

INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST- 9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

Case Study:

American Corporate Partners



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AMERICAN CORPORATE PARTNERS CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

In September 2008, founder, Mr. Sidney Goodfriend, launched American Corporate Partners (ACP) with the assistance of six original participating institutions. A retired investment banker who accredits his own professional success to constructive mentoring relationships throughout his career, Goodfriend has said that he is deeply appreciative of the work and sacrifices of post-9/11 veterans and launched ACP as a means to help the growing community of American veterans find meaningful careers in the corporate world. Goodfriend distinguishes ACP's work from the work of employment agencies that are focused on just getting "employment" rather than helping veterans to build a career. In the years since its launch, the program has grown to include close to 50 participating institutions and has provided corporate mentorships to about 2,500 post-9/11 veterans.

On Veterans Day 2011, American Corporate Partners expanded to include ACP AdvisorNet, an online business Q&A forum that enables veterans and civilian professionals to interface on topics related to career development. The forum is open to all American veterans and their immediate family members and attracts business leaders from across the country to act as virtual advisors to veterans in transition.

Mission Statement

American Corporate Partners (ACP) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting veterans in their transition from the armed services to the civilian workforce. With the help of business professionals nationwide, ACP offers veterans tools for long-term career development through mentoring, career counseling, and networking opportunities. With the belief that one-on-one relationships enhance an atmosphere of mutual understanding, respect, and support, ACP aims to strengthen the connection between corporate America and veteran communities.

Organizational Structure

American Corporate Partners is overseen by an Advisory Council and Board of Directors, and is supported by staff including: its Chairman and Founder, Mr. Goodfriend, a Vice President, three Managers, a Senior Operations Associate and a number of associates. Overall, the role of the Board of Directors is to provide oversight and instructions for the operations and programs of the organization, but is not involved in fundraising. As Chairman, Goodfriend is responsible for the supervision and direction of the organization. The Vice President is also responsible for the general oversight of American Corporate Partners. The three Managers each have a specific responsibility: one for oversight of the Mentoring Program, one for oversight of the home office and ACP Advisor Net; and one for

managing corporate relationships which fund ACP. The remaining associates are responsible for managing specific mentor-protégé relationships. On average, each associate is responsible for 120 pairs, maintaining contact once or twice per month. In total, there are 22 people on staff.

At each of the companies providing mentors to ACP, the organization provides a point of contact for ACP.

Programming

Mentoring Program

ACP's formal Mentoring Program is a nationwide effort that connects post-9/11 veterans with civilian professionals from ACP's participating institutions, which include a number of Fortune 100 companies as well as select universities. While each protégé/mentor pairing is tailored to the veteran's individual circumstances and goals, mentorships often focus on topics such as resume building, interviewing skills, networking, job market knowledge (i.e. defense, education, finance, insurance, information technology, logistics, management, manufacturing, marketing and retail), and leadership. ACP does not accept mentors not affiliated with one of their partner corporations, as ACP lacks the capacity to screen individuals to ensure that no ulterior motives are present, such as marketing to veterans and their families.

The Mentoring Program requires a yearlong commitment of active engagement by both the mentor and veteran protégé, with the expectation of at least one monthly conversation between the two. In cases of high profile mentors—Rupert Murdoch as a notable example—this means that Murdoch would make sure that the veteran had at least one conversation with people in different positions within his organization. Applications are open to any veteran who has served on active duty since 2001, as well as the spouses of service members who have been wounded or killed in action. ACP's Mentoring Program is intended as a tool for networking and long-term career development, not a job-placement program. Participants are eligible for one mentor relationship; and upon completion of that year, all communication with the organization concludes as well.

Along with one-on-one meetings between mentors and protégés, ACP hosts networking events in each of their four national regions approximately twice per year. These events are typically hosted by one of ACP's partnering companies. They usually begin with a short brief related to networking or career guidance, followed by opportunities for the mentors and protégés present to network.

ACP has developed two program options in order to offer mentorships to veterans across the country:

1. National pairing: ACP's National Program supports remote mentorships between participants who share similar career interests, but do not live within local proximity. ACP asks mentors and protégés to be flexible regarding the location of their mentorship. Participants in long-distance mentorships communicate by phone, e-mail, and/or videoconference. 60% of those mentored meet electronically rather than in person.
2. Local: ACP's Local Programs operate in cities with high densities of participants. Because they aim to connect the veteran with someone whose career objectives and professional experience aligns with theirs, they may not always have an ideal candidate in the veteran's area. If the veteran's location lends itself to a local mentorship, they do their best to pair the person with a

participant nearby.

