

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of Working Nation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

As we wrap up our November focus on Veterans and work, I'm pleased to welcome Michael Haynie to the podcast. Mike is the vice chancellor of Strategic Initiatives and Innovation at Syracuse University, and the founder and executive director of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families based out of the university. Mike, thank you very much for joining me.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

I'm thrilled to be here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

For those who haven't heard of IVMF I know you founded it in 2011, and it comes out of your own work as an educator, but also a Veteran.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

That is correct. I was an Air Force officer. Higher education is a second career for me, if you will. I had the good fortune of while I was serving the Air Force, they sent me off to school a couple times, and assigned me as a faculty member at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. I fell in love with teaching and being around students and the academic environment while at the Air Force Academy so I made my transition to civilian life by becoming a professor here at Syracuse University.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And when you got to the university did that affect how you looked at the transition for Veterans, or where did you start thinking about helping Veterans transition into civilian life?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Well, the irony of what I do now, I guess, is when I made the transition myself, I had no plan of getting involved in Veteran's issues and building programs for Veterans. My PhD is in entrepreneurship and innovation. I came here to be an entrepreneurship professor, but shortly after I arrived, I think I recognized in a way I hadn't before the unique opportunity to leverage the intellectual capacity of higher education to address some pressing issues and concerns facing Veterans and military families. So shortly after I arrived, I started thinking about how I could take what I do now as an entrepreneurship professor and position it to solve issues and challenges and address barriers facing Veterans making the transition to civilian life. And that's really what got me started in this work was the intersection of Veterans and entrepreneurship. How is it that particularly in the case of Veterans with disabilities we can leverage business ownership to create a vocational path for Veterans that may face barriers to traditional employment because of disability. So the first program that we built and created was one around entrepreneurship, particularly for Veterans with service connected disabilities.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So what kind of work do you do with them? Are you helping them take an idea and expand on it? Are you helping them find finance? What work do you do with Veterans?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

All of the above. So that first program is a program that we still run today called the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans. It's really a soup to nuts immersion experience in launching and growing a business. So the program starts with some online content for about a month. It's really level setting, given the variety of past education, as well as entrepreneurial aspirations that our Veterans come to us with, but then after that month of online content, we actually bring them physically to the university. Today, now we have 10 university partners. So there are 10 universities across the country.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

We bring the Veterans to campus for an eight day immersion experience in business ownership that takes them through the steps and stages of launching and growing a sustainable business venture that concludes I like to say before there was Shark Tank, there was our EBV program because the concluding experience throughout those eight days, the Veterans are actually building a fundable plan for the launch of their venture. And then that experience concludes at the end of those eight days with the Veterans presenting that fundable plan to a panel of experienced investors. So it really is designed to take an idea from that idea stage and build around it an operational plan, a financial plan, a marketing plan, a market entry strategy around that idea.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are you finding the Veterans, or are they finding you?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

This program that we're talking about actually even predates the creation of the institute so we ran the first offering of this program was the summer of 2007. Back then this was a very novel offering. So we did have to do some work to actually market this program, if you will, to Veterans and their families. 15 years later, our biggest problem is capacity. Without us having to do much marketing we have more Veterans and military spouses. The programs is also open to military spouses. Our biggest challenge is how we meet the demand. So I think over the course of the last 15 years or so, the success of this program, the reputation of the program really drives our interest in enrollment at this point so we don't have to work very hard to market.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is this a program that's free for people, or is there a cost that's associated?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Everything we do at the IVMF is without any cost whatsoever to Veterans and their families. From the very beginning our economic model, if you will, was one where we were not going to create a financial barrier for a Veteran, or a military family member to participate. So everything we do is funded through external grants, donations, philanthropy, so that we can offer our programs to Veterans and their families without any cost to them whatsoever. In the case of this program, for example, that even includes the cost associated with flying them to the university, putting them up, feeding them while they're here. It is truly a cost-free experience.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What kind of businesses have you seen coming out of the bootcamp? Is there anything that stands out to you that you would say this is something that would never have gotten off the ground if we hadn't been there?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

