

VETERAN EMPLOYER CASE STUDY: WESTPAC SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED



As Australia's first bank, Westpac's history is deeply entwined with that of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The organisation, which started life as the Bank of New South Wales in 1817, has seen countless staff come and go from active service, and has a long and distinguished record of supporting ex-service employees – the first a veteran returning from the Boer War (1899-1902).

Over the centuries, the bank's employees have had a strong connection to recognising service. Westpac counts World War I veteran Thomas Baker Heffer among its former CEOs, honours Anzac Day traditions and even has its own RSL sub-branch. So it's no surprise that it takes its commitment to employing and supporting ex-service people extremely seriously.

As one of six founding members of the Australian Veterans Employers Coalition, created in 2017, Westpac is committed to employing ex-service people and creating an environment where they can perform at their best.

The bank is dedicated to making it “easier for veterans, reservists and military partners to take their next career step with us”, says Phillip Milton, Senior Manager of Westpac's Information Security Group. In support of this mission, it has a special Employee Advocacy Group (EAG) called “Military and Mates”. The EAG works to attract, support and mentor ex-service applicants and employees, support active Reservists and provide a community for family members and loved ones of current ADF members.

“It's a group with a real sense of community,” says Rachel Maumill, Business Manager of Westpac's Information Security Group and an EAG member. “We advocate on our members' behalf, and also support networking.”

She adds that the bank has recently formalised its “buddy program” to help veteran employees transition more easily from military to civilian life. “The idea is just to be that friendly face and help answer questions like: ‘What do I wear to work?’ That might sound like a very basic question, but if you've been in uniform your whole career, you don't necessarily know and you may feel more comfortable talking to someone who understands where you're coming from.”

In a large organisation such as Westpac, it's likely there will be a role to match a wide range of skill sets, Maumill says. “The public only tends to see our front face, the people who work in the branch network. But we're a broad business with close to 40,000 people. There is a variety of roles where we tend to find ex-service expertise really helpful: around organisation, project management, technology, cyber crime and risk management.”

“Banking is all about problem solving and delivering on a service promise to our customers,” she adds “and they're two very aligned capabilities that you get in the armed services. The skill sets are absolutely aligned.”

What would Maumill say to employers who might be unsure about the benefits of hiring an ex-service person?

“Don't hesitate!” she laughs. “Ex-service people's values and skills include higher order thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, adaptability and resilience. Focus under pressure. Adaptability. Clear communication. Accountability and decision-making. And the teamwork is just exemplary.”

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If employers have any questions, she adds, “just get informed. Break down any assumptions and misconceptions. You'll be pleasantly surprised.”

Milton, who served with the Royal Australian Navy before joining Westpac in 2019, says that similarly, the best thing ex-service people can do is back themselves and think outside the square. “Don't underestimate how your core skills can be transferred,” he says.

“Don't just default to the defence industry aligned organisations for the next chapter of your career. We need people to be confident and understand that those core skills are transferable to so many different industries.”



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