



## **South Florida Sun Sentinel**

# **Troops face new battle on return: Finding work**

By Marcia Heroux Pounds, Sun Sentinel

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Zachary Morgan was an Army paratrooper, a prestigious position that commanded respect. When the 24-year-old sergeant came out of the service in 2011 after a tour in Iraq, he had no worries that his specialized training and leadership experience would help him land a good job.

But the only work Morgan could find was as a bus boy at the Blue Martini Lounge in [Boca Raton](#). Frustrated, he considered re-enlisting.

"I thought I was going to get out and put my resume up, and everybody was going to want me," Morgan said. "It turned out not to be as easy as that."

Morgan's story is not unique. As we celebrate Veterans Day today, many vets are facing new challenges. They expect their military experience to catapult them into well-paying, fulfilling jobs. Instead, they struggle to find work or feel underemployed in the jobs they do find. Often, there's a disconnect between employers'

offerings and veterans' expectations for employment.

In South Florida, however, there are resources now available to help veterans to bridge the gap. Angela Yehl, who heads Nova Southeastern University's Center for Veterans Assistance in Davie, said there are more programs now than for veterans of previous wars.

"The community cares and is trying to provide these services," she said. But every individual returning from a military experience handles it differently, she said. For some, it takes longer to adjust.

In the military, the veteran may have managed millions of dollars of equipment or led soldiers into combat. Some expect a comparable civilian job, but are offered only entry- or mid-level positions.

"Everyone comes out and says, 'I want to be a manager,'" said Nancy Vaniman, director of Mission United, a partnership between Broward's United Way and the American Red Cross that already has worked with nearly 1,200 veterans since launching in January.

Mission United and other job counselors help veterans refine their expectations, narrow their job search, identify their skills for civilian work and obtain the additional education and necessary licenses to practice certain professions.

Some veterans are opting to attend college on the G.I. Bill before a job search. With the assistance of Mission United, Morgan, for example, is earning his associate's degree at Broward College, hoping to find a job in logistics.

Schofield Miller, 23, managed \$50 million in assets as a Marine. He returned from service last August after four years of active duty in places including Afghanistan, Africa and Indonesia. He is now pursuing his bachelor's degree at Broward College in the field he

learned in the Marines — supply chain management.

"I liked it, and I was great at it, and I might as well take advantage of my experience in the field," said Miller, who recently attended an **Edge4Vets program** at Florida Atlantic University in Davie, which matches him with an employer-mentor.

Miller said when he first got out, he was trying to figure it out on his own, as any good Marine would do.

"We don't want charity. We want to tough it out," he said. Programs such as **Edge4Vets** and Mission United are "opening my eyes that there are people who care about us and want to see us succeed."

Tom Murphy, director of the **Human Resiliency Institute at Fordham University** who has been coordinating the **Edge4Vets** workshops, said some veterans feel isolated and lost after they leave the service.

"They're coming back upside down in many ways. They've been out of the country, in a military culture that's another world — the regimens they live by are fixed. They have to adjust to a civilian life that's more fluid," he said.

Army veteran Dakota Snow, 28, moved to South Florida in 2009 — in the middle of the recession. He went back to school to become an X-ray technician, but then he couldn't find a job. Snow said he felt discouraged. "I really didn't have a career path," said Snow.

Recently, Snow enrolled in Mission United's job "boot camp." Counselors helped him rework his resume, revising Army job descriptions such as "multisystem transmission specialist" and taking out military acronyms.

"It was like hieroglyphics," he said. With a new resume and better direction, Snow snagged a job within a week as a medical coder at Team Health in Plantation.

Local workforce agencies also have been working to match veterans with jobs. [Palm Beach County](#)'s Workforce Alliance placed 1,350 veterans and eligible spouses in jobs from January through September, while Broward's WorkForce One placed 1,589 veterans and spouses in jobs during the same period.

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*Photo below shows veterans and their mentors working together in an Edge4Vets workshop at FAU on October 23, 2013:*