ACP AdvisorNet

ACP AdvisorNet is an online "Question and Answer Community" that allows a network of volunteer advisors to share their business expertise with military veterans and their immediate family. The forum was launched to help the growing number of returning veterans and active service members achieve their long and short-term career goals; and it encourages veterans to post questions related to employment, career development, and small business. ACP AdvisorNet users can follow Q&A threads on the main forum or message other users to start private conversations related to business and career development.

Veteran Populations Served

American Corporate Partners serves all categories of post-9/11 veterans who apply for the program. Founder and Chair, Mr. Goodfriend, explains further, "We've never turned a veteran down who really wants to be in the program...we would take surviving spouses...we give priority to severely wounded, and so we work with certain nonprofits that focus in this way."

Funding Sources and Strategies

Founder and Chair, Mr. Goodfriend prides himself that "ACP does not fundraise." What this means in practice is that American Corporate Partners has no staff designated to fundraising and makes no public solicitations. The organization began with funds from its CEO and Founder and is currently funded by ongoing relationships with 55 businesses and company partners. Goodfriend explains their unusual way of business by saying, "We have a very strong advisory council and independent board. We don't need money to grow."

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

Before someone may become a mentor, data is collected from them for screening purposes. In order to be a mentor, one must be affiliated with one of ACP's corporate partners and be approved by that company to be a mentor. Then, a staff member from ACP coordinates with a representative at the company to confirm that the applicant is in good standing and the company is comfortable with them mentoring. If, for example, a company anticipated that that person or their group was going to be let go, or if the person was under investigation, then the company would take the person off the list without sharing the reason.

Veterans and mentors are asked to take a questionnaire that is used to create mentor-protégé pairs. The purpose of this survey is to gauge the interests and personalities of each participant so that an effective pair can be created. After the initial questionnaire, protégés are interviewed to gauge their "enthusiasm and responsiveness" as a measure of suitability for the program.

Surveys are also used during the mentoring process, with data collected from both the mentor and the protégé approximately five times per year. Data gathered from protégés include: demographic information, whether they would recommend ACP to a friend, how they used the mentoring process, and whether they would participate again.

Data gathered from mentors include: demographic information, whether they are proud that their

company supports ACP and whether they would participate as a mentor again. Additionally, exit surveys are given to both mentors and protégés. Follow-up surveys are not conducted after protégés leave the program due to the difficulty locating former participants. At each step, all data collection is done by ACP staff members and is not the responsibility of the mentors.

With regard to AdvisorNet, data collected include: the number of sessions, page views and duration of time on a page. This data is collected via Google Analytics.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Analysis of survey data gathered from mentors and protégés is aided by computer systems exclusively built by IBM for ACP, with information from each survey and each conversation with the protégé tracked from the time they apply until their exit interview.

A crucial point of data analysis is the pairing of the applicant with a mentor. Mr. Goodfriend explains as he looks at a screen with one applicant's data summary:

“So we ask [the applicant], by email, ‘How did you hear of us? Were you deployed in surge of OIF or OEF? What else might you have done?’ We ask them about the length of service, and this guy [on the screen] was 17 years, 10 months. So he's a full-time employee already. He's interested in government service. We asked for some personal things, which help us pairing the right personal things. ‘What do you like to do and least like to do?’ So if somebody says, ‘My favorite thing to do is go to my church group’ and somebody else says, ‘My least favorite thing to do is go to religious services,’ we're not likely to pair them up. So we have some sense that two guys liking baseball are going to want to spend more time with each other, for example.”

While the data tracking is done electronically, the staff does the actual processes of analyzing this data and making the match—a subjective process that Goodfriend says is a “very labor-intensive and very costly process.”

Data from the five annual surveys are analyzed and summarized by ACP staff into a letter grade – A, B, C, and D – a process learned from the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program and attributed to their 110 years of success. For ACP, the ultimate criteria for grade distribution is the likelihood that a protégé will become an alumnus (fully complete the one-year relationship), with an A letter grade being roughly a 90-percent likelihood and a B letter grade being in in the 80-100-percent likelihood and so on.

Mr. Goodfriend explained that the grades are determined through triangulation of the survey data from the protégé and the mentor by ACP staff. So, for example, while a protégé may report that all is well, the mentor may report that that they haven't seen each other in months. In this way, the staff gains greater understanding about where things are working and where attention is needed.

