



Moving Beyond Checking the Box:

A Social Impact Strategy that
Affects Real World Change



AMERICAN VETERANS GROUP

OUR SOCIAL MISSION

At American Veterans Group, we leverage our expertise as broker-dealers to help military service members and their families make the often-difficult transition to civilian life.

We fulfill our social mission by providing direct financial support from our charitable foundation to veteran-focused non-profits across the country that provide job training and placement, career counseling, mental health, and other important services.

Importantly, we identify nonprofits that receive our support by aligning the AVG Foundation's giving with how our clients choose to help military veterans via their social-impact and veteran recruitment initiatives. Our north star is having as broad an impact on the veteran community at large as we possibly can.

For us, that means going beyond just hiring veterans ourselves. We are a service-disabled, veteran owned business which, true, does qualify us as a diverse minority supplier. But from our perspective, that's just a small part of the story. Make no mistake, we value hiring veterans and strive to do so at every turn. But is it really getting to the heart of the matter if I'm content checking that box by hiring experienced traders, long successful in their careers, who also happen to be veterans?

I have always believed we could do more.

American Veterans Group is Wall Street's first and only public benefit corporation.

American Veterans Group dedicates 25% of its earnings to support veteran causes.

OVER
\$600,000
IN DONATIONS TO
37
NON-PROFITS
IMPACTING
3,100+
VETERANS
IN
46
CITIES

We decided a better way to help – to have a positive impact that extends way beyond our four walls – is to dedicate a quarter of our profits via our Foundation to provide direct financial support for established non-profits that are doing the hard work.

To date, we have donated just over \$600,000 to 37 nonprofits and have had a direct impact on the lives of 3,100-plus veterans in 46 cities. We have made it a point to give to nonprofits in local communities that are important to our clients. In the best-case scenario, our support of job training and career counseling programs in some locales has helped establish a veteran recruitment pipeline for a couple of our clients. There's been a tangible, multiplier effect to our giving.



Bank of America

HIRING OUR HEROES

Bank of America is a good example.

Through our growing business relationship with BofA, we learned that Hiring Our Heroes is an important component of their outreach to military veterans, both in terms of their giving and in their efforts to recruit former service members. HOH is a highly respected program started some years ago by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. They connect military service members, military spouses, and veterans with American businesses through hiring events and corporate fellowship programs.



Directing Our Philanthropy to Nonprofits Important to Our Clients

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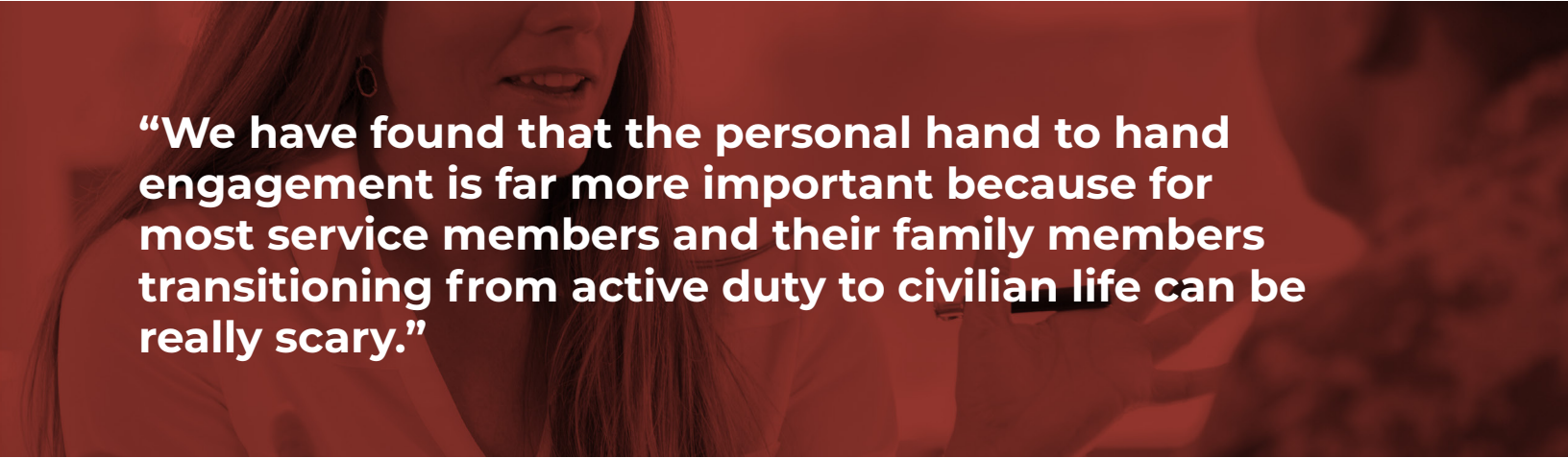
**ERIC EVERSOLE, PRESIDENT
HIRING OUR HEROES**

