Prudential Financial, Inc. VETalent
Providing Skills and Opportunities for Veterans Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce

MODEL SUMMARY

VETalent is an academic and on-the-job training program for military veterans transitioning into the civilian workforce. Participants complete internships and consulting engagements with major corporations, such as Prudential Financial, Inc. Upon completion of the consulting phase, participants are considered for full-time employment with VETalent partner companies.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, Workforce Opportunity Services (WOS), a nonprofit organization that helps companies build strong talent pipelines through unique work-study programs, identified the need to expand education and training opportunities for high school graduates in underserved areas. Working with the senior vice president and chief information officer at Prudential and with local educational partners, WOS established a new Talent Acquisition Pipeline (T.A.P.) program in information technology (IT) and business operations. During the program, participants complete an internship at a WOS corporate sponsor, such as Prudential. Upon certification in their program area of study (IT, business operations, etc.), they serve as consultants to Prudential or one of the other corporate T.A.P. partners. At the end of the consultant phase, participants are considered for full-time employment with the company.

In late 2009 and early 2010, Prudential leadership set out to develop programs to support veterans who had served in the military after Sept. 11, 2001. Building on the best practices and success of the T.A.P. program, WOS and Prudential, working with Rutgers University in Newark, NJ, established the VETalent program. The new initiative was designed to train veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan for civilian jobs in IT. Since the program’s establishment, VETalent has expanded into other in-demand areas, including customer service, back office administration and project coordination, and is supported at six Prudential locations.

PARTNERSHIP

To help make VETalent a success, WOS works with academic partners and more than 30 company sponsors that support other veteran programs, including Blackstone; BNY Mellon; General Electric; Guardian; HBO; HP; Johnson & Johnson; Merck; and Prudential Financial, Inc.
Veterans bring significant value to the workforce, including practiced leadership skills, discipline, the ability to perform in stressful situations, and a solid work ethic. We recognize the sacrifices made every day by these men and women and believe their experience and leadership can only make our company stronger.”

—Charles Sevola, Vice President and Head of the Office of Veterans Initiatives, Prudential Financial, Inc.

**NUTS AND BOLTS**

Admission to the program is competitive and requires applicants to (1) have served in the military after Sept. 11, 2001, and have been honorably discharged or be a spouse of a military member who has served in the military after Sept. 11, 2001; (2) hold a high school diploma or equivalent credential; and (3) demonstrate basic computer knowledge, attention to detail, proven leadership and strong interpersonal skills. The costs to participate in the program are covered by Prudential, and all participants receive a stipend during the training period.

The program includes:

- **Networking with Fellow Participants:** Participants complete the program in a “cohort,” which ranges from 10 to 25 students, providing opportunities for students to network and share experiences with one another.

- **Coursework:** During the academic phase of VETalent, veterans gain the skills and knowledge needed to perform specific jobs within the areas of IT, sales or business operations.

**PROGRAM BENEFITS, RESULTS AND OUTCOMES**

Since 2010, 15 cohorts have completed the VETalent program at Prudential, helping more than 300 veterans transition from the military to the civilian workforce. More than 25 companies have developed, or are considering developing, their own WOS programs similar to VETalent.

Benefits to VETalent participants include:

- **Industry-Recognized Certificates by the Partnering College or University:** The program provides VETalent participants industry-recognized and portable credentials that certify their skills and knowledge within the program area (IT, project management, business operations, etc.).

- **Pathway To Build Meaningful Careers within the Civilian Workforce:** Participants who successfully complete the VETalent Quality Assurance Training program can be hired as quality assurance professionals at the sponsoring company.

- **Free Training and Weekly Stipend:** Prudential covers the training costs and provides participants a weekly stipend. This support allows participants to focus on the training, rather than the financial burdens associated with most training programs.

- **Support in the Transition from Military to Civilian Workforce:** Through resources made available by the sponsoring company, participants have access to mentors and counselors who help them navigate transitions.

**Professional Skills Training:** Program training includes written and verbal communication within a corporate business, as well as interpersonal skills.

**Mentorship and Career Guidance:** VETalent participants complete a mentoring series designed to help veterans transition from the military to a business environment. Participants may also receive support during their transition through Prudential’s VETNET, a network that connects employees with military backgrounds at all levels of the corporation. As consultants, participants also receive coaching and guidance from their line supervisors. Client service managers at WOS provide job placement assistance with WOS corporate partners, such as Prudential.

**Internship:** Through the internship, participants learn the skills needed to be successful within their particular job function.

**On-the-Job Training in a Civilian Work Environment through Consultant Role:** The IT Quality Assurance cohort (10 veterans and three spouses of military veterans) that graduated in August 2015 is now completing the consulting phase of the program.
Benefits of VETalent to Prudential include:

- **Supports Prudential Commitment to Veterans:** The Prudential relationship to the military dates back to the early 1900s. The company is committed to making a positive impact on the lives of active duty service members and veterans. VETalent graduates report that they were unsure what to do after the military, but entering this program provided them the skills and opportunities to build a rewarding career.

