

The Coca-Cola Company

Testimony of Mrs. Elizabeth Voticky
Group Director for North America Talent Acquisition
The Coca-Cola Company
Before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
The Honorable Senator Johnny Isakson, Chairman
Tuesday, December 15, 2015

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and staff. For the record, my name is Elizabeth Voticky, Group Director for North America Talent Acquisition at The Coca-Cola Company. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on some of our best practices – as well as challenges – in facilitating post-service career transition and employment opportunities for those who have served our Country.

On behalf of our Chairman and CEO, Mr. Muhtar Kent, and our nearly 700,000 associates across this country and globally, we would also like to thank the many military and nonprofit partners who are represented here today. The positive strides that we have made in veterans recruitment would not be possible were it not for their tireless dedication and efforts. Public-private partnerships truly excel when all stakeholders align around a shared set of values and goals and that is an integral part of our narrative today thanks to the productive relationships that we enjoy with many of those gathered here.

For historical perspective, The Coca-Cola Company's partnership with the United States Military dates back to the USO's beginning in 1941. At that time, former Coca-Cola Chief Executive Officer, Robert Woodruff, proclaimed that "every person in uniform will get a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents wherever he or she is and whatever the cost to the company." The Coca-Cola Company helped quench the thirst of soldiers who flocked to USO centers during World War II to socialize and enjoy some of the comforts of a "home away from home." More than 74 years later, we remain prouder than ever of our continuing partnerships in support of U.S. service men and women both around the world and here at home.

We believe that a successful veterans recruitment and retention program must have, at minimum, three intertwined components: (1) support from the top through senior leadership that recognizes and embraces the unique value of this cohort of individuals to any workforce, (2) a comprehensive human resources engagement plan that encompasses the full continuum from job search to recruitment, hiring, on-boarding and retention and (3) a consistent emphasis on veteran integration into the organizational culture and ongoing support throughout their career progression. These elements form the cornerstone of our efforts.

One of our senior-most leaders, Chief Customer Officer Mark Rahiya, served as an officer in the U.S. Navy Submarine Force, and captured the importance of senior leadership engagement in this effort at our recent Army PaYS Program MOU signing ceremony where he said: "The young men and women coming out of the military understand the value of hard work," he said. "We find they're high-integrity individuals because of what they've learned as part of that military culture, and they bring that with them . . . combined with MOS skills sets, whether they've been mechanics or one of any other number of amazing skills they learn. You can take advantage of that and get them into the right job and train them and you get fantastic employees - and very loyal employees as well. That's a phenomenal opportunity for our economy."

I. The Coca-Cola Company: Veterans Recruitment and Hiring Partnerships Best Practices

Coca-Cola is currently engaged on various installations with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), sponsored by the Department of Defense (DOD). The MSEP works in conjunction with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) office on military installations to assist spouses and children of active duty members to find employment locally. Currently, Coca-Cola is actively engaged with MSEP in Florida providing employment opportunities. Coca-Cola proactively partners in this and other ways with various regional and local TAP offices to provide employment opportunities at all levels of the organization.

Additionally, this past September, Coca-Cola proudly joined the Army Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) Program – a strategic partnership between the US Army and corporations, companies, and public sector agencies to assist exiting army personnel with job opportunities. The Program guarantees PaYS Soldiers a job interview and the potential for employment after honorable discharge or completion of required active duty training.

Aside from targeted relationships for hiring military veterans, Coca-Cola is also proud of our partnership with American Corporate Partners (ACP). Through our Military Veteran Business Resources Group (MVBRG) – which you will hear a bit more about momentarily – Coca-Cola associates work with ACP by mentoring on job search, resume writing and business acumen. The Coca-Cola Foundation awarded a \$50,000 grant in 2014 for programmatic funding of the mentoring program. Since then, 70+ veterans have received one-on-one career development assistance from Coca-Cola associates who volunteer as career mentors.

