

Help for vets on job front

Danette Mitchell, February 19, 2011

The Labor Department this week reported that the national unemployment rate for veterans took an unexpected jump in January. It climbed to 9.9 percent, up from 8.3 percent in December. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans saw an unemployment rate of 15.2 percent, up from 9.4 percent in November. It shows a worsening job market trend for younger veterans, many of whom are combat veterans.

Part of the problem, according to the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, is that military transition programs are not preparing combat veterans for the civilian job market.

That's why I was pleased to hear about an upcoming event, "Operation Career: Military/Veteran Transition Assistance," which will target those still in the military (active or reserve), veterans and their spouses. It will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 1 at San Francisco's War Memorial Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave.

Enrollment must be done through a representative at the Employment Development Department Workforce Services office, which can be found at www.edd.ca.gov. A session such as this would normally cost \$350, but it will be offered free of charge.

Thanks to PeopleThink, a San Francisco organization that focuses on career, leadership and team development, career seekers will attend intensive workshops and receive a copy of the "Get Real Guide to Your Career," authored by Karen Colligan, PeopleThink founder. Attendees also will receive information about various services for veterans.

Speaking at a recent career fair, Colligan told me she became involved with training veterans after she read a pamphlet titled "Veterans are a Priority." Initially, she felt helpless. Then she came up with an idea to donate copies of her book to San Francisco's EDD to hand out to all veterans.

In partnership with EDD last year, PeopleThink decided to launch "Operation Career: Tools for a New Beginning," an interactive workshop designed specifically for veterans in transition. It was a success. Veterans learned and practiced relevant career tools and strategies, such as identifying skills, developing an effective resume, networking and acing an interview.

PeopleThink's goal is to provide these workshops all over the Bay Area, including Solano County. They welcome corporate sponsorships to underwrite costs.

"Veterans feel like a fish out of water when they enter civilian life," said Johnnie Stanton, EDD's veterans representative. "They must learn how to live as civilians, translate their military skills into a resume and function in a nonmilitary workforce."

This is true. I witnessed the challenges my husband faced when he was discharged from the military during a good economy.

"Veterans should not have to fight another war when they return home," Colligan said. We should provide them with the resources they need to be productive citizens and integrate back into the civilian world.

The author is a Vacaville resident. E-mail: damitchell@earthlink.net.

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