COMPANIES THAT A VETERAN SHOULD NEVER WORK FOR.

Not all companies like to hire Veterans coming out of the Army. That is probably the most politically incorrect thing that I can say, but it is an uncomfortable reality that must be faced by Service Leaving Tigers.

With all the talk about employing Veterans in the media these days it would be easy to assume that Veterans have enough support, the fact is most Veterans still face a challenge when it comes to gaining employment.

A search of many major companies will reveal their HR seem to have “formal” military recruiting propaganda articulating how much they want to employ Service Leavers. But the reality is that when given a choice between a fresh University graduate, or Veteran Tiger who spent many years defending the United Kingdom they will often choose the graduate.

Some HR managers will openly state that “I do not want any military CV’s – they never work out well.” There can be a stigma attached to Service Leavers.

In fact, Veterans as candidates are better prepared for corporate life, often far exceeding the abilities of those coming out of University. They have received incredible training, not just physical, but in all kinds of leadership, soft skills, technical, and academic. So why can some HR Managers be Veteran shy?

* They can be intimidated by someone who probably has more training and responsibility as a leader than they will ever have;
* HR managers are scared and unsure of how they will integrate a Veteran into their company “team”.
* Many HR managers have no understanding of the Army, University and academic backgrounds are easier to relate to, so their comfort zone guides their choices.

However, when the HR manager or executives of the company are themselves Veterans or the businesses are in the defence and security industries, the situation is more welcoming to Veterans.

Sometimes you have to bite the bullet and get on the job ladder somehow. This can mean accepting a job where your background might not be so welcome. There is always something to be gleaned from every working experience, no matter what the job situation. Every job provides the opportunity to find out what works for you; all jobs are stepping stones. Veterans are expert at accruing experience and regenerating it as valuable expertise. On your career path through Civvy Street, you may have to consider some jobs, possibly your first job as a stepping stone across the obstacle of unemployment and towards where you want to be in life. If you have had to take an interim post until you find your ideal job, then learn from the experience and make the job pay:

* Observe your colleagues, what makes them happy and what does not;
* Try to walk a mile in your line manager’s shoes;
* Know the people you work with - it is more important than calculated networking;
* When you finally cross the bridge and move on, do not destroy it behind you;
* Investigate the aspects of the job that made you happy.

No matter how desperate you are to be employed or how difficult your current situation, there are some companies where a Veteran is better off not working. The dream job may not be evident to you straight away so treat your career as a series of stepping stones with each step enhancing your skills and experience. Also, be open and seize career-making opportunities as they occur rather than sticking rigidly to a mapped-out career plan (… as no plan survives contact with the enemy...).

The salary is right; the position seems irresistible, you might think that it's worth accepting employment in a bad company but be careful as it could set you back and jeopardise future success. How do you know which companies to avoid? The following might help, but remember, all businesses have the tools to make changes:

* **High Turnover of personnel** - for example, key positions are consistently advertised. No company should be continually seeking to fill critical management or leadership roles, and if they are, then they have fallen into a hire-and-fire cycle. High turnover of personnel can indicate either that the senior leadership is fickle, or the company culture is negative which makes retention nearly impossible. Companies with high turnover will not deliver on their promises. If you are interviewed for a job, ask, why did the last post holder leave?
* **Culture Clash** - actual employees speak poorly of the company; there is a lack of focus on an authentic employee experience. Positive company culture is essential, a negative company culture may not seem like a bad choice, but it is. Even if a company’s negative culture is not publicly known, it can affect your career. Positive company cultures drive financial performance and creates a happy and productive workforce. Therefore, a negative culture can do the exact opposite. Avoid companies who talk a lot about their culture but will not allow you to speak to existing employees. Be wary of businesses that evade questions about culture.
* **Superficially Looks Good** - they have a great website, an excellent corporate image, great marketing collateral and publicity. However, day-to-day operations are drab. Inside might tell another story. Carry out some due diligence before you apply to a company (time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted) look inside its offices, get a sense of the reality of office life and see if it is a workplace where you would like to spend 40+ hours a week.
* **Top-Heavy Business** - beware of too many chiefs and not enough Indians! Lots of executives brainstorming and creating PowerPoints, and not enough employees executing. The key drivers of employee satisfaction include culture, values, career opportunities, and trust of the senior leadership. How much emphasis is placed on non-executive employees? All team members are essential, and you should see that reflected in employee reviews of the company, also in their hiring practices.
* **Continuous Promises -** Unfulfilled corporate expectations, employees report a lack of trust in the CEO, an inability to live up to brand promises. In this era of transparency, enterprises are aware that they must attract the best talent with full, robust and competitive packages. So, promises are made on the job, the compensation package, the culture and the brand. The problem with promises is they can be broken. Beware of businesses that make promise after promise yet fail to deliver. A company is only as good as its brand promise and the trust of its employees. Without these two factors, it is likely to fail.
* **Stagnation** - Lack of learning and training opportunities, fails to promote mentorship, and offers little more than the role for which you have applied. Beware of the stagnant company because it places little to no emphasis on helping you meet your long-term career goals. While this type of business may work for some Service Leavers looking for a very particular type of job, for many Veterans it is a dead-end. Remember, to stagnate is a verb that means, “to cease developing; become inactive or dull.” This is not what a Service Leaver needs.
* **Aimless** - No clear strategy for the future; employees do not know long-term goals; senior leadership fails to communicate adequately. Beware of companies that lack a clear direction. It is these businesses that unavoidably hit significant challenges and inevitably fail. All companies should be frank about their financial standing, their direction, and should have a willingness to discuss problems. If the interviewers are unable to discuss the direction and strategy of the business, it may be that the enterprise lacks a plan for growth and that the foundation may be insecure. No matter how promising a company might look to the media or how much hype surrounds its latest product, if the value proposition and forecast are unclear, the company does not have a winning strategy.

Many companies are committed to employing Veterans, and that is encouraging, but we also owe Veterans more than just a job. Veterans deserve the assurance of a successful transition to Civvy Street and the aspiration of not just full-time employment, but of a fulfilling career. They deserve a job with a purpose that paves a path for advancement and future opportunities.

At the heart of a successful transition is a transition of identity; an emotional shift from being part of the Armed Forces to having a future as an individual in the civilian world.