

Veterans and Emotional Intelligence

Challenges, Assessment, Veteran Suicides, and a Vision

The first parts of this article have been published on [ACP AdvisorNet](#).

According to a “major study” published in 2017, veterans lack Emotional Intelligence. Employers, managers, and others consistently rated veterans as a better fit for jobs working with things rather than people. An undated post from recruiting/leadership development firm, Korn-Ferry, labeled this as “unconscious bias” but expanded on the perception:

The biggest problem military veterans face when entering the workforce is not getting a job. It's getting the right job. And the reason for that, based on a new study, could be due to unconscious bias.

Researchers found that recruiters, hiring managers, and others viewed veterans as lacking emotional intelligence, creativity, and interpersonal and other social skills. Conversely, they were perceived as rigid, process-oriented, and efficient.
[Emphasis Added]

The Challenges

As a veteran, career/leadership coach, and lifelong learner/educator, this is frustrating. More so because I've also been actively assessing and coaching individuals on Emotional Intelligence. Initially, some key points to consider:

- The articles and posts on this issue all state the “perceptions” of this lack of emotional intelligence. The stated skepticism is good. But even stating perceptions without data can be damaging. The lack of any real data on the Emotional Intelligence of veterans should be stated much more clearly.
- There are numerous organizations dedicated to supporting and assisting veterans in transitioning from the military. These organizations offer job fairs, training, hiring programs, webinars, and more to address veteran concerns. I support several of these organizations in different ways, including submitting articles to multiple sites.
- The challenges of military transitioning and veterans are real. There are factors in the workplace – and in the hiring process – that are different. There are practices within the military that do not translate well to the non-military environments. And it's now being significantly impacted by the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Chatbots, e.g., ChatGPT. This means that transitioning military and veterans must approach their career decision-making, their job search differently. They must take advantage of the resources and advice available.

Emotional Intelligence

While there is some, expected, academic debate about Emotional Intelligence, it is widely accepted within organizations, practiced in many ways, writings, coaching, trainings, by 1000's of professionals. Emotional Intelligence includes the following core factors:

Self-Recognition: Reflects self-awareness and understanding, personal acceptance. Self-awareness is foundational to social awareness and self-management.

Social Recognition: Reflects awareness and consideration of the feelings and responses of others. The ability to empathize and maintain sensitivity to the moods and emotions of others allows for superior intuition and connection.

Self-Management: Indicates self-evaluation coupled with self-regulation. The awareness and discipline to control and harness feelings directly impacts the ability to achieve personal objectives and develop inner resolution. Satisfaction, happiness and contentment are results of self-management.

Social Management: Includes interpersonal skills and focuses intelligence on generating results. Social intelligence fosters collaboration and connection to tap the power of synergy.

Important Observations

I offer several observations applicable to the arguments I'm going to make on this issue:

- In the field of assessment, "face validity" is an accepted factor. Emotional Intelligence has a high level of face validity. Reading the brief descriptions of the factors above illustrates that they are 1) easy to understand, and 2) easy to connect the relationships among the factors. Participants in training programs, coaching clients, etc. quickly acknowledge the basic realities of Emotional Intelligence. This simple factor is sometimes overlooked (or ignored).
- There are scores of assessments purporting to measure Emotional Intelligence, ranging from simple, short "self-awareness" surveys to more sophisticated assessments, including several that offer a 360° option.
- Connections to other assessments, e.g., "preferences" like the Myers-Briggs (MBTI) measurement of type (preferences) and CliftonStrengths are clearly presented, often with specific, Emotional Intelligence focused information.
- Assessments are being used in training programs, coaching relationships, somewhat unfortunately as part of a selection process, and as key components of leadership and personal development programs.
- Emotional Intelligence appears "everywhere", 259 million results on Google.

- Emotional Intelligence, because of the clarity of the terms, is something that can be developed through very specific action-oriented behaviors. The definitions of Emotional Intelligence factors can be specifically described and behaviorally anchored.

Recommendations to Veterans, Coaches...

- **A Powerful First Step:** Take each of the primary Emotional Intelligence factors, Self-Recognition, Social Recognition, Self-Management, and Social Management. Respond to the following question for each:
 - Describe a specific accomplishment from your career (life) where you demonstrated self-awareness, understanding, and personal acceptance (Self-Recognition).
 - Be specific; tell a story. Describe the Challenge, the Action, and the Result.
 - Repeat this for each of the factors.
- **Seize an Opportunity:** Find an assessment of Emotional Intelligence!
 - First, you can (will) increase your understanding of the Emotional Intelligence Factors.
 - Second, you will identify your self-awareness (a factor itself) of how you think you score on these factors.
 - Third, if possible, via a 360° assessment, you can have the opportunity to learn how others (colleagues, family, supervisors, etc.) view your levels of Emotional Intelligence.
 - Fourth, you'll give yourself the opportunity to develop your Emotional Intelligence via self-study, workshops, coaching, or...