A. The Coca-Cola Company Military Veterans Business Resource Group

The Coca-Cola Military Veterans Business Resource Group (“MVBRG”) was established in 2012 and has 11 field chapters and 1,000+ members. I am honored to be joined in the audience by our MVBRG President, Mr. Patrick Haddock, Lt. Col., US Army Reserve. Like Mark, who I mentioned earlier, Lt. Col. Haddock brings a wealth of first-hand knowledge to the table through his leadership in support of our veterans recruitment and retention efforts. The MVBRG facilitates programs that focus on three primary pillars; Workplace, Marketplace and Community:

- 1) **WORKPLACE** incorporates engaging our employees in programs that benefit our associates who are veterans or associated with the military including Guardsmen and Reservists. This includes partnering with Talent Acquisition to help with veteran recruiting, mentoring veteran employees in career development, and assisting company leadership with USERRA compliance.
- 2) **MARKETPLACE** incorporates our efforts to connect our veterans in military service with our business. This is done through partnerships with the USO, Wounded Warrior Project, and our military sales to installations globally.
- 3) **COMMUNITY** involves our efforts to support local communities with events and programs which support the veteran population. These vary widely from sponsoring a race to support a veterans-related cause, to helping with local programs for homeless veterans.

Each year, Coca-Cola's MVBORG also hosts a two-day event for veterans and active duty members in the Atlanta area at Coca-Cola Plaza. These events start with our annual "USO Stuffing Party" where our associates volunteer to fill 10,000+ care packages for deployed troops around the world. Events also include an evening reception; a leadership panel discussion on veteran transition; a full day workshop on resume writing, interviewing skills and job searches. We also announce an annual customer award, The President's Veterans Award, in recognition of a customer who has demonstrated outstanding support to veterans and service members throughout the prior year. Dunkin Brands is our 2015 award recipient and they made a financial donation of \$5,000.00 to the USO of Georgia.

Our MVBORG is a true example of a best practice in an organization dedicated to developing a culture of respect and understanding of our veteran associates. The team is entirely comprised of volunteers who take time out of work and home life to mentor, plan and execute a variety of programs and events aimed at enhancing the work-life experiences of our veteran associates. Our leadership is dedicated to providing a culture where our associates are given the time – not only to serve – but also to volunteer on company time to develop the programs that veterans so desperately need and want to facilitate their assimilation into corporate culture.

B. VETLANTA Partnership

The Coca-Cola MVBORG founded VETLANTA in 2014 as a partnership of 20+ Atlanta based Fortune 500 Company veterans groups focused on improving the veteran homeless challenges, provide mentoring and helping with veteran employment. Through a partnership with American Corporate Partners (ACP), VETLANTA and our MVBORG, Coca-Cola associates provide mentoring and career development support to transitioning service men and women on job search, resume writing and business acumen. As noted earlier, more than 70 veterans have received one-on-one career development assistance from Coca-Cola associates who volunteer as career mentors.

C. Internal Training for Talent Acquisition & Internal Non-Military Leaders

Coca-Cola also has an internal training program for our Talent Acquisition team to help them translate military job descriptions typically found on veterans' résumés into the civilian workplace context. Recruiting military veterans is successful when we have properly trained our recruiting teams to interpret and translate military experience and skills into relative business skills within our organization. Our plan is to expand upon this best practice and launch leadership knowledge courses to assist our current non-military leaders in better understanding the skillsets brought to our organization by veterans.

II. Opportunities for Improved Public/Private Collaboration on Veterans Transition Efforts

A. Need for Improved Administrative Structure

While working with the TAP Program has many advantages, we would agree that there are some areas for improvement where updates could make it an even stronger and more robust partner. As you may know, the TAP Program largely relies upon a contractor-based administrative model. Such a structure poses a barrier to establishing solid relationships due to different contractors and/or points-of-contacts changing on a regular basis. There is no central point of contact for companies like ours that are national in scope.

Frequent changes in contract entities and personnel prevent these critical players from developing critical institutional relationships and memory with their military and civilian partners. For example, changing contractor contacts mean that new personnel often have to navigate a learning curve to assist transitioning candidates with the crucial task of translating military experience and its unique language into business terminology. To be certain, the task of translating military nomenclature regarding job skills and roles into terms that the civilian workplace can understand remains a constant challenge – even in a perfect world. But this contractor-based model makes it even more difficult to have points-of-contact who have successfully mastered that and other skills.

These types of structural issues – and their resulting inefficiencies – are also mirrored within the Veterans Administration (VA) context at the state level. State-run DVOP and LVER programs through the VA are isolated and, as such, companies like ours are unable to leverage fully the programs offered to veterans through these offices as they stand alone and vary from state to state. Improved coordination could exponentially increase the effectiveness of these resources.

