

# Are military spouses the answer to your staffing problems?

With the national unemployment rate never higher than 4% during 2019, many organizations experienced difficulty filling job openings this year. One segment of the population, however, still continuously posts an unemployment rate around 24% despite being educated (89% have some college or higher) and eager to work—military spouses.

“Military spouse unemployment is a crisis on par with unemployment in the world’s most poverty- and war-ridden places. A crisis that has occurred for no other reason than, ‘I move a lot,’ says Jaime Chapman, a career and employment advocate for military spouses and founder/CEO of Begin Within.

Besides the personal frustration of trying to make headway on a career path, the situation poses a variety of familial and societal concerns. Many military families are food insecure and possess a household income that qualifies for benefits such as food stamps and reduced lunches.

As Chapman points out, “This problem is easily resolved with dual incomes but, as it stands, increases taxpayer burden because military spouses struggle to maintain viable employment.”

Furthermore, a report by the national nonprofit Blue Star Families states that military spouse employment “has a direct effect on force readiness and member retention.” The armed services lose some of their top talent when people opt not to re-enlist because of the stress experienced by their families.

## Helping them . . . and you

In the past, employers often sympathized with the plight of military spouses but felt unable to offer much in terms of ongoing employment. Nowadays, however, companies small and large from a variety of industries hire remote workers as valuable members of their staff and use the Internet, cloud-based file sharing, email, smartphones, and other wonders of modern life to tear down geographical barriers to employment.

“Five of our seven team members are military spouses,” says Ashlee Campbell, founder and CEO of Summit Collaborations Marketing Agency. “We operate from around the globe with team members in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and Germany. The military spouses that work at Summit are highly skilled social media specialists, content writers, and graphic designers. Without them, we wouldn’t be where we are today!”

Another example: With the technology industry facing a talent shortage, Microsoft launched a program in Tacoma, Washington, called the Military Spouse Technology Academy. The 19 military spouses who graduated from this 22-week pilot program earlier this year all interviewed for positions at Microsoft or one of its hiring partners. But even before gaining in-demand tech skills, the group as a whole had impressive credentials—collectively speaking 20 languages and holding 35 college degrees and over 40 certifications.

## Armed with talent & loyalty

In addition to their competency, employers often report military spouses bringing something special to the table.

“Our military spouse employees have been a crucial part of AAFMAA’s continued success,” says Charlene Wilde, assistant secretary at The American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association, a financial services organization that has hired military spouses for roles in areas such as member benefits, customer service, and management. “As a group, they are resilient and independent workers who bring a unique and invaluable skillset to any workplace. Spouses are used to taking challenges, both personal and professional, in stride, and this is something we see each day in their work ethic.”

And, as Chapman adds, in an era where the average tenure of any U.S. employee is only 4.2 years, employers frequently discover that military spouses who obtain long-term, flexible careers tend to stay on board as loyal employees.

“Military spouses do not deserve jobs solely for being a military spouse,” Chapman says. “But they deserve a fair hiring process void of tenure discrimination and the opportunity to prove their immense value in the labor force.”