The values of a 360° assessment and/or a coach must be addressed. Each acknowledges the classic reality of the Johari Window. An individual may have self-knowledge (again an Emotional Intelligence factor itself) or the level of that perception may be inaccurate (at least as perceived by others). The 360° or coach can reveal the “others” perception, or the “hidden (façade) levels. The result will be a much clearer picture of Emotional Intelligence and a clearer pathway to development actions. In every coaching relationship I’ve had with a 360° Emotional Intelligence assessment, this has been an extremely valuable element.

Military & Veteran Suicide – Cannot Be Ignored

Suicide rates among the military and veterans are a serious problem. Fortunately, it is not for lack of awareness. The Department of Veterans Affairs is just one major organization that works diligently on awareness and prevention. Some key points:

- According to the VA's 2022 National Suicide Report, suicide rates among veterans declined by 9.7% from 2018 to 2020. However, there were still 6,146 veteran suicide deaths in 2020.
- According to a 2016 USA Today report, "Suicide — not combat — is the leading killer of U.S. troops deployed to the Middle East to fight Islamic State militants, according to newly released Pentagon statistics."
- The same report highlighted the complexity: "The reasons suicide ranks as the No. 1 cause of troop deaths are complex and poorly understood, according to experts on military suicide. They likely include mental illnesses that enlistees brought with them to boot camp, post-traumatic stress, multiple combat deployments and heightened anxiety in a military at war for 16 years."
- A November 2022 report from Military.com included: "A recent study found that the rate of suicide among veterans who had experienced a mild traumatic brain injury, also known as concussion, was three times higher than the general population across the study period, from 2002 to 2018. And those with moderate to severe brain injuries were five times more likely to die by suicide."

The question, or perhaps the challenge is clear: Could Emotional Intelligence play a role in the prevention of military and veteran suicides? The question has been posed by researchers:

- Researchers examined multiple examinations of the possible link between Emotional Intelligence and suicidal ideation.
- Emotional Intelligence and suicidal behavior correlated inversely in almost all the studies examined. [Emphasis Added]
- The results appear to indicate that a high level of Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in protecting against suicidal behavior and should thus be integrated into suicide prevention programs.

Conclusion

This information does more than support the observations and action recommendations identified here for career issues.

Emotional Intelligence can be assessed; it can be learned; it can be coached and practiced! **It can become a very important part of supporting our transitioning military and veterans!!**

A Vision

Futurist Joel Barker stated:

*Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action with vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.*

I propose a vision where Emotional Intelligence becomes a significantly more prominent factor in support of transitioning military and veterans.

- **A Personal Step:** I intend to offer special assessment and coaching opportunities to transitioning military and veterans.
- **Promote:** to the many organizations already working to support their efforts in this area to address this issue and, if possible, extend their activities and services.
- **The BHAG:** One or more organizations supports a program that would allow for the assessment and feedback on Emotional Intelligence for transitioning military and veterans. Ideally the assessment would be one of “best” assessments, with a 360° option.

Notes:

It is not possible here to identify all of the organizations that support veterans through job programs, career programs, and other services. My selections here are personal for a variety of reasons.

- 212-Careers.Com This is my leadership/career website and contains a page dedicated to veterans, including a [complimentary collection](#) of articles on veteran’s career issues.
- ACP AdvisorNet A site with multiple services including an on-going forum where transitioning military and veterans can post questions – and a large population of volunteer “coaches” who quickly respond to a wide variety of questions. I’ve published [several articles](#) on this site:
 - [Veterans and Emotional Intelligence](#)
 - [Futuring Skills – A Veteran Advantage](#)
 - [Superman or Wonder Woman Does Not Belong on Your Resume](#)
 - [5 Challenges & Realities that Veteran Job Seekers Face](#)
 - [Team Accomplishments Are Critical](#)
 - [Job Search Techniques: Remember Drills](#)
 - [A Major Resume Error: “MS – Office Skills”](#)
 - [Am I My Resume?](#)

- Military.com Regularly provides webinars, coaching, and other resources for transitioning military and veteran career issues.
- Checkered Flag Foundation Founded by NASCAR's Brad Keselowski's, the Checkered Flag Foundation was founded in 2010 with the mission to honor and assist those who have sacrificed greatly for our country at home and abroad.
- Mission BBQ "America counted on you. So will MISSION BBQ. Heroes like you are welcome here from the moment you walk in our doors. On our walls are the authentic symbols of bravery and courage shared with us by American Heroes. Every day, we salute the USA together, all standing at attention for the National Anthem, at noon."
- The "Challenge – Action – Result" steps mentioned are based on the "C-A-R Mini Story" technique ([C-A-R Mini Story](#))
- As noted in the article, there are scores of assessments for Emotional Intelligence. I've used several for different applications, training, coaching, etc. Right now, I'm using and highly recommend the "EIQ2" and EIQ2-360°.



About the Author

James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR is a career and leadership coach, and a management consultant. He's presented career, leadership, and management workshops to 1000's in multiple industries and locations around the world. He's published 100's of articles on a wide range of topics. His "career" work can be found at www.212-Careers.com and his management/leadership work at www.farcliffs.com. Dr. Schreier proudly served in the United States Army.