As a result of our ongoing business relationship with BofA, our philanthropic relationship with HOH has grown as well. To date, we have donated \$108,000 in support of their training efforts.

There are more than 40,000 American charities with military-related missions, but HOH is one of the few national grassroots organizations that help veterans and military spouses find meaningful careers post service.

In talking with HOH President Eric Eversole, I realized we speak the same language. “When we talk about both that national perspective, as well as the grassroots aspect of what we do, we’re really talking about a broader outreach to veterans and military spouses so that we can find them and meet them where they are,” he says.

The broader reach he speaks of is what got my attention.



“We have found that the personal hand to hand engagement is far more important because for most service members and their family members transitioning from active duty to civilian life can be really scary.”

HOH considers itself a “Big Tent” organization. They are open to partnering with others when it comes to connecting them with transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses. From nationwide hiring events to support representatives based near military installations, veterans and transitioning service members have many opportunities to learn about HOH.

Eric had more to say.

“We work with a number of state and federal agencies including the Veterans Administration, the Department of Labor and the Department of Defense to really reach veterans where they are and where they live versus asking them to find us,” he added.

HOH works to connect veterans and service members with what they call Career Connectors to help them with the tough decisions and to help them begin to navigate looking for work in the civilian space.

“We have found that the personal hand to hand engagement is far more important because for most service members and their family members transitioning from active duty to civilian life can be really scary,” Eric shared. “It’s a process that very few of them have ever gone through. HOH takes great care to truly connect with individuals to understand their needs. We pride ourselves on providing guidance and direction and answering all the questions they may have about their next step. We put a real emphasis on the people and the ability to connect them with a person that understands and where they can ask questions.”



Hiring Our Heroes

CORPORATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Career Connectors provide a high-level analysis for all their candidates. They find out what that person wants to do and where they want to live. Then, depending on their needs and skill set, they can register for one of their many hiring events, up-skilling/re-skilling programs or apply for their DoD Skillbridge corporate fellowship program. The corporate fellowship program provides networking, professional training, and hands-on experience in the civilian workforce.

Candidates who qualify for HOH corporate fellowships are put through a competitive interview process after which they identify a company with which they want to do their internship. Once selected by the company they are then awarded a 12-week internship which in many cases can be virtual and completed while the candidate is still on active duty.

It's a great program and we're proud to be HOH supporters. I asked Eric if he could share some success stories of veterans who have benefitted from our support. We spoke to three transitioning service members and here are their stories.

Major Robert Buck

U.S. MARINE CORPS

U.S. Marine Corps Major Robert Buck, helicopter pilot and Naval Academy graduate knows all too well the challenges of transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce.

After a distinguished 24-year career including five combat tours, two to Iraq and three to Afghanistan, Robert decided to look at his post service options for employment more than a year before his retirement. Robert was serving his last tour of duty as the Air Operations Officer aboard the USS Iwo Jima LHD-7 which is based in Norfolk, Virginia. A few months into the process of researching opportunities Robert was connected with an organization that offers coaching to senior level military personnel called Commit Foundation. It was through his coach there that he learned about Hiring Our Heroes.

