

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. 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:

May is Military Appreciation Month. WorkingNation has long reported on the employment barriers many veterans face as they transition from a military career to a civilian career. Today, we take a closer look at veteran medics and hospital corpsmen and the difficulties many face finding jobs in the civilian healthcare industry.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The issue is at the heart of a new public awareness campaign from the Call of Duty Endowment, #codemedicalheroes. It's my pleasure to welcome the nonprofit's executive director, Dan Goldenberg, to the podcast. Dan, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me about this.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Thanks so much, Ramona. Glad to be here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Let's start out by laying out what this issue is, that many men and women serve in the military as medics or hospital corpsmen, but when they leave service, they have a hard time connecting with civilian jobs. Explain to me why that is.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

I'll back up a little bit and then answer your question. But a number of months ago early on in the pandemic, we asked some of our grantees. So the Call of Duty Endowment has 12 organizations, 10 in the US, two in the UK that work primarily on placing veterans in high quality jobs. We wanted to know in this time when there's a real difficulty finding public health workers, particularly when governors were asking for armies of more public health workers and pulling folks out of retirement, by the way, populations of folks who are vulnerable, we wanted to know, well, how available was the veteran community with respect to those who were trained as medics or hospital corpsmen.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So, we started checking in with our grantees and amongst the biggest is Hire Heroes USA. They have excellent data, and they told us that since 2015, they were measuring the numbers between 2015 and 2020, 50% of the hospital corpsmen and medics that they served who wanted to work in the healthcare industry as veterans could not get jobs in the healthcare industry. Which was sort of staggering to us, right?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Because as we dug further, we found out that at an absolute minimum, every corpsman and medic receives at least \$100,000 in basic medical training for their first stint of training, before they even specialize within the military. When they leave the service by and large, the civilian medical community doesn't know what to do with that, because medics and corpsmen are more trained up than an EMT,

but not as trained up as say a nurse. So they're really, in many cases, not sure what to do with that training.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

It varies enormously from state to state, states control their own medical certifications. You would think every single graduate of the school down in San Antonio, Texas that trains our medics and corpsmen should at least be able to ride in the back of an ambulance as an EMT. They are certainly qualified, overqualified and trained to do that role, but they have no licensure in every single state that's universally accepted.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What kind of training is it that they're getting to serve in the military? So, maybe kind of explain that and we can go for why they can't transition into the healthcare industry.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Yeah, well, no one questions whether the training, the extensive training received at that basic level, in the Navy they would call it A school, your first school after bootcamp, or in the Army, basic training, provides all the curriculum and then some that an EMT, a civilian EMT would get. The problem is there is no accepted standard nationally and every state sets their own. So in doing so, they're not syncing with the military training standards.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So in some cases, there are some states that will accept it. There are some states that will accept it with an exam, there are some states that say start over, your military training carries no weight. Thank you for your service, but you need to go through our training, our certified training and go through our path. You have to pay for the schooling, you have to pay for the licensure, you have to pay for the testing, which is just absolutely ridiculous.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

When you add onto the fact that, again, we're talking about the most basic level of military medical training, the fact is many of these folks go on to more advanced medical training so they can be paramedics. My Naval academy roommate before he went to the academy was an X-ray technician, was Navy hospital corpsman X-ray technician. So very highly skilled, and yet he would have had to have started over again.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

By the way, he literally, because of his corpsman skills, in our first three months of Naval academy, saved my life. So, I'm someone who can say literally my life was saved because of the training of a hospital corpsman.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What happened? I'd love to hear what happened.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Yeah, so this goes back to 1988 when we matriculated the Naval academy for [inaudible 00:05:13] summer, all of us were given a smallpox vaccine. Unfortunately, some of the batch was bad. Many, many of us ended up getting pneumonia and we didn't know it at the time, and of course we were trying to tough it out and not complain. One night I woke up and I literally couldn't breathe, I couldn't take air into my lungs.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

I went over to his rack where he was sleeping and I was shaking him and putting my hands to my throat, and it must've been 3:00 in the morning, Tim, he's a fireplug, he literally lifted all 150 pounds of me at the time up, carried me over to my rack to my bed, pinned me against the wall on my side until the fluid drained out of my lungs. But he had the presence of mind at 3:00 in the morning, when I couldn't even talk, he knew what was going on and he was able to save my life.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Obviously, he has the medical trainings. That goes back to the idea that there is no standard around the country by which to measure that ability, so that means people, as you said, have to go through this training again. Do you have a solution? Do you have a suggestion? What do you want to see changed?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Yeah, absolutely. So, one of the really interesting things about the current training is that every medic and hospital corpsman now goes through the same school in San Antonio and receives the same training in the state of Texas. Every one of them could and should graduate with a Texas EMT certification that would then be accepted nationally. This way as a bare minimum, every new medic and corpsman that the US military produces has a civilian understood certification that they could take anywhere, and as an absolute baseline could ride in an ambulance.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