The process survey data analysis is done by four teams, each focused on one geographic sector—Northeast, Southeast, Midwest and West. Each team has a team captain, who is accountable to the manager overseeing the mentoring program. The manager is responsible for audits of the process, training individuals, the standardization of services, and notifying the Chairman of any issues and concerns with a particular mentor. In consideration to the data collected, Goodfriend cares as much

about mentor satisfaction as protégé satisfaction. While unhappy protégés matter because they are the ultimate beneficiaries of services, unhappy mentors matter because they may negatively affect the entire pool of mentors from their company. The goal is to attract mentors and keep them satisfied by their participation in the program, so that they return repeatedly over time to mentor multiple veterans.

How Data Are Used for Getting to Impact

After receiving data on protégé and mentor satisfaction, the staff follows up on circumstances where poor grades were given. Goodfriend explains:

"I don't know if you have kids, but if we have got a C we've got a problem, and a D is close to failing. So tomorrow morning, for example, the entire staff is going to drop what they're doing. Tomorrow morning...is D-day, except D-day means something different here. It means that you focus on your D's and you turn them into B's. And then I tell the staff, I want to brag about it because each week they send me a report and we bring it all together. These guys work under Colleen, and I want them to brag how many relationships they have improved. So it only works if there is follow through..."

Follow ups are done via phone by ACP Staff to inquire the root of the problem, whether it is the mentor, the protégé, combination of the two, the match, or just "bad luck" (i.e. timing of schedules, etc.). If a particular protégé/mentor pair continues to get bad grades, ACP would find a more appropriate pairing.

In addition to assisting ACP's understanding and management of mentor/protégé pairings, other information regarding the mentoring process helps ACP gauge what they're doing well so they can calibrate their processes. An evidence-based example is survey data displaying that the fourth most common use of mentors was for help in "translating military experience into civilian terms." This data affirmed that many veterans seem to need a more nuanced approach than MOS translators can provide. For this reason, ACP strives to utilize their mentoring process to provide guidance on how the skills they learned in the military can be used in a civilian career.

In addition to improving their processes, surveys from protégés and mentors are displayed on their website and in their Annual Report, both for accountability to corporate partners and to herald the success of the program as a way of attracting more mentors, protégés and funders.

Data collected in regards to AdvisorNet is used to guide the improvement of the site by illustrating points of success and failure. Key metrics include both the amount of traffic to the site and the length of stay on each page, with the latter being used to judge whether visit to the site was intentional or stumbled upon. Because AdvisorNet is still relatively new, summative data about its performance is being developed.

Formal Evaluation Activities (internal and external)

ACP's financial activities are reported annually by an independent auditor and appear publically, along with performance data in its annual report, on its website.

3. Strategic Themes

Employment and Education

American Corporate Partners specifically addresses the employment of veterans. However, what sets this organization apart from others is its emphasis on helping veterans develop a career and not just get a job. The Mentoring Program provides veterans with the opportunity to interact with a mentor in their field of interest. These mentors work with the veterans to educate about their field, provide assistance with resume and interview skills and much more. Additionally, these mentors provide veterans with an invaluable network to which veterans would not have access to otherwise. Veterans are given an inside look into the corporate world, enabling them to effectively explore their options and passions.

In some instances, veterans discover that in order to achieve their career goals, they need to return to school. Through their mentors, they can identify the types of programs or the right schools to apply to. Mr. Goodfriend says that they see roughly the same percentage of veterans wondering whether they should go back to school as those looking to obtain a job; and that ACP views its work as mentoring to both needs—whichever will help that individual develop a career. Regarding help for those who are interested in going back to school, Goodfriend says, “We have great dialogues with many colleges, community colleges, and universities all around the country, to let them know about our program.”

Independent Sector Involvement

American Corporate Partners is heavily reliant on its involvement with the independent sector – most specifically, the private sector. The organization is funded through its corporate partners and the mentors in these programs are employees of those corporations. The organization connects with the independent sector through the networks of Mr. Goodfriend, the Board of Directors and the Advisory Council.

Companies providing mentors sign on for one year at a time. Goodfriend sees the satisfaction of the individual mentors as the key aspect of why companies renew, and he has a theory about why ACP typically gets high marks from mentors:

“So our satisfaction metrics, from what I hear from companies that do different volunteer groups, they've never seen satisfaction numbers anything like this. I attribute that not really to us. I attribute that to the fact that our endeavor is not really viewed as a charity by the people engaged in it... Because we don't bill it as only emotional and ‘You've got to do this for your country’ and ‘Don't you want to help the poor guy with no limbs?’ If he wants to be in our program and he's enthusiastic, we'll take him in our program.”

This satisfaction among ACP's corporate partners is absolutely critical for not only the financial survival of the organization but also to continue the supply of mentors for ACP's veterans. The foundation of the organization is the partnership between the private sector and transitioning service members to help them navigate their employment journey.