After applying for and being awarded a corporate internship with Deloitte, Robert said the hardest part of the process was getting his command to agree to the extended time off to participate.

“They’re very hesitant to let people go because your position may be needed to actually work until the very end (of your duty),” Robert says. “If something were to happen and we were called to war, I would need to go. But, with the ship in the shipyard I knew there wouldn’t be anything for me to do, which gave me a clear runway to do the corporate fellowship program.”



Robert studied engineering at the academy and with his background in aviation, he thought he'd try something completely different. He started applying for a fellowship in the Fall of 2021 and was awarded the internship in May of 2022 on Deloitte's finance and enterprise performance team.

"My goal for the fellowship was to practice doing everything," adds Robert. "I wanted to practice getting my resume together, practice interviewing and obtain that practice in the civilian world."

Not only did Robert achieve his goals, he also was offered a job with the finance and enterprise performance team at the end of his internship in July 2022. However, through the process, Robert discovered that he really wanted to do something more aviation centric.

"Deloitte has been very supportive, and during my internship I had been doing a lot of networking on the government and public services side of the business," shared Robert.

Robert's networking paid off and just before his internship wrapped up, he received an offer from the government services side of Deloitte and will be working with the Navy again doing modeling for aircraft maintenance upon the completion of his service with the Marine Corps.

There is undoubtedly a lot of uncertainty in transitioning from military service to the civilian workforce, but Robert credits his positive transition experience a lot in part to HOH.

"Some of my peers have been going through a really tough time and I credit (my success) to Hiring Our Heroes and the corporate fellowship program," Robert says. "I didn't realize how good of an opportunity it was and just how well designed it was in terms of matching veterans with prospective employers and the added benefit of a sort of try before you buy on both sides. The contrast between trying to go and apply on job boards versus this sort of bespoke process meant to match employers with veterans is just incredible."

Major Lenora Ridley

U.S. ARMY

Air Defense Artillery Officer, Major Lenora Ridley decided it was time for her to transition out after serving 11 years in the U.S. Army.



Based in Aberdeen, Maryland, she and her four-year-old son for almost two years have been living apart from her husband who is in the U.S. Air Force stationed in California.

A West Point graduate, Lenora has spent the last three years of her service in Maryland. During her service she was deployed to Turkey during the Syrian civil war, and to the United Arab Emirates. The separation from her husband has been challenging, and while she would have wanted to stay on active duty, she made the difficult decision to transition from active to reserve duty. Not long after making that decision, Lenora received an email from her first sergeant with an informational presentation about Hiring Our Heroes and its corporate fellowship programs.

"I just kind of flipped through it and then thought, this is actually perfect, and I think this would be a really good opportunity," Lenora says. "I went to the website and got in contact with a local POC (point of contact) and did the research about what the program would be like and decided that that was perfect for me."

She applied for the fellowship program but was also considering other SkillBridge offerings. The SkillBridge program is an opportunity through the Department of Defense for service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service.

“I was also looking into some of the other SkillBridge opportunities and researching that, but nothing stood out to me as strongly as the Hiring Our Heroes corporate fellowship program,” Lenora says.

The first step in her journey was to find out where she wanted to do her internship. Hiring Our Heroes works with companies across America. She thought through her transition plan and realized it would be easier to do her internship where she could have support for her son. She connected with the Hiring Our Heroes program manager in the region where she wanted to apply and was selected for a program.

Even though she was still on active duty, she had managed to save up enough leave to take the extended time off to relocate temporarily to Kansas where her parents are located. She completed her 12-week internship virtually with Catalyzer, Inc, a veteran-owned, leadership consulting company. Lenora has since been offered a contracting role to project manage various projects with Catalyzer, and the company leadership is in full support of her continuing to seek permanent, full-time work as she transitions to be with her husband in California.