By the way, we have lots and lots of need and growing need for people to do that. That doesn't mean they shouldn't be able to do more, but we think as a minimum if states won't accept that certification, they should be able to allow those who've had this experience within the military simply to come and test them. They shouldn't have to take new coursework, they shouldn't have to pay licensure fees, they should simply be able to pass a test that proves their knowledge and be able to have the credential. That's at the most basic level what we'd like to see.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How close are you to achieving that goal?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Well, it's really interesting. We're early on. We're actually conducting a study right now of every state and territory to understand exactly what the barriers are right now. So you can check back with us in a couple months and we'll have this data, but ultimately we want to have very specific policy recommendations for the Department of Defense, and then for the state level licensure organizations.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

It would be great if Congress could get involved in helping solve this problem as well. This is clearly not a partisan issue, this is clearly a matter of us as taxpayers getting return on the investment we've made in these incredible individuals and giving them a chance to succeed in our economy in a place where help is desperately needed. It's kind of a no-brainer, but these state level problems can be very difficult to solve at a national level.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

We've run into no policymaker who's been against this, they're all looking for practical solutions, and I think we have one. One encouraging note is that the Army right now is ensuring that all of its new graduates, all of its new medics in the military, in the Army, they would call them 68 Whiskey, that would be their military occupational specialty, are graduating that initial school with the Texas EMT license. So it's a start, but we'd like to see that accepted everywhere.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

How many people are we talking about here? How many medics and corpsmen?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Yeah, that's actually part of our analysis as well we're trying to figure out, but just as one sample, the number from Hire Heroes USA, just one nonprofit, they had over that time period 1500 medics and corpsmen who approached them for help finding employment. That's just one sample. So the number's much, much larger, and we're talking about the tens of thousands. We're working towards getting a more precise answer to that, but the opportunity's great, the need is great, we just need to get states to get out of the way in making this happen.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

What's so ironic is, early on in the pandemic the USNS Mercy and the USNS Comfort, the Navy's two hospital ships, went to New York and Los Angeles respectively, and the theory being they could relieve the pressure on the hospitals that were overrun. Their ICU's were overrun, their hallways were overrun with patients by treating non-COVID patients.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Those cities put faith in the hospital corpsmen aboard those ships to treat civilians to their standards, yet the second those hospital corpsmen walk off that ship and take off their uniform, they have no standing in the medical community, civilian medical communities of those cities. It's kind of ironic and sadly ironic. So, ultimately we want to make the law catch up with the practicality of the situation.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So all of May, it's the Military Awareness Month and you're using this month to bring awareness to this issue, and you're doing it through some very interesting ways. For those who know the name Call of Duty Endowment, you were co-founded by Bobby Kotick, the CEO of Activision Blizzard. There is a connection to the game, the Call of Duty. Explain that.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Yeah, absolutely. So, the Call of Duty Endowment was founded 11 years ago, co-founded by Bobby Kotick, who's still the chairman of the board, he's still personally involved. I think we'd be hard pressed

to find a Fortune 500 CEO who was more involved with his company's philanthropy. Bobby still personally approves, or is involved in the approval of every single grant we issue and he cares deeply about the topic.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So one of the beautiful things about being associated with, even though we're an independent 501(c)(3) foundation, one of the great things about us being associated with a huge entertainment property like Call of Duty is that we can use that brand, use that name to do good for our veterans.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

In the case of Military Appreciation Month, there's three big things we're doing. First in one of Activision Blizzard games, Warzone, which is a Call of Duty game, any player who revives five other players during the month of May will get an end game calling card. Then for every challenge completed, basically every player who does this, the company will donate a dollar to the endowment up to a million dollars. So, that's the first thing.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

The second thing is we worked with a retired Sergeant First Class combat medic [inaudible 00:11:34], Tim Hobbs Jr, in co-creating an end game pack for Call of Duty that our players can buy with all the proceeds going to support our Call of Duty Endowments veteran employment efforts. We're hoping to raise \$2 million from that. Last year our average cost to place a veteran in the job was \$515, so we're talking about thousands of veterans that we'll be able to place through this funding. So, we're really excited about that. Those are two items.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Obviously while raising the funds is super important for our efforts, so is raising awareness. So, we're going to be doing a lot through our corporate blog, the Activision Games blog, through conversations like this that we're having nationally, through a number of PSA's that we'll be running to really raise awareness about the issue.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

If the feeling it engenders is righteous indignation, it should, because we need these people, these people have so much to offer. We've paid for their training, it's time to let them put it to use. So, we're going to try to emphasize all those themes throughout Military Appreciation Month.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Have you rallied the gaming community before in this way?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

This is more than we've ever done before and much more focused. I will say gamers are incredibly passionate, they're very, very involved with social causes and their response to our cause over the last 11 years has been incredible. Just we've literally raised tens of millions of dollars from gamers, every cent of which we've used to put veterans back in jobs. We're really fortunate that we can do that, because Activision Blizzard covers all of the Call of Duty Endowment's operating costs. So, every cent we raise goes directly to veteran employment grants.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I am not a gamer, I don't know that space very well. Is this a constantly changing game, something that is easy to insert this campaign into?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

