KORN FERRY

The Untapped Cyber Force

Why Veterans Are the Key to Closing the Frontline Talent Gap

Thought Leadership

THE CYBERSECURITY SKILLS GAP NO ONE CAN IGNORE

More than a headline, the global cybersecurity workforce shortage is now a serious operational challenge. While conversations often highlight CISOs and senior architects, the real crisis lies elsewhere: not enough defenders on the digital frontline.

In 2024, over 500,000 cybersecurity jobs sat unfilled in the U.S. alone, according to one study. And most weren't executive roles—they were practitioner positions like SOC analysts, threat hunters, incident responders, vulnerability managers, and cloud security engineers. These specialists keep systems safe day to day by monitoring networks, investigating anomalies, and responding to threats. Without them, even the strongest strategy falls apart.

Traditional hiring pipelines can't fill the gap. Veterans can.

VETERANS: A STRATEGIC TALENT SOLUTION

Every year, more than 200,000 service members transition out of the military. Many bring direct experience in cybersecurity, communications security, electronic warfare, intelligence operations, and secure systems management.

Veterans offer:

- Experience with classified systems and secure networks
- Operational security and information protection expertise
- Proven crisis-response skills under pressure
- Training in red team/blue team exercises and vulnerability detection
- Active or renewable security clearances

These aren't theoretical qualifications. They align closely with today's cyber needs. Veterans thrive in high-stakes environments, react fast to threats, and know the value of precision. They already think and act like security pros—because many already are.

WHY EMPLOYERS OVERLOOK VETERAN CYBER TALENT

Despite this strong alignment, veterans remain underutilized in cybersecurity hiring. Three reasons stand out:

1. Skills Translation
Military job titles and descriptions rarely align with civilian ones. An Army "Cyber Network Defender" may be qualified as a "Security Operations Analyst" in the private sector, but applicant tracking systems (ATS) filters and hiring managers may miss that connection.

2. Certification Gaps
Veterans may hold Department of Defense (DoD) certifications but not the commercial equivalents like Security+ or CISSP. As a result, they're frequently screened out by rigid certification requirements.

3. Cultural Differences
Transitioning from military to corporate life can feel like entering a different world, with new communication styles, expectations, and office norms. But with basic onboarding support and mentoring, veterans adapt quickly and often thrive.

WHERE VETERANS EXCEL: HIGH-IMPACT CYBER ROLES

Veterans are especially effective in roles that demand trust, focus, and reliability, such as:

- Security Operations Center (SOC) analysts
- Incident response and digital forensics
- Threat intelligence and vulnerability management
- Offensive and defensive cyber operations
- Governance, risk, and compliance (GRC)

Their background makes them ideal for both internal technical teams and client-facing positions that require clearances.

INDUSTRY MOMENTUM: A GROWING RECOGNITION

More and more organizations in defense, technology, healthcare, finance, and government are hiring veterans for cybersecurity roles. The shift reflects a broader recognition that talent should be evaluated based on capability and impact more than paper credentials.

Businesses that rely on trust, precision, and fast decision-making see that veterans often bring exactly what is needed. And while some challenges remain, the momentum toward hiring veterans in frontline cyber roles is building.

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN HIRE MORE VETERANS

To unlock the potential of this talent pool, employers need to rethink how they recruit, assess, and onboard veterans. Start with these four steps:

- Look past job titles and focus on real-world experience
- Balance certifications with proven skills
- Provide peer mentorships to help veterans adapt and succeed
- Train recruiters and hiring managers to decode military backgrounds

With these thoughtful changes, companies can build stronger, more resilient cyber teams while giving veterans meaningful opportunities to continue serving—this time, in the defense of digital infrastructure.

THE ROI OF VETERAN CYBERSECURITY TALENT

Cybersecurity success depends on people who know how to respond, stay calm under pressure, and protect what matters most. Veterans fit that mold better than almost any group.

They are more than a good option. They are a strategic advantage.

As cyber threats evolve daily and burnout rises, veterans make for a steady, capable, and tested workforce. They've already worked in high-pressure environments. They know how to lead, follow, and adapt. That's exactly what the cybersecurity frontline needs.

Organizations that invest in veteran talent are strengthening their defenses with people who bring real-world experience, discipline, and resilience. In today's threat landscape, that's both smart and essential.

With AI risks and nation-state attacks escalating, the organizations that build resilient, ready-now security teams will be the ones to thrive. Veterans should be part of that equation.

ABOUT KORN FERRY

Korn Ferry is a global consulting firm that powers performance. We unlock the potential in your people and unleash transformation across your business—synchronizing strategy, operations, and talent to accelerate performance, fuel growth, and inspire a legacy of change. That's why the world's most forward-thinking companies across every major industry turn to us—for a shared commitment to lasting impact and the bold ambition to *Be More Than*.

HOW WE HELP

Korn Ferry partners with organizations to unlock the full potential of veteran cybersecurity talent. Our integrated talent solutions help bridge the gap between military experience and civilian opportunity, ensuring that veterans are hired and set up for success. We help clients:

- **Translate military experience into business impact** through proprietary assessment tools and tailored role mapping.
- **Build resilient cyber teams** by identifying veterans with the skills, clearances, and mindset needed for frontline defense.
- **Accelerate onboarding and retention** with targeted development programs, mentorship frameworks, and cultural integration strategies.
- **Strengthen diversity and inclusion** by embedding veteran hiring into broader workforce strategies.
- **Stay ahead of threats** with our deep expertise in cybersecurity talent strategy, workforce planning, and leadership development.

Whether you're scaling a Security Operations Center or building a cyber-ready leadership pipeline, Korn Ferry delivers the insight, tools, and talent to help you close the gap—securely and sustainably.

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