Lenora said that the networking opportunities provided through Hiring Our Heroes has been one of the best things for her.

“I didn’t have the folks in my network that I do now, most of whom are veterans,” says Lenora. “All of them were really, really eager and willing to network and willing to talk about their experiences and share what they’ve learned, all of which I feel has been extremely valuable. I also feel like I gained a mentor from my boss in the program (Catalyzer). He seems to really want me to succeed and help me find what’s best for me.”

Captain Killian Byrne

U.S. MARINE CORPS

Killian went to the University of Pittsburgh on an ROTC scholarship, graduating in 2015.

He then entered the Marine Corps officer candidate school. He thought he wanted to be an infantry leader, but after officer basic training he chose to do something more in the supporting establishment. He decided to become a communications officer.

His time as a communications officer sent him overseas to Australia, Kuwait, Syria and finally Iraq. In Iraq, he was the single point of contact for all the coalition forces on that base. He linked up and used the combined joint task force network ensuring communications stayed intact.

Killian initially enlisted to serve only four years, but served eight years with his last duty station being the Pentagon working in the command control communications and computers office as an action officer. It was his deployment to Iraq that caused him to consider transitioning out of the military. His wife, a dentist, had landed a job after having been unemployed due to Covid for some time and he did not want to risk being deployed overseas again, pulling her away from a job she worked so hard to find. So, in 2021 he began looking at his options for transitioning out. He was hopeful after a friend shared his positive experience with the HOH corporate fellowship program. His friend, who was already transitioning out, shared with Killian how smooth that experience made the job search process.





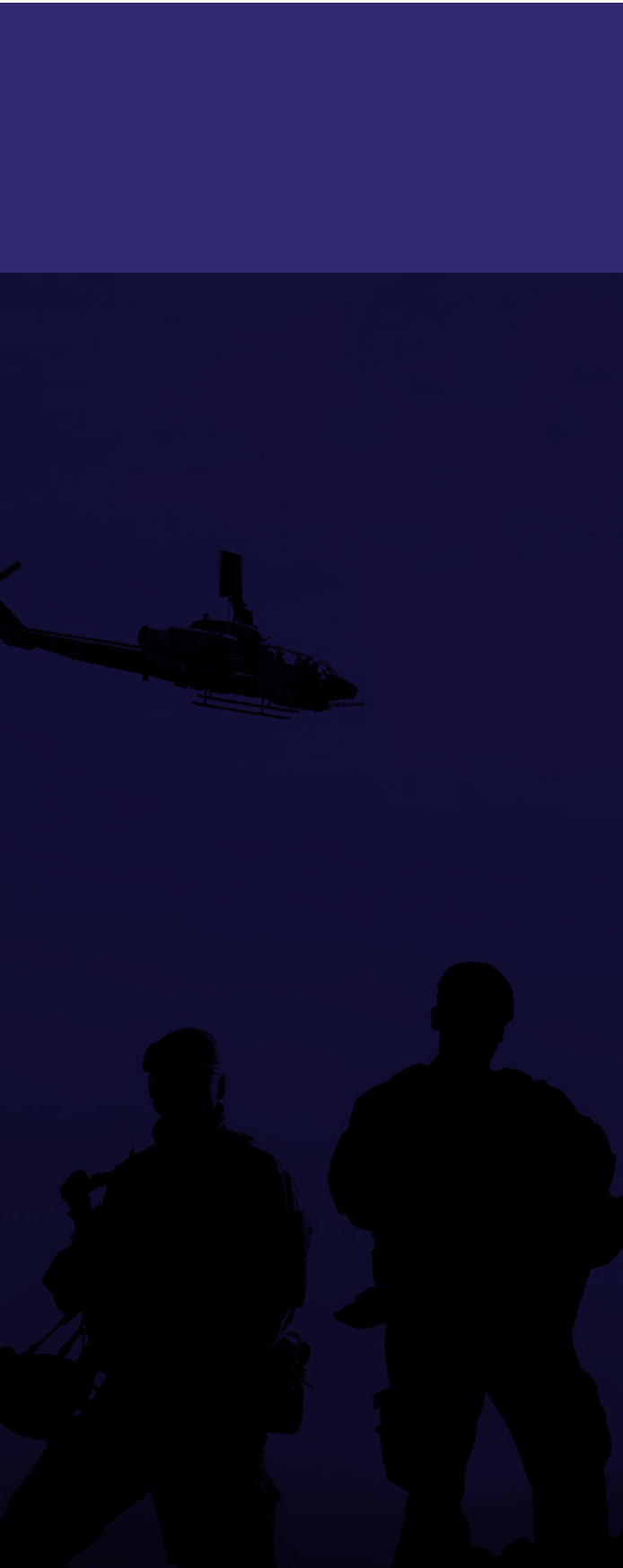
Killian says you cannot accrue more than 60 days leave, so even if he had planned to take terminal leave, that's not enough time to find employment.

