A Call to Arms

Veterans Day is a national holiday intended to honor our men and women who have served in our Nation’s military. This letter is a call to organizations everywhere to assist our veterans in their time of need. This is a call to arms, welcoming arms, for those that answered our call.

As a nation, we citizens depend on our young adults to serve their country voluntarily. We call on them when we have a national need. In this call, we ask them shed their former identity and to adopt a new one as an Airman, Marine, Sailor, or Soldier. They voluntarily enter into a very effective socialization process that molds them into military personas. This socialization is so important that billions of dollars are spent every year to develop and maintain our all-volunteer military. The various services recruit individuals from all walks then, through great expense and deliberate process, socialize them into an instrument of national power – our military. This process, this creation of a warrior ethos in the minds of our young, is necessary to prepare them for the often unsavory tasks of answering our call.

Yet for all of the effort we make preparing them to take ups arms, we make a paltry effort to prepare them for their return home. We expect them to return to the way they were. We expect them to somehow shed their warrior ethos and undo the processes and experiences that transformed them into our military instrument of national power. As our military men and women return to civilian life, they often find that their socialized self-image as a military member and the culmination of their military experiences, have in many cases resulted in profound personal change. They often find themselves no longer “fitting” with their civilian peer group counterparts. In many cases, these socialized service men and women find it difficult to even fit in with groups they previously belonged. When we consider those veterans that have
experienced combat or even more dramatic, those veterans that carry the scars of combat, either physical or psychological, the problem is compounded immensely.

While our military does make an effort at transition assistance, it is woefully insufficient. Increasing veteran suicide rates, substance abuse cases, and homelessness, are all indicators of our failure to re-socialize our veterans back into mainstream American society. The attitude seems to be that we can just “un-do” their military personas and help them “go get a good job” or “go back to school” and all be well. We can do better.

We can do better by leveraging the organizations that exist in all our communities to do what they do best. Many organizations across our country and in every community create strong cultures, purposeful missions, and foster a sense of belonging and camaraderie. These organizations have a special capacity to re-socialize our veterans. Chambers of commerce, civic organizations, student organizations on our college campuses, and countless other organizations from churches to volunteer organizations all provide the purpose, culture, and peer support necessary for re-socialization. By recruiting transitioning veterans into our civic organizations we can begin the slow and arduous process of re-socializing them into our communities.

We asked these men and women to answer our call to arms, now let’s answer theirs. Let’s go beyond placing a yellow magnetic ribbon on our vehicles and fully embrace their return to our communities through action. As a nation we owe it to our veterans to assist them in their transition. I urge organizations everywhere to answer the call for welcoming arms by making a concerted effort to recruit veterans into your ranks.
For more information on this piece please contact Randy Blass at 644-6154 or via email at rblass@cob.fsu.edu.

**Randy Blass**, is an Associate in Organizational Behavior at the Florida State University College of Business and serves as the program director for the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) program. Blass served in the U.S. Air Force for 25 years and earned his doctoral degree at Florida State where he now teaches. After retiring as a lieutenant colonel, he was instrumental in bringing the EBV program to the FSU campus. The EBV program, which was begun at the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University, is an educational initiative that offers training in the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and business ownership to U.S. military members disabled as a result of their military service in post-9/11 conflicts.