- **Provides a Dedicated and Talented Pipeline of Workers:** Through on-the-job training and consultancy, sponsoring companies have the opportunity to train and retain skilled workers.

- **Promotes High Retention Rates:** Once hired for a full-time position with Prudential, VETalent graduates have high retention rates.

- **Has the Flexibility To Support Multiple Divisions of Prudential:** The length, duration and teaching disciplines are highly flexible, allowing the program to be customized to support multiple business units.

**SUSTAINABILITY AND OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

The Prudential team continues to look at ways to grow the program and expand it beyond the current business units. Currently, the team is exploring an option to create a hybrid program, in which the first semester of the training would be the same for all training areas, while the second semester would provide participants the opportunity to receive training that is specific to their career area through breakout sessions. The goal is to increase the number of participants within a VETalent cohort.

Prudential believes that the VETalent platform is flexible and can be applied to various jobs within any industry. Management’s focus is on sharing company insights with other corporations and using this best practice model as a vehicle to inspire other companies to support veterans transitioning into the civilian workforce.

**WORDS OF WISDOM**

Prudential recommends the following to businesses considering training and workforce development programs for veterans:

- **Start by Looking at Jobs for Which You Already Offer Training Programs:** This program can be easily applied to any job function for which a company offers training and educational programs, whether through third-party training, through an educational partner or within the company’s facility. These training programs can easily be modified to align with the WOS veteran program model (similar to VETalent).

- **Select Candidates for Success:** The program is valuable to veterans only if they complete it and secure full-time employment.

- **Ensure Program Buy-In from Senior Leaders:** Programs like VETalent are successful and sustainable only if they are supported by senior management. At Prudential, Barbara Koster, senior vice president and chief information officer, and John R. Strangfeld, chairman and CEO, are fully committed to and believe in the program as a way to support veterans and build the company’s talent pipeline. At Prudential, the program is managed by a veteran initiative team, which reports directly to senior management.

- **Select Mentors Who Are Passionate About Training and Have the Time To Coach:** Pairing participants with mentors and line supervisors who have the time to coach and inspire them is important. Veterans participating in VETalent programs are highly motivated; they simply need support to make a successful transition into the civilian workforce.

**INFORMATION, TOOLS AND RESOURCES**

- **Prudential Commitment to Veterans**  
  [www.prudential.com/veterans](http://www.prudential.com/veterans)

- **Workforce Opportunity Services**  
  [www.wforce.org](http://www.wforce.org)

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Descriptions of Common Work-and-Learn Models

A Glossary of Key Terms

Following are descriptions of the most common and effective work-and-learn models that are a part of business and industry programs nationwide.

**Apprenticeship**
An apprenticeship is a unique, flexible training system that combines job-related technical instruction with structured on-the-job learning experiences. It provides a unique combination of structured learning with on-the-job training from an assigned mentor. Related instruction, technical training or other certified training is provided by apprenticeship training centers, technical schools, community colleges, and/or institutions employing distance and computer-based learning approaches. The goal is to provide workers with advanced skill sets that meet the specific needs of employers. In many cases, these programs provide apprentices the opportunity to simultaneously obtain secondary and postsecondary degrees, as well as credentials issued by third-party industry organizations. (Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

**Career Fair, Career Expo, Job Fair**
A career fair, also called a career expo or job fair, is an event held for employers and recruiters to meet with potential job candidates. Industry representatives set up exhibition booths — usually at a secondary or postsecondary institution — where students and job seekers can find information about different career fields, training opportunities and jobs currently available. Career fairs give employers an opportunity to interact with future job candidates and make direct contact with students who are making decisions about what education, training and career to pursue. Quality career fairs offer hands-on activities to participants, allowing them to see firsthand what a job in the industry entails.

**Clinical Training/Practicum**
Clinical training combines classroom learning with supervised hands-on immersion experiences in specific fields, mostly in industries that involve human services. In health fields, clinical training is founded on actual observation and lab instruction and/or treatment of patients, as distinguished from theoretical or experimental training. The training is usually highly specialized and includes coursework specific to performing functions and tasks in an actual workplace. (Sources: Siemens Clinical Training & Continuing Education; Clinical Training Institute)

**Cooperative Education/Co-Op**
Cooperative education is the integration of classroom theory with practical work experience, through which students alternate attendance at school with periods of professional employment. At the high school level, the periods of classroom and work-based experience are usually half-days. In higher education, the alternation is most often on a longer time scale. Cooperative education programs enable students to apply technical skills already acquired through the education institution in a real-world workplace setting. Traditionally, cooperative education has been used to aid a student's transition from school to work, while providing participating employers an opportunity to attract, evaluate, train and ultimately employ a ready source of educated and skilled employees. (Sources: Center for Manufacturing Excellence, University of Mississippi; University of Cincinnati)
Externship
An externship is typically a training program offered by educational institutions and private businesses that gives students brief practical experiences in their field of study and insight and knowledge in a particular career field. Often shorter term than internships, externships are intensive career learning experiences that typically range from two days to two weeks. Although more immersive and structured than job shadowing, these experiences provide the opportunity for students to see firsthand the work activities and responsibilities in various professions and industries. The experience should provide the learner a greater sense of the knowledge, skills and attributes of people who thrive within that given career pathway and industry sector and a complete experience of day-to-day work life.

