

EMPLOYERS
NETWORK

#militaryisgoodforbusiness

OA
OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

The Case of BT

Background

BT has a long history of engagement with the armed forces, dating back over 100 years when the General Post Office (GPO) made an important contribution to British defence and military programmes during the First World War. Over the following decades, BT has continued to build on this relationship through its major technology and people investments in commercial, networking and security operations across Government, including the MOD and the armed forces.

This relationship came to the fore between 2011-14, when Openreach, BT's local network division, needed to recruit field engineers in large volumes. During this time, over 2,000 armed forces Service leavers were recruited through a focused campaign, and since then Service leavers and veterans have been recognised as high quality recruits across BT.

In addition to recruitment, BT has numerous ongoing programmes to deliver its armed forces support agenda, which contribute to its Purposeful Business and Employee Engagement aims.

The Process

In order to bring BT's armed forces initiatives together in a coherent programme, BT appointed Mark Arscott as Head of Military Engagement in September 2015. Mark has brought the various initiatives at BT together under three main streams as follows:

Business Benefits

- Military engagement to continue partnerships with MOD and other related military forums
- Recruitment of ex-military personnel
- Jointly developing training and accreditation with MOD
- External engagement and PR

Employee Engagement

- Armed Forces Network - internal network of BT employees who are interested in the armed forces
- Transition Force - mentoring and buddy system to support ex-military

Purposeful Business Agenda (CSR)

- Various initiatives to encourage BT employees to volunteer in events activities related to the armed forces
- Openreach's corporate partnership with SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, to promote volunteering and fundraising

The Outcomes & Benefits

BT was one of the first signatories to the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant in 2013, and was awarded a Gold Award from the Employer Recognition Scheme in 2014 for its wide-ranging support to the armed forces and its people. Through its various military focused initiatives, BT is able to engage a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, including over 4,000 ex-armed forces employees. It also helps support one of BT's key corporate responsibility targets - for two thirds of employees to engage in volunteering by 2020.

Added to this, there are also operational level benefits. As Mark Arscott explains, between 2011-14, traditional channels were not be able to deliver the volumes required for recruiting into Openreach field engineering roles; over 2,000 ex-military personnel were recruited over that period, and Openreach has seen higher assessment centre pass rates, better retention and lower sick absence rates amongst ex-military employees, compared to non-military people in identical roles.

BT's Armed Forces Network helps promote a sense of community within the organisation and aid a more supportive culture for the transition of ex-military personnel; this has potential to deliver significant employee engagement benefits in the long term.

The Costs & Challenges

The costs to BT include staff time and related costs, in particular the creation of a dedicated Head of Military Engagement role, the time spent by employees involved with various mentoring and volunteering initiatives related to the armed forces, and supporting BT's Transition Force programme of workshops, buddying and work placements.

One key challenge is to ensure that the armed forces support programme continues to be sustained in the long term, regardless of personnel, budget constraints and other organisational changes; senior leadership across the business has been extremely strong, but devolving delivery and enabling employees at regional and local levels is the key to success. Another ongoing challenge is to manage expectations of various parties involved. As Mark mentions, 'it's about trying to get that balance between operational demands and doing the right thing; not overpromising, but delivering as much as you possibly can in the best possible way.'

"between 2011-14 Openreach recruited 2,000 ex-military personnel, bringing numerous benefits to the business"

Mark Arscott, BT

Moving Forward

BT is planning to evolve military engagement initiatives further within the three main streams of Business Benefits, Employee Engagement and Purposeful Business Agenda. They are looking into developing joint training and skills accreditation with the Ministry of Defence to enable more effective transition of ex-military personnel into BT.

Volume recruitment continues to work effectively for Openreach engineering roles. Going forward, BT plans to continue recruiting ex-military people into as many parts of its business as possible, in particular operational and project management roles.