That's a great question. And I say it's a great question because it gives me an opportunity to highlight why I get so excited about entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship by definition allows you to turn a passion into a business. And you asked the question what have we seen? What kind of businesses have been created? They truly are all over the map and represented by the passions and the experiences of the Veterans that go through our programs. As a former Air Force officer it's sometimes hard for me to say, but some of our, for example, most off the charts couldn't believe this has happened kind of businesses have been created by young enlisted Marines. I share that to only highlight that really is an example of what I was talking about in that entrepreneurship confers the autonomy to turn a passion into a business.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

So, for example, several years ago, we had a young enlisted Marine come through our program that had the simple aspiration to create a landscaping business. And we helped that Marine get that business off the ground, use our networks to connect him to folks that could help him get that business off the ground. And that little landscaping business, six, seven years ago now generates several million dollars a year in revenue, and government contracts, and institutional contracts. The kind of thing that you never would have imagined could be developed, and built into the kind of business that it is today, but it's a testament to the military service experience confers resilience, it confers an innovative mindset in terms of not being constrained by what you don't control, making the best of what you have and building from it. And that's what our Veterans bring to the business ownership experience.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think that goes to the point that there's a lot of talent. There's a lot of skills, but sometimes people don't know how to tap into them themselves, or they need mentors. It sounds like your program is really making that part of this happen.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Yeah, I think that's true. One of the biggest misnomers about military service and that transition both among transitioning service members, but also among employers in this country is that there has to be this linkage between what someone did in the military and what they're "able" to do in civilian life. Truth be told the military service experience is very, very diverse in the context of just because your vocational role in the military is X, is this thing, that doesn't mean that in the civilian world of work, you have to constrain yourself to the civilian equivalent of whatever X was.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

The reality is I served 14 years in the military. I had a very specific vocational role as defined by what the Air Force calls my AFSE, or the Army calls the MOS, the skill's identifier, but across 14 years, I held a wide variety of positions related to logistics, or administration. I think one of the things that we have to encourage employers to think beyond those specific military roles, we have to encourage transitioning

service members Veterans to view the civilian world of work as everything is possible, and not be constrained by simply what you did in the military as a limiting factor to what you can do in the civilian world work.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you think that higher education is prepared in general to help transitioning Veterans find that next step?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

That's a good question as well. I'll provide an answer that maybe is not what you'd expect from someone who is the vice chancellor of a leading American university. I think higher education can do an awful lot more than it's doing now. And I think the challenge here extends beyond Veterans. I think when you look at a traditional academic degree today that degree may be unnecessary, but I would argue insufficient condition to support lifelong employability. The nature of the workforce today is such that given globalization, changing technology, there is this real imperative for lifelong learning, the ability to upskill, to reskill in ways that maybe are not simply about another degree, but it's about a credential. It's about a certification. It's about rescaling within the context of a particular industry, or market.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

This is somewhere where I think higher education has a lot of work to do. I think as an industry, or as a community, we are coming around more so than ever to the need to serve students and learners in nontraditional ways, but I think we've been slow to that realization and there's an awful lot more that needs to be done to support lifelong learning for students who are not the traditional, the 18 to 21-year-old right out of high school, but instead adults, mid career professionals there's a lot of opportunity for us to serve them better than we do today.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You mentioned that IVMF also has other programs beyond the bootcamp what you started with. What are you doing out of that institute?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

The institute today runs a whole portfolio of programs focused on supporting the vocational transition from military to civilian life. One I'll highlight speaks to the point I just made about upskilling and credentialing is a program we run called Onward to Opportunity. Onward to Opportunity is very specifically an upskilling and reskilling program designed to put labor market connected credentials and certifications in the hands of transitioning service members and Veterans as a means to bridge that military experience to the civilian world of work. So this is a program that right now upwards of 50 different learning pathways across multiple industries, all of those learning pathways leading to a civilian credential, or certification.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