Hands-On Training
Hands-on training provides student learners an opportunity to use their hands to perform tasks. This training aims to simulate conditions that are as close as possible to real work conditions while avoiding the risks commonly associated with a new employee. In hands-on training, participants typically have the opportunity for repeated practice.

Industry Tour
Companies offer guided tours of their facilities to let students, parents and the general public witness firsthand the day-to-day operations of the business. Typically lasting up to two hours, tours are led by knowledgeable staff members who show and describe the companies’ processes, products and protocols, as well as point out the skills and training needed for different jobs. Quality industry tours typically result in greater awareness of the company and the industry and increased engagement with the local community, schools and future employees.

Internship
An internship is a formal program that provides practical experience for learners in an occupation or profession, during which the learner is immersed in a work situation for a limited period of time. Internships can be paid or unpaid and usually accompany or relate to academic coursework or training. A quality internship provides the learner an increasingly thorough grasp of the career field, extensive experience in specific job functions, application of education and training to specific duties, and a feel for what it is like to work on a daily basis in the industry. While not always intended to result in employment at the sponsoring company, internships help employers expose potential workers to their workplace and industry and recruit, screen and test-fit future job candidates before they are hired full time.

Job Shadowing
Job shadowing is a work experience option through which students learn about a job by walking through the working day as a shadow to a competent worker. The job shadowing work experience is a temporary, unpaid exposure to the workplace in an occupational area of interest to the student. Students witness firsthand the work environment, employability and occupational skills in practice, the value of professional training, and potential career options. Job shadowing is designed to increase career awareness, help model student behavior through examples, and reinforce for the student the link between classroom learning and work requirements. Almost any workplace is a potential job-shadowing site. (Source: Paris, K., and Mason, S. (1995). Planning and Implementing Youth Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Center on Education and Work)

Mentorship
Mentorship is the coupling of a novice with an older, more experienced professional wherein the expert shares knowledge and experience with the novice over the course of time. Mentorship can be either formal or informal and can happen face to face; online; or in conjunction with other work-and-learn opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing. Mentorships help mentored youth improve their overall academic achievement and develop the necessary skills to enter or continue on a career path. They also provide guidance for decision making. Quality mentorships usually involve mentee training and alignment to the company’s culture and goals.
On-the-Job Training (OJT)
OJT is training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant (either an incoming or incumbent employee) while engaged in productive work in a job that provides knowledge or skills essential to the adequate performance of the job. OJT is usually limited in duration, as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate. (Source: Workforce Investment Act)

Pre-Apprenticeship
Pre-apprenticeship is defined by the Employment and Training Administration as “a program or set of strategies [that is] designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program and has a documented partnership with at least one, if not more, Registered Apprenticeship program(s).” Since the pre-apprenticeship model is meant to prepare learners to enter a registered apprenticeship, a quality model provides sufficient applied academic training, as well as industry-based technical skills training and practice, to ensure that students transition successfully into an apprenticeship.

Registered Apprenticeship
A registered apprenticeship encompasses the details and benefits listed in the “Apprenticeship” definition. Additionally, it meets national apprenticeship standards outlined by the registration process with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship or through a state apprenticeship agency. Upon completion of a registered apprenticeship program, participants receive a portable credential (provided by DOL or the state apprenticeship agency) that certifies occupational proficiency as a journey worker for the selected occupation. For more information on the DOL registered apprenticeship program, please visit: www.dol.gov/apprenticeship. (Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

Returnship
A returnship is an internship specifically designed for older professionals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time to re-enter a career. In many cases, they are designed to help these individuals refresh their skill sets and learn new technologies before returning as full-time employees. Often lasting around 10 weeks, a returnship provides individuals with an opportunity to sharpen their skills in a given career path or pursue new areas of expertise in a work environment that may have changed significantly since their last experience as an employee. Returnships also give employers the opportunity to screen returning experienced applicants before hiring them full time. (Sources: Goldman Sachs; CareerBuilder)

RESOURCES
- 21st Century Competency-Based Apprenticeship Resources http://bit.ly/1RcO4Uh
- U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship www.dol.gov/apprenticeship
Contributors
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