One of the really neat things about Warzone ... so there's different ways to play Call of Duty. There's a Call of Duty mobile game, there's the premium Call of Duty that has come out every year for well over a decade, which right now the current iteration is Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War, and then there's Call of Duty: Warzone, which is a free to play game.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

They have literally millions of players on them every single day. The environments, especially Warzone, in which gamers play are constantly being updated and are very dynamic. We're really privileged to have the opportunity to insert some messaging about this really important employment topic within the game. In fact, in Warzone when players are waiting to connect, early this month there will be a messaging in the game as they're waiting about it being Military Appreciation Month.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So the Call of Duty Endowment, you've placed more than 81,000 veterans into high quality jobs, but you have a goal of placing a 100,000 by 2024. What are some of the other issues that you focus on when it comes to veteran employment?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

This month, we're certainly highlighting the work of medics and corpsmen and we're going to continue to push on that until our society makes it right, but we've been watching and working on this issue for a long time. Prior to the pandemic, underemployment, I know it's something WorkingNation talks a lot about as well, has been a real problem for veterans.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

We know for a fact before the pandemic, one in three veterans was underemployed, we know that veterans were 16% more likely than non-veterans to be underemployed. So underemployment is a bad problem, it's getting worse in our society for a lot of factors, globalization, automation, just to name two factors, but it hits vets harder. So underemployment, the way this translates is folks are working beneath their objective skillset and experiences, and we have to fight those underemployment pressures every day.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So, we work with our grantees to ensure that they're not just placing veterans into jobs, but high quality jobs, ones that, for us last year had an average starting salary of above \$60,000, where 94% of the jobs were for full-time roles and 93%, 94% of those hired were still in those jobs six months later. Retention, full-time work, well over living wage salaries, that's what we're focusing on and we will continue to focus on even through the pandemic.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

The good thing is we just got our Q1 numbers back and we see that all those trends are continuing in a positive way. We actually, because the need was great, we had our biggest year ever last year. We funded the placement of more than 15,000 vets into jobs, the most in our history and all the quality metrics stayed high. What we have observed in Q1 is the retention rates have started to drop off a little bit, the six and 12 month retention rates. Which isn't surprising given the midst of a pandemic economy, but we're going to continue to watch that. Quality matters a lot in this space.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

There's other opportunities we think for transitioning service members and veterans to do better in this economy, and we think there's some other public policy issues that could be resolved. One of them is the Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers, the BLS numbers that we all know and we see every month are published, are deeply flawed. So that number, the US unemployment rate is based off one question, which is last week were you paid to work? If you answer yes, you're fully employed.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So if you're a barista for 10 hours a week, fully employed, if you're a guardsman who drilled last week and doesn't have a civilian job, fully employed. If you mowed your neighbor's lawn for 25 bucks, you're fully employed. It's a deeply flawed metric that doesn't actually measure the quality of employment, so we would like to see better federal numbers and we have ideas on how to get there.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

If you combine the VADIR database, which is a database the VA has of all veterans with the Social Security Administration payroll data, we would literally know how our veterans are doing in almost near real-time everywhere in the country. We can compare them to non-vets and build a heat map of the whole country and know where the need for better quality employment is greater. I think everyone would love to have much better quality data to understand where veterans are not doing well and where they are doing well economically. That's just one example, but we have a few more ideas up our sleeve as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I totally agree with you about the data being flawed, and it goes for the civilian population as well, because that one question leaves out so many different variables. We've talked a lot about the set WorkingNation, which you know, because we've known each other for a little bit. What are the biggest barriers to employment right now for veterans? What do you think is keeping them out of these good jobs?

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

It's a multi-factor answer. I guess the way to look at us from a supply and demand standpoint, the supply of job ready vets and a demand of employers willing to hire them. From the supply side, we think that it begins with things like transition with veterans not being well-equipped and certainly transitioning service members to market themselves, to explain the value they have to offer.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

I was just speaking at an event for the 1st Infantry Division the other day, and I said, "Nothing tears me up more when I hear an infantryman say I'm just a door kicker when they're in the job market." There so

much more. Even as a junior enlisted member who's led a fire team, they've still been in charge of four or five other individuals at the age of 18 or 19 in high stress, high consequence of failure rate environments. They've had an incredible training in terms of leadership and working with other cultures and adapting in unfamiliar circumstances and working with minimum resources.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

There's so much that a little coaching can add to these transitioning service members and their ability to show their value. Many of them get frustrated and yet feel responsibility, like they have to have a job, so sometimes they'll act too quickly and get any job, a job they can do, as opposed to a job that they want to do. We all know you're going to have a much better fit and much better success rate amongst folks who are working fields where they have real passion.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So, the second thing is they really need to invest in understanding, not again just what they can do, but what they want to do. Our grantees are amazing at that work, at helping veterans and transitioning service members understand what they really want to do, building a roadmap on how to get there. If they have skills gaps or education gaps or experience gaps, showing them what ways to fill those gaps, and then ultimately helping them position themselves at a resume and an interview to be successful in that environment.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

So a lot of it's confidence, a lot of it is building up the transitioning service member or veteran's confidence so they can really sell themselves. Selling yourself, marketing yourself, patting yourself on the