Transition to Civilian Life

American Corporate Partners' support for veterans' transition to civilian life focuses on establishing a career path. Their efforts address what they see as a strategic flaw in the services provided to veterans that too often present “employment” as a binary issue: Does the veteran have a job or does the veteran not have a job? The problem, as they see it, is that while it may be relatively easy to get an unsatisfying, low-paying job; for veterans to truly re-establish themselves as civilians, they need to have a rewarding

career.

With this concept as their framing purpose, ACP does not support programs or services related to other issues, such as mental or physical health, substance abuse, or homelessness. While mentors receive a handbook that includes resources in case of a crisis, ACP is clear that their focus is on careers and that other requests for assistance with other issues will be directed elsewhere.

Social Connectedness

Although American Corporate Partners does not provide programs and services that directly engage veterans and their families with the broader civilian community/society-at-large, ACP is actively bridging the civilian-military divide through its advocacy on behalf of veterans among America's corporate community and by connecting veterans with civilian mentors. ACP works to address stereotypes surrounding PTSD through dialogue with their corporate partners, by fostering successful protégé/mentor arrangements and through op-eds in outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal* or commercials aired on television. The organization's efforts to fight stigma and articulate the value of veterans are frustrated by the media's tendency to focus exclusively on negative stories and a generally short attention span, given the close of combat operations in Afghanistan. In contrast, American Corporate Partners communicates to potential partners that veterans are equipped with professional and life experiences that make them an asset to any work environment. "Only now are we beginning to see companies viewing this as a good thing," said Mr. Goodfriend.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

While American Corporate Partners does not differentiate specific programs based on cohorts within the veteran community (male/female, officer/enlisted, etc.), the specific, tailored nature of the mentor/protégé matching process provides for a uniquely differentiated program, specialized for each veteran's needs. To create that differentiated program based on the individual needs and experiences of the protégés and mentors, ACP in 2007 enlisted the help of Big Brothers/Big Sisters to learn about their internal processes, controls, systems and follow through procedures. These processes, described earlier in the sections on data, allow ACP to carefully match the particular needs, experiences and even personalities of protégés and mentors. Though currently ACP has a waiting list of "a couple hundred," Mr. Goodfriend explains this list is of "people who are waiting for something in particular":

"So they're looking for a media company, and we don't have a media company. So if the veteran says, 'I'm a Marine, and I want to be mentored by a Marine.' You know, not everybody in Morgan Stanley is going to have been a Marine, but we can try... It's not just one-sided. Some of the mentors will say, 'I only want to work with an enlisted guy because that's how I can make a bigger difference. An officer is going to make it on his own. What am I going to do for him?' Some will say, 'I'm African-American; I only want to mentor an African-American.' We had one veteran who was in Iraq in the Army, and he handled kidnapping negotiations for the Army. He only wanted a mentor with kidnap experience."

One way that ACP tries to meet the diverse needs of the veterans is to maintain diversity in the types of corporations that it works with and the range of mentors it has within those companies.

While the needs of veterans vary, one key constituency that ACP has identified is enlisted veterans who

are going back to school. These veterans tend to face the challenge of being older than many of their undergraduate classmates and often have a spouse and children. As far as ACP focusing on careers rather than solely employment, the mentors help these veterans advance their careers through higher education.

A second key constituency, whose particular needs ACP seeks to accommodate, are those veterans challenged with networking due to their location – veterans who may live in a rural area, a small town, or in a metropolitan area that simply doesn't have the type of jobs or industry that the veteran is interested in. To serve veterans under these circumstances, AdvisorNet was developed, that allowed them to access mentors through electronic means despite their geographical location.

Women Veteran Efforts

All veterans are welcome to participate in American Corporate Partners' programs. In 2013, 10% of its protégés were female. While there are no special programs to address particular needs of women, the individualized pairing process for protégés and mentors is well suited for matching women who are seeking female mentors should female veterans or female spouses of deceased service members desire.

Media

American Corporate Partners has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. They also use more traditional media outlets, such as newspapers and television. Mr. Goodfriend and General David Petraeus published an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* ("Enlisting Companies to Engage Veterans," 1/21/14); and are currently, in production for a TV commercial with David Axelrod and Karl Rove, and another with former President Bill Clinton. In addition, Goodfriend noted that he hopes that AdvisorNet would help prevent veterans' issues from falling off the awareness of the general public.

Community Connectedness

American Corporate Partners supplies its mentors with a booklet of resources that includes crisis resources, so that they can refer their protégé if necessary. Otherwise, ACP does not get involved in connecting veterans with the broader network of social services. Mr. Goodfriend cites two reasons for this stance, "A we're not qualified, and B, there's liability associated with trying to help and getting it wrong."