B. Better Use and Integration of Technology

We are all constantly working to better understand and leverage technology in our organizations – civilian and military alike. TAP offices continue to rely upon hard copy to a significant degree. For example, requiring a paper copy of a job posting which is then manually posted on a job board is just one such illustration. The result is that only those who physically walk into the TAP office see our postings. Without a central contact list, every TAP office would have to be called and contacts made prior to emailing or, in many cases faxing, a job posting to the site. These added steps all serve to burden and slow down the process when we are hiring across the country.

One example of where technology has been leveraged with some effectiveness can be found in the e-Benefits tool. Although it is a great new way of getting jobs out to military personnel through a scrape of our own job site, there is considerably less traffic via this channel than on commercial sites such as Monster's military job board. We believe this is due, in large part, to a lack of a targeted marketing campaign, if you will, to transitioning military personnel that would drive traffic to the site specifically for careers. It does hold potential, however, and we believe it could be more fully leveraged to drive employment opportunities.

C. Inability to Promote Specific Jobs w/Specific Employers

Aside from the aforementioned opportunities, TAP's ability to realize its full potential is further inhibited by the limitation on promoting a specific job with a specific employer. Within the TAP context, transitioning personnel are often unable to formally discuss what job opportunity would constitute the best fit and which companies offer that type

of job. Tailoring inquiries to specific individuals can help to not only improve the overall job search experience but also increase the chances for a successful match between candidate and prospective employer.

D. Syncing the Military Transition Timeline & Private Sector Hiring Cycle

It must be emphasized that the need for continuing innovation does not solely rest on the public sector/military side of the ledger. The private sector must also continue to come up with creative ways of resolving obstacles to the effective facilitation of veterans recruitment and hiring. In that vein, a major challenge for the private sector continues to be misalignment between the timeline for a transitioning candidate's search and the timeline for a company's hiring process. Most companies post jobs for immediate needs, and exiting service personnel are often weeks or months from an exit date when they begin to search. Our organization and others like ours need to find a way to pipeline more effectively and better structure the contact management of qualified personnel.

There are several private agencies that attempt to fill this gap but, while free to service personnel, they charge fees for private sector use of their services. This is an uneven fix that requires more collaborative work between all partners in this effort. Our view is that they capitalize on the gaps in the current government model for assisting in hiring veterans and are successful because there are few other options. We would like to see the government programs fill in the gaps and bridge the barriers that prevent or challenge organizations focused on hiring vets, from achieving this objective.

III. How Can Veterans Better Prepare?

Where can veterans themselves assist in this effort? Where we see an area of potential improvement is in the emotional preparedness for the change in environment. Veterans are accustomed to a plan, a direction, and seldom work well in ambiguity – it's not their culture or experience in the military to be left with little or no direction. In the corporate world, barring a controlling leader, most mid-management and frontline associates are left to do the job. This is something that although they are advised of, they haven't experienced as military personnel. Training in how a real world organization works and what they expect from their teams would be a very valuable addition to the transition experience.

A successful transition for our organization is when we are able to translate a service member's skills and experience into a role that is not only well suited, but provides both personal and professional fulfillment through a challenging and growth-oriented opportunity for the veteran. Through our MVBPRP, we assist veterans with their assimilation into our organization and culture through a variety of ways. Having a veteran find the right role for them within our organization, learning and developing a career that is satisfying and productive and growth with the organization – that is truly a successful transition.

IV. Closing

In closing, we would like to once again thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the honorable members of the Committee and staff for your leadership. We would also like to applaud all of the nonprofit partners assembled here today for their work. In particular, to our military partners, the branches and men and women in uniform whom you represent – The Coca-Cola Company would like to say thank you for your service and reaffirm our commitment to supporting your post-service career plans. This commitment is based not only upon the belief that it is the "right" thing to do . . . but also upon the understanding that a company in today's complex global economy cannot effectively compete without leveraging the unique skillsets and experiences of veterans.

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As we have done since 1941, when thousands of men and women were sent to military bases around the world at the outset of WWII, Coca-Cola rallied behind our men and women in uniform. Today, we continue to rally behind you as we work to create even more rewarding and challenging employment opportunities for veterans. Thank you.