

# WDB OCTOBER 14, 2015

## MID-CAREER JOB SEEKERS TOPIC PRESENTATION

### Guests:

- **Linae Warden**, NoCoNet
- **Kara Tripician**, Aims Community College
- **Shauna Cobb**, New Belgium
- **Dave Kramer**, AllProWeb Tools
- **Pamela Martis**, Veterans Employment Representative
- **Katy Piotrowski**, Career Solutions

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### Mid-Career Job Seeker

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#### Definition of mid-career job seeker

- For this panel mid-career person defined as: Person who has worked more than 10 years (or considered middle age) in a career or industry, and is now changing either career path or industry or both.

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### Panelists

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#### Describe your experience with mid-career job seekers.

- NoCoNet is comprised primarily of people with a lot of experience in high tech industries. They have been in positions that require a lot of brain work and leadership. They are running into obstacles like having experience that is difficult to verify. They often feel like they are not getting the respect that their resumes deserve which is reflected in lower wages. There is a perception that businesses prefer to pay a lower wage to someone straight out of college rather than have someone with experience. Members often report that there is a soft/invisible bias regarding their age, experience, and ability to learn new skills.
- I focus on vets transitioning to civilian life and those who have significant barriers to employment (incarcerated, at-risk for being homeless, etc.). I help them transition their military experience into the civilian skill set.
- We're a tech start-up company. We've interviewed over 200 people. One of the problems we're experiencing is where are we suppose to post the job information to get applicants. We have successfully hired mid-career job seekers but also had some that struggle with current technology/tools. It's not about fax machines and phone calls anymore.
- We don't struggle to get applicants at our company, we receive a large number of candidates for our job and it is very competitive. I have worked at places where finding 'that skill' was a constant challenge.

- We do a lot of work counseling people. The majority of our clientele is mid-career job seekers. It is a challenge to figure out how to break into something new and appeal to hiring managers as someone with current/relevant skills and experience.
- We see a lot of people who are looking for career advice and using our resume and interview services. Often by the time they see us they are frustrated and don't always know exactly what to do. They are hoping to quickly obtain some training and skills.

#### **What are the advantages of hiring mid-career job seekers?**

- New perspective and historical knowledge of best practices.
- We've hired people straight out of college with degrees that don't know how to do the job. For us with mid-career folks it is the same thing, you say you can do it – show us.
- They are super dedicated to doing an awesome job.
- Some of the things that don't translate well on paper are soft skills, leadership, and loyalty. They are hard to articulate but an experienced mid-career job seeker can showcase those skills in an interview. Most vets are great problem solvers as well.
- I see a lot of eagerness and gratitude with mid-career folks. They have experienced some of the highs and lows of life. That can give them fortitude and a sense of perspective, which can help in making difficult decisions.
- Experience with changes in the workplace and know how to navigate it. You might find people who don't fit the job description perfectly but exceeds it. More bang for the buck.

#### **What are the obstacles and best practice for hiring mid-career job seekers?**

- For us it's taking military experience and translating it to civilian jobs. In the military the emphasis is teamwork, for civilian jobs you have to promote yourself. It can be difficult for the HR rep to translate some military skills. There is a platform, RallyPoint, similar to LinkedIn where companies can look for veteran job seekers.
- I see many who lack confidence in their computer skills. It can even be a challenge to navigate the application process. We have workshops on computer skills and for navigating the hiring process.
- There is a perception that businesses want the purple unicorn applicant and you can be rejected for small things that aren't necessarily core skills, such as lacking a certification but having significant experience with a skill. Some career counselors don't have the experience or background necessary to help high level mid-career job changers .
- I made a change mid-career and think there is some issue with people wanting to start their new career at their previous level. You may need to take a few steps back to grow. Another thing to remember is that businesses have a budget and wage range for positions and may really be limited to what they can pay. My best practice suggestion is to network. Get to know the people in the community and again be willing to accept a lower salary to gain experience.
- We will increase pay but you have to put time in with us. Get in the door and be an asset to the company. I hear that employees and employers are not connecting. I think we could have grown as a company much more quickly and been more profitable if we had the right people. Even with all the hiring tools there is a mismatch.

- I try to help people manage their expectations and may suggest they obtain certifications and build a stronger LinkedIn profile.
- The vast majority of us work in companies with fewer than 25 employees. I suggest mid-career job changes be more flexible and put themselves out there to those companies that fit their goals and be willing to take a few steps back.

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## Questions/Comments

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**Q. When you're considering hiring someone with extensive training what soft skills are you looking for?**

A. I'm looking for someone who can figure out how to find the answer to a question they don't know. A. Our culture is very important to us. I look at the attitude they show up with. Soft skills are huge but only after we've said you have the skills to do the job.

**Q. In mid level employment, there seems to be a disconnect between the skills required and required length of experience. How can you convince hiring managers you have what they want?**

A. When you apply to job ads you can expect a 10% response rate. From your side it should be crystal clear that you have what they are requiring and you need to present it to HR so they can see it.

A. Sometimes you can use the cover letter as a means to stand out and explain that you have the skills or the experience they seek but maybe in a different way.

**Q. I interview 20 – 40 people per week, a lot of whom are mid-career folks who don't want to go on LinkedIn. How important is social media to you?**

A. We have a recruiting manager who is very much a networking guy; not sure if it's a big impact but it is a way to possibly gain more visibility.

A. We mostly use resumes – we're happy if someone responds to our ad with a LinkedIn link but we mostly use resumes. We do look up applicants on both Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Q. What can the WDB do to help address these issues?**

A. Facilitate the connections. I would love it if there was a board that I can go to for help recruiting.

A. I would recommend we talk about the I-25 corridor and reach out to businesses who are actively seeking to transition vets. Maybe the board can help businesses screen resumes for transferable skills.

A. Hold a couple of job fairs a year for mid-career job seekers.

A. Provide help on where to post jobs to really get the word out. There are so many places to post jobs it can be confusing and expensive.

A. Help people find and connect more with small and medium businesses.