So, for example, one of those learning pathways is around program management. And the outcome of that learning pathway is the PMP Certification, Program Management Professional Certification. We have certifications in the communication space, in HR, human resource management, cyber security, but

importantly, all of those learning pathways are informed by our research with the nation's employers about where there is labor market demand. So what this program does is try to create opportunities for our transitioning service members to leverage that labor market demand via a credential that makes them employable where the nation's employers are hiring. And that program is about five years old. Our aspirations when we launched that program were maybe enroll 1,000 Veterans a year. We're enrolling today more than 1,000 Veterans a month in that particular program.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Is that one of the programs that's offered in other places other than Syracuse University? I understand you work with other groups.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Yeah. Onward to Opportunity is a program that, actually, and I have to give Howard and Sheri Schultz and the Schultz Family Foundation a lot of credit here. This is a program that the Schultz Foundation helped us launch. We offer this program both in person at 65 different military installations across the United States, and also online. So you can access it two ways. If you prefer a residential experience in-person learning, we offer this program on military installations to service members who are making the transition, or if your situation is such that you can't enroll in residency model, you can access the entire program online. So today we have service members in places like Iraq and Afghanistan that are waking up in the middle of the night to participate in some of our sessions, or accessing it though entirely online, but then we also have classes happening on military installations in San Diego, in San Antonio, in Jacksonville, Kansas City, all over the United States.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I did not know how vast that was. That's amazing the opportunities and plus the numbers 1,000 a month people enrolling. That's incredible.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Thanks. It is a testament to the team here and really what I would describe as an innovative approach to how we do our work. I think one of the things that's true about working in the Veteran space is that the needs, the challenges, and the opportunities associated with serving Veterans it's a very dynamic environment. What is impactful and meaningful today, two, three years down the road might not be as a function of what the community needs at a given time. And I think Onward to Opportunity is an example of a program that really was created in response to what the Veteran community was telling us they need. The opportunity didn't exist while someone was serving, and then making that transition to secure the kinds of credentials and upskilling that the labor market was telling them was required for them to land the kind of jobs that they were looking for. And that's where we stepped in and filled that void.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And before we go, I would love to talk a little bit about the military families because that's part of your name, and part of your mission. There's very different challenges facing military spouses when it comes to finding opportunities for jobs and careers. How are you addressing that?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Yeah, so that's very true. And I'm glad you asked the question. I think military families by far are the least understood and most underserved segment of this military connected community. When we talk about transition, that term is typically used in the context of a service member making the transition one time from military civilian life. If you think about, for example, the life of a military spouse, military spouses are constantly transitioning because every three years, the military, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, they move a military family to a new assignment. I was in 14 years I moved nine times in 14 years. The spouse of that service member is constantly making a vocational transition because they have to pick up and move every three years. And that's one reason of many that we opened all of the programs that we run at the IVMF not just to service members and Veterans, but to military spouses because they're constantly in transition.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

So that need for vocational supports through those transitions is persistent in the case of a military family. Military spouses particularly 10 years of research highlights, for example, that military spouses in spite of their education level are underemployed compared to their non-military spouse counterparts, and their wages are typically significantly less compared to their non-military spouse counterparts. This is in large part because their resume every three years it's a different job and many of them because they also have to move it takes them longer to complete education because they're having to switch from one college to another college to another. As a community of Veteran serving organizations, and also as a nation, a focus on military families should be something that we're all committed to all the time.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Mike, if somebody wants to find out more about the program where should they look?

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

The easiest place to go is right to our website. If you just Google IVMF, or Institute for Veterans and Military Families, or go to ivmf.syr.edu you can learn about everything we do, and how to get involved.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Mike, thank you very much for joining me on the Work in Progress podcast.

Michael Haynie, IVMF Syracuse executive director:

Thank you so much for having me. It was a great talk.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking to Mike Haynie, vice chancellor of Strategic Initiatives and Innovation at Syracuse University, and the founder and executive director of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families. Thanks for listening.