



Franchising offers solution for military vets to adapt to civilian life

With specialized training under his or her belt and walking papers in hand, how does an individual, who spent so many years in the military, adapt to civilian life?

Acquiring a franchise may just be the solution. Franchising draws on parallels founded in all arms of military branches, with a strong work ethic and discipline being significant shared traits.

Successful franchisors have proven operating systems established, and in turn, search for franchisees to carry them out. Numerous military veterans have found franchised businesses to match their skills, and some exceptional programs are in place to enable veterans to pursue business ownership.

The Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative is one such program. Known as “VetFran,” this voluntary discount program was designed to help former military personnel become small-business owners. As of Sept. 1, VetFran has enabled 612 veterans to acquire small businesses, compared to 385 a year ago, and more than 150 veterans are currently considering franchise purchases.

In recognition of franchising’s wide variety of business concepts and sizes, the program allows each participating company to determine its own financial incentive. Typically, VetFran participants offer discounts of their initial fees, which make franchises more accessible to these first-time buyers. The only requirements established by the association are that participating companies be current members of IFA and offer the incentives to honorably discharged veterans. The association does not receive government funding for the initiative.

Verlo Mattress Factory Stores, the nation’s largest factory-direct mattress retailer, recently enlisted in the program, offering a 15-percent discount to veterans.

“The VetFran Program is ideally suited for veterans,” Verlo Mattress Factory Stores President John Siipola said. “Many men and women coming out of the

military have very specific skills and experience that may not readily apply to civilian occupations. But they have acquired the personal discipline and sense of accountability to excel in a franchise system that provides the business model, training, and ongoing support as a foundation for their success as independent business owners. The key to success in franchising is to follow the system and not spin your wheels trying to reinvent the wheel.”

Siipola said because Verlo’s mattresses are individually tailored to match customers' needs, attention to detail is vital. Being a veteran himself, Siipola understands the demands of military life and its application to civilian life.

“After spending six years in the Navy, I was fortunate to be accepted at Northeastern University to continue my education,” Siipola said. “After graduation, like most of my college classmates, I went into corporate America.”

Siipola said he soon found that large corporations were not what he had envisioned.

“Franchising offered me the opportunity to use some of the personal skills that I had learned in the military to my advantage,” he said. “Learning the system and following the guidelines within the system allowed me to succeed in a business where I had no previous experience and my military training was a definite asset.”

Prior to joining Verlo Mattress Factory Stores, Siipola said he had been a proponent of the VetFran Program and worked with several veterans who were interested in becoming franchise business owners.

“Not only do we at Verlo provide qualified veterans with a 15-percent discount on our franchise fee, participating financial institutions may count the 15-percent discount as equity or paid in capital for loan qualification purposes. It is a great program that can really assist our military veterans to get a start as small business owners in a proven system,” Siipola said.

To learn more about franchise opportunities with Verlo Mattress Factory Stores, visit www.verlofranchise.com.