Reintegration with Family

ACP's function with regard to family reintegration is solely related to helping veterans to become established on a meaningful career path, and the associated family stabilization and reintegration benefits are a positive byproduct of ACP's services. However, ACP does not provide specific family-related programming.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

A clear niche that they uniquely fill

American Corporate Partners are clear about their work—they provide mentors to help veterans find careers that are meaningful for the veterans themselves. They are not an employment agency. They are not a social service agency. In the landscape of organizations serving veterans, they provide a needed service and do so on a large scale.

“Social capital” – ACP is well connected

The idea of social capital is that social networks have value. ACP has extensive social networks. ACP seems to be very good at tapping into the value of these networks, both monetarily and in creating trusting relationships with its partners, both its corporate partners that provide the mentors and the military personnel who get out the word to veterans.

Not re-inventing the wheel – tapping into the knowledge of those who have already been successful

With its many successful friends and corporations, ACP is wise to tap into what they know: IBM provides its hardware; GE provides its software; Big Brothers and Big Sisters helped them in any number of ways related to organizational development, and so on. This is just one more way that ACP taps into its formidable social capital.

Formative feedback—Using data to know what tasks are worth investing the labor

American Corporate Partners uses data systems to make things fast and efficient, and then hold a few important points in the process for slow, deliberate work by their staff. One of these points is the pairing of the protégé and mentor. One could imagine this pairing being automated in the way that online dating services do their match, but ACP has chosen to go another way, investing the time of their staff in making this crucial decision. Similarly, once the pairing is made, survey data analysis and interventions, as necessary, require further labor-intensive processes.

Barriers to Impact

A key challenge for American Corporate Partners is expanding its capacity to meet the demands of returning veterans. Mr. Goodfriend recounted a conversation he had with General David Petraeus in which he remembers the General saying, "All right, this is a great program. I want to help, and what you're doing is really cool but you only have 2,000 people. There are 1 million people coming home. What are you going to do for the 998,000 of those?"

A second challenge ACP faces relates to overcoming stereotypes of veterans as incapacitated by PTSD or other mental illnesses. This problem affects ACP's ability to continue to build its capacity. Currently, ACP is attempting to address these concerns through dialogue with its corporate partners and some outreach through media, such as its op-ed pieces and public service television commercials. As ACP continues to receive positive data on mentor satisfaction this will also, presumably, play a larger role in convincing corporate partners to sign on.

The third challenge that ACP faces is in raising awareness of what they do as an organization among associations that serve veterans, in corporations and in institutions of higher education. While ACP's program is about career development, it takes a bit of explaining to help people understand that ACP is different than the myriad of programs available to help veterans find employment. Making matters challenging are rivalries and poor relationships between the non-profits that serve veterans. While ACP may have a positive relationship with one particular organization, that group may not be willing or well situated to get word about ACP to other veterans groups.

Finally, ACP faces an ongoing challenge of reaching veterans, who are flooded with marketing, both by non-profit and for-profit companies upon their return to civilian life.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

One way ACP is answering the challenge to increase the number of veterans it can mentor is through their online mentoring platform, AdvisorNet. One hope is that more people will be willing to mentor if they can do it electronically rather than face-to-face. AdvisorNet stands to increase the capacity of available mentors by allowing greater flexibility in pairing, as pairs no longer need to be limited by geography. Understandably, protégés can at times be particular about with whom they work with as can the mentors. Goodfriend tells us that each may want someone with a particular skill set, military experience, race, or gender, and so on. AdvisorNet will help expand the range of pairings beyond a particular geographical area so that specific requests independent of location, can be accommodated.

Helping to expand the range of use for AdvisorNet are all the advantages of being online. This includes a searchable Question and Answer section, where veterans can ask questions and receive multiple replies from mentors, wherever they are located.

Along with using AdvisorNet to build capacity, ACP continues to use its formidable social network – both within the military and in the corporate world – to reach out to increasing numbers of protégés and mentors. Currently, ACP has no marketing budget; therefore, this kind of outreach happens solely on a person-to-person basis.

Regarding their two other public relations challenges – overcoming stereotypes of veterans and getting the word out about how ACP differs from job placement organizations – the watchword used by Goodfriend is “dialogue.” This person-to-person orientation taps what is arguably ACP’s greatest resource – its powerful network to those both in the armed services and industry. While “dialogue” seems to focus on person-to-person conversations, ACP is also beginning to multiply its reach by connecting with well-known and powerful people to help with written op-ed pieces, television spots and other public service announcements.