

Facilitating the Transition from Military Service to Higher Education

By Randy Culver, with Scott Hanson

Being the main provider of education for over 60 years for Ellsworth Air Force Base's 28th Bomb Wing in Rapid City, South Dakota, Black Hills State University (BHSU) has a long history of working with the military. In fact, BHSU has been honored as one of the best colleges for student veterans by *Military Times* for six consecutive years.

Employees with military service have a unique and valuable benefit to offer our universities, as they have the ability to both communicate directly and express their opinions in a respectful manner. The bottom line is that the United States military does a great job training our veterans to be huge assets for the civilian workforce—in fact, the military is undoubtedly the greatest leadership development institution on the planet! As an educational facilities professional and

the father of a Marine veteran, I am proud to support veterans' transitions to a career in educational facilities by employing several veterans at BHSU Facilities Services.

This initiative is so important to our profession that APPA has established a subcommittee specifically to help military personnel transition to a successful career in higher education. APPA and SAME (the Society of American Military Engineers) also formed a strategic alliance specifically to support military personnel who are seeking a career change.

The following is a real-life example of a personal transition from military service to educational facilities. Scott Hanson, facilities services business manager at BHSU, has worked for me for the past four years. Here is his story:

Transitioning in life is a daily occurrence, but making a career change after 25 years can be fearful for some. During my time in the United States Army, I had the privilege to serve my country with honor, respect, and loyalty. There are some who may not understand that, but in others it instills a personal pride that is hard to explain. Yes, there were days that were more difficult than others, but the best part was that I was doing something I chose to do: making the Army my career.

Having a career in the Army is different than one in educational facilities in many ways, but more similar than most realize. Both career paths have similar attributes and responsibilities, with the main difference being what's at stake. Yes, the military sector is a different discipline than higher education with respect to how things are done, but they are similar in that a final outcome is attained in both sectors. In the Army, our job is to defend our nation, so we were constantly training to ensure we were able to comply at a moment's notice. In facilities management, our job also requires contact training and complying at a moment's notice to protect and maintain our universities.

One may think changing a career after so long would be easy because it is just moving on to a new chapter in life. I thought I was prepared for what was next, but the truth is that I wasn't. I have started a new life, transitioning from an extremely disciplined environment including something as simple as wearing a uniform every day, to a more casual environment. One's wardrobe is only a part of the transitioning



from the military. You have to adapt to new environments, civilian terms, and also learn how not to communicate in military terms or acronyms.

Military service means a soldier must accept being deployed at a moment's notice. During my military service, I was deployed numerous times. Transitioning to civilian life alleviated the stress associated with deployment; however, it was replaced with the stress of choosing which career path to take in the future. I wanted to do something in business, help others, and work with a team. This challenge made me nervous because I only knew the Army life; civilian life had not been a focal point in my life for 25 years. Now that I am on this new journey, I am learning an entire new life which is at times both stressful and enjoyable.

I was fortunate to begin working at Black Hills State University, where I could do everything that I was looking for when it came to my next career. Here at the university, I am working in my field of study, helping others, working with a team, and truly enjoy my job. Working in facilities management has shown me a different aspect of working with a team, because facility management personnel are the hidden gems of any campus. I found that this career can be somewhat like working in the military, because of the hidden value of the work that our team does every day.

—Scott Hanson



I offer a special thank you to APPA for making this a professional priority. Please help support military veterans by hiring them in your organization. It will be a rewarding experience!

I want to personally thank Scott, my son, Chris, and all veterans for their dedicated service to our country. 🇺🇸

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