membership in the National Guard or Reserves, a state defense force, or another state or Federal Reserve unit.
- *“Did you see any action over there?” “Did you lose your arm getting hit by an IED?” “You don’t have any of that PTSD stuff, do you?”*
 - Questions related to deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan may be interpreted as trying to determine if the wounded service member has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI) and could be construed as violations of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Lastly, it is perfectly fine to thank the individual for his or her service to our country.

★ **CONTACT US TODAY**
★ **wtow@woundedwarriorproject.org**
★ **TO BEGIN THE DISCUSSION.**