"There's a lot of stress around that timeline," adds Killian. "I was lucky in that my chain of command was very open to me doing the SkillBridge process. A friend of mine actually delayed his exit strategy by about a year because he wasn't able to get that time at the end to make his transition smooth."

Because Killian did have a lot of accrued time off, he was able to take that time off to prepare for the application process for the HOH corporate fellowship program.

Killian says it took about six weeks to prepare for and finally be selected for his fellowship. During that time, he was completing paperwork and doing informational sessions and interviews. With the help from his program coordinator and support team at HOH, Killian was able to tailor his resume to specific job roles and companies that were in the corporate fellowship pool of opportunities. He said he had about 16 interviews.

The preparation paid off. Soon after Killian was selected for a corporate fellowship with Amazon Web Services. The internship was based in Herndon, Virginia, which was only about 40 minutes from where he was living at the time. Killian was able to participate primarily virtually but did go into the office on occasion to meet with teams.



It was full-time every day but on the last day of the week, Hiring Our Heroes reserves that day to provide informational sessions,” says Killian. “Different companies were slotted for those Fridays to talk about various things. For example, Deloitte did a huge presentation talking about the transition from military to civilian life and sharing things like how power structures are organized in leadership roles and some of the unspoken rules and regulations in the corporate sector that aren’t as well defined in the military.”

Killian’s goal going into the fellowship was to look for a company that was looking for fellows with intent to hire. As his 12-week fellowship was coming to an end he was invited to participate in what Amazon calls loops, which is a part of their hiring process. Killian participated in six different interviews at the end of which he was given a solid job offer that far exceeded his expectations in terms of compensation.

“I have been and will continue to recommend Hiring Our Heroes to every transitioning veteran that I know because it is so good to have a mechanism by which to transition,” Killian says. “These companies have a vested interest in hiring veterans. So, you are treated with that priority. Hiring Our Heroes, just mainlines you straight to those folks and it’s made the process so much more manageable and less stressful than just trying to do it on my own.”



Social-Impact Efforts That Create Real Value

The experience of these three veterans is a clear indicator that the strength of the public-private coalition that is mobilized to transition veterans to civilian employment is working. It also demonstrates that companies do see the value in being better connected to their communities.

One way companies can better communicate their ESG efforts is by considering the broader social impact they are making when working with a company like AVG. Veterans are a deeply diverse group of people and reflect the fabric of the American people and experience. There are many companies in the United States that consider the hiring and training of veterans as a key CSR goal, but we also know that simply hiring X number of veterans and checking a box is not enough. Companies that think “outside the DEI box” and take it to the next level will shape the new standards for their workforces and society. It’s personal stories like these that lead to a culture that employees, shareholders, and the community can be proud of.

As more and more investors consider both the financial return as well as the social impact their investments make, companies would be wise to get more serious about deepening their DEI strategies.