

Running head: HOW TO MOTIVATE MILITARY

How to Motivate Military Veterans to Participate in the GI Bill

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Abstract

Over the years, some military veterans have been influenced by barriers, preventing them from using their educational benefits. Any active duty member or military veteran could have been exposed to and influenced by these barriers and become unmotivated and not use or discontinue using these benefits. If veterans do not use their educational benefits, this could result in postsecondary institutions losing their military veteran population, and the military recruitment population could decrease causing our country's national security to become more vulnerable. The purpose of this paper is to express the researcher's position towards motivating active duty members and military veterans to use their educational benefits. The research question addressed how military veterans could overcome these barriers and take advantage of these educational benefits. The research methodology was a literature review through Google Scholar to obtain primary and secondary sources to support the researcher's position. A literature review determined the relevance of the sources in supporting the researcher's position. The results suggested that the literature was a strong supporter towards the researcher's position of how military members and veterans should overcome these barriers to use their benefits. The implications of this study could help military members and veterans understand how to become motivated to overcome these barriers to attend postsecondary institutions and gain a college degree.

How to Motivate Military Veterans to Participate in the GI Bill

Problem Statement

Over the years, some military veterans have been influenced by barriers that have prevented them from using their educational benefits. Any active duty member or military veteran could have been exposed to, or influenced by, these barriers (influenced by others to not use the benefit, feeling overwhelmed with personal responsibilities and needing a job, and not disclosing their disability in order to claim benefit discounts) and become unmotivated and discontinue using these benefits (Black, Westwood, & Sorsdal, 2007). The lack of using the benefit can, therefore, decrease the college student population of postsecondary institutions. If these barriers continue to exist and influence these individuals, all active duty personnel and veterans may decide to not attend colleges, resulting in decreased college attendance and the possibility of colleges terminating their operations. Potential recruits may decide not to enlist, therefore, decreasing the military force which could lead to decreased national security. The purpose of this paper is to show the researcher's position towards motivating active duty members and military veterans to use their educational benefits.

Explanation of the Problem

The literature will reveal that, even though the military is not without their own barriers, when active duty members and military veterans are faced with these barriers, they need to be persuaded to understand the importance of using the educational benefits. As veterans have worked with each other through many active duty missions, they tend to share the same experiences, forming strong bonds and relationships and able to persuade one another to use these benefits. Sargent (2009) suggested that veterans should form support groups where they discuss issues and how they can lessen the stress that most veterans experience from academia. Tucker, Sinclair, and Thomas (2005) found that addressing and intervening a targeted group,

rather than with an individual, was more effective when the individual identified his or her self as belonging to a social group. Before veterans begin attending any college or a university, Shackelford (2009) suggested veterans should familiarize themselves with the variety of programs and higher education organizations that would better serve the needs of the student veterans.

Call to Action

The current nature of the problem does provide some room for changes, but the main concern leads to how to address the situation. The most effective way to implement change to the problem is to address active duty personnel directly and assess their attitude towards the GI Bill. As the researcher (911 Dispatcher) works with firefighters at the fire station, the firefighters' attitudes of the benefit can be ascertained as they are in-processing at the fire department. As this is their first official duty day, they arrive in uniform. If they are an Airman (one stripe), Airman First Class (two stripes), or Senior Airman (three stripes), they most likely have not been active duty long enough to decide if they would use the GI Bill. As the researcher is usually on duty at the same time, the researcher could ask these firefighters their educational background and their thoughts of the Bill. They could be reminded that the Bill can be the best investment for their education if used right away after they separate from active duty.

There are many stakeholders that would be involved with implementing this change. The U.S. Government could provide a more improved GI Bill that would attract more potential recruits (Kenworthy, 2011). The various military branches could become more involved in attracting recruits who could also be interested in continuing their education. As military veterans are the sole customers of the Bill, they could share their experiences with potential recruits and other veterans, getting them to use the Bill (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).

Postsecondary institutions could attract more veterans by constructing a more veteran friendly website, offering additional and/or more improved services for veterans (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). The cultures that would be affected by this change would be potential recruits who are about to become active duty, active duty members who would eventually become veterans, and military veterans who are to use the Bill. The operations that would most likely be affected would be how colleges or universities use their media to attract veterans to attend their institutions.

Sustainability Plan

To ensure that these recommendations be implemented, a sustainable plan has been considered. One of the most effective means of contacting military members, as they are about to become veterans, is while they are attending an out-processing briefing. The researcher could contact the out-processing office on base and explain a research proposal currently being investigated in hopes to convince them to offer research skills to solve the problem. The plan is to determine, (1) what current research methods they may already have used and make any necessary improvements, and (2) what other possible agencies (e.g., college counselors, V.A. representatives and military veteran college students) are currently involved in the briefings and possibly include more to improve the military to veteran transition process. If needed, a mixed-method survey through www.surveymonkey.com could be prepared and disseminated by email to those out-processing. The results would be collected and analyzed by the researcher and office before the briefing. Results would be distributed to the out-processing office, then distribute to the other agencies, if not already included. Prior to the briefing, the researcher could prepare a power point presentation sharing his educational experiences of how to become eligible for the GI Bill and how it has been useful. College counselors or V.A. representatives

could explain how to obtain and use their Bill (Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). Military veteran college students could participate in a training program sponsored by their college. These students attend these briefings to encourage newly discharged veterans, especially disabled veterans, how the Bill has benefited them (Grossman, 2009). Policies between the out-processing office and the other agencies would need to be established in order for this plan to be successful.

Conclusion

For many years military veterans have been influenced by barriers preventing them from using their educational benefits. The literature supports the researcher's assertiveness in that military veterans can be motivated to take advantage of their educational benefits in spite of the numerous barriers that may exist. A temporary plan to motivate these veterans can be to interview newly arrived military personnel as they in-process into their work areas. Their attitudes toward education can be ascertained in hopes to motivate them. To sustain this plan, military organizations can survey potential military veterans to determine their attitudes towards education and prepare counseling sessions as they out-process. Military veterans can also provide guidance as to how the G.I. Bill has made an effective impact on their lives.

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