

# The Great Divide: Civilian & Military World

Educating the Civilian Community: Military Service Is Absolutely Valuable in the Workforce

By Shari Kingston Adams

(Published in Military Times online April 2016)

A recent article by Colonel David Sutherland on the Huffington Post, [“Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide”](#), touches on the complexities surrounding how civilian business, community and civic leaders view service members’ experiences in the military. Col. Sutherland hits many of the sentiments that veterans and active duty service members have regarding civilians’ inaccurate opinion of their military experience and how it translates in the workforce.



*“It used to frustrate me when I ran into this same lack of awareness by corporate, social, and civic leaders. I’d get irritated when captains of industry, education, or local leaders would posit that the limited background of those who have served impacted their ability to get a job. Or when they’d ask why, with all the resources and money appropriated to various agencies, government isn’t solving the problems facing our veterans.*”

*I realize now that this unfamiliarity is driven by the divide between those touched by military service and their neighbors.”*

There has always been a challenge getting businesses, community and social leaders to truly understand the enormous significance that veterans bring to a job and a community—way beyond their homecoming photo ops. Civilians growing disengagement from our armed forces and veterans are impacting the future success of our veterans. This problem will be hitting home for the nearly 300,000 service members transitioning to civilian life ANNUALLY through 2017. This means there will be almost one million service members hitting the payment to get jobs and reintegrate into their communities in the next three years.

Will they face the same ignorance when they try to build a new life as Col. Sutherland explains in his article?

*“ Nearly [80,000 Army troops will be forcibly retired in 2015](#) -- and that's just one branch of the military.*

*The cold, hard reality? We can project that approximately [250,000 - 300,000 service members](#) will be making the transition to civilian life annually through 2017. And this concerns me.*

*As a young man growing up in Toledo, Ohio, I still recall the Senatorial campaign debate between Howard Metzenbaum and John Glenn, a decorated Marine who served from 1941 - 1965. At one point, Metzenbaum looked at Colonel Glenn and blurted, "[How can you run for Senate when you've never held a job?](#)"*

Can the military and veterans community do a better job of educating our communities that the military IS A REAL JOB and that the skills acquired during service gives veterans specialized skills and strengths that employers and communities should covet, instead of negating? Maybe if civilians were “better” informed they would understand. Col. Sutherland explains this further,

*“In 2010, I co-wrote with Major John Copeland, [The Sea of Goodwill](#), a white paper that described a paradox in which the American people wanted to make a difference in the lives of veterans and military families but just weren't sure how. We proffered that veterans don't come home to big, organized government social programs. They come home to communities. Unfortunately, it is within the very heart of these communities where we must work the hardest to defeat the epidemic of disconnection between military (who represent one half of one percent of all U.S. citizens) and their civilian neighbors.”*

Your communities are full of service members and veterans right now that just want to build a successful life beyond their military life but the ignorance of business owners, communities and civic leaders make it difficult to break free from the “military” stigma—military service doesn’t count as worthy “experience” towards getting a job. Their service should count just as much as someone else who held a desk job for the same number of years.



Our service members and veterans would rather get a fair chance at success than a big parade that fades—remember this the next time you wonder HOW you can help them.

[Learn more about how you can help veterans.](#)