After serving their country honorably, many members of the armed forces face a transition to civilian life that can often be exciting and confusing. These brave men and women, including 2.8 million veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, who have lived each day dedicated to serving and protecting their country often struggle with finding their new sense of mission, purpose or calling after the military.

Many veterans are now recognizing that the fuel and petrochemical industries offer a unique opportunity to find a new mission among like-minded individuals who appreciate challenging work and the ability to grow a prosperous career. These jobs also give them the satisfaction of being involved in an industry that allows others to live comfortable, safe and healthy lives.

The Transition Challenge: Finding the "Why"

"Members of each branch of service have different challenges to face during their transition, but one common denominator I see is veterans trying to find their sense of purpose after the military," said Capt. Amber Schoeder, a United States Marine Corps Officer. "I will be separating from the military after eight years, and now I'm trying to find my purpose, again. I am talented and can do anything, but what do I want to do and why? What greater purpose will I, should I be serving?"

For veterans, working for U.S. fuel and petrochemical manufacturers can be compelling. AFPM member companies operate in highly-structured, technical fields with strict protocols familiar to many veterans. And acting in a role at an AFPM member company that will ultimately help millions of people live healthier, safer and more comfortable lives is appealing to many former service members. Strong domestic fuel refining and petrochemical manufacturing helps to ensure that Americans have the freedom to travel anywhere, provides access to millions of products manufactured using petrochemicals (ranging from appliances to healthcare solutions to consumer technology), and perhaps most importantly, delivers reliable and affordable energy to people across America — and around the globe.

In addition to identifying one's purpose, comes the frustration of finding a job that pays enough to support a family. A rush to find a job also means some veterans settle for positions that do not allow them to fully engage or grow professionally and personally in a new career. A Gallup study found that less than a third of U.S. employees feel engaged at work, which can be the case for veterans — especially who need to financially support their families.

"I am trying to figure out what is going to satisfy me and how to determine my worth in a company or industry," said Sgt. First Class Sir Avington, a United States Army non-commissioned officer. "It would

be hard to take a position without growth potential, purpose or the security of being able to take care of my family and maintain a certain way of life." Avington is retiring from the military with twenty years of service as a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear specialist.

A New Career Path

AFPM member companies understand veterans deserve more than gratitude — they deserve opportunities to put their skills and knowledge to good use following their service and to be compensated well for the unique value they bring.

"Veterans share the same culture and values as our industries, while bringing skills that are hugely advantageous to civilian employers," said James Cooper, a senior petrochemical adviser at AFPM and former U.S. Marine Corp Sergeant. "These include leadership, change management, how to motivate comrades, how to work as a team, the ability to work under pressure and a safety-conscious attitude."

Many AFPM members strive to provide well-defined careers with gratifying paths for service members transitioning to the civilian workforce. These members actively recruit veterans and, if hired, work to provide them with continuous growth opportunities.

"AFPM has partnered with Hiring Our Heroes and American Jobs for America's Heroes (AJAH), two national campaigns aimed at connecting veterans with employers," said AFPM President and CEO Chet Thompson. "The oil, gas and petrochemical industries employ nearly 185,000 veterans, including nearly 6,000 women and 41,000 minority veterans. They are an essential and highly valued part of our workforce."

Veterans account for 10 percent of the oil and gas industry workforce, well above the seven percent rate for veterans across the U.S. economy. Pay in both the fuel and petrochemical industries is extremely competitive, average annual salaries of refining workers and chemical industry workers are $111,500 and $93,000, respectively. This is more than double the average annual salary of a U.S. worker ($44,148).

Veterans Infuse the Fuel and Petrochemical Industries with In-Demand Skills, Rigor and Passion

AFPM and our member companies are helping veterans and members of the U.S. armed forces who are transitioning from the military and find their purpose in a new career. AECOM is an AFPM member company that employs more than 9,000 veterans on projects around the world in a variety of professions and disciplines. Praxair is among a group of U.S. companies participating in a campaign to hire 100,00 veterans by 2020. Career opportunities with AFPM members are expected to become even more abundant in the coming years: about 950,000 jobs could open in the oil and gas industry by 2020 and as

many as 1.3 million by 2030, according to a study by IHS Markit, generating additional opportunities for former service members.

“AFPM has a place for veterans to learn about a variety of available jobs — from skilled-craft jobs to technical staff to administrative roles. But first, you have to figure out the kind of stuff you want to do,” said Cooper.”

A veteran who served in Iraq and now works for DowDupont, Lydia Ragsdale feels invested in the company’s mission to provide critical equipment to members of the armed forces. Hired as a DowDuPont master scheduler after leaving the Army, Ragsdale remembers a fellow soldier’s life saved by Kevlar armor, which is made using petrochemicals. “I saw how valuable [the armor] was,” she says. “I made that personal connection to what saved his life.”

Kiewit, a major construction firm and AFPM member, also has numerous veterans on staff. Sarah Anderson, a talent development specialist at Kiewit and former Army captain, found overlaps between the company and the military. “I was drawn to Kiewit because its core values parallel the Army values,” she said. “It was important for me to be a part of an organization that values its employees while maintaining high expectations and a commitment to excellence.”

Veterans say their sense of teamwork can help strengthen the culture of the fuel and petrochemical industries more broadly. According to Sara Green, a quality database administrator at Praxair and veteran of the U.S. Navy, “I feel the same sense of pride and accountability to my team here as I did in the Navy.”

As president and CEO of AFPM, Thompson encourages companies to recruit veterans and for veterans to keep the refining and petrochemicals industries in mind. “There is an abundance of resources to help companies connect with veterans who are seeking employment. It’s a decision that’s not only good for veterans, but it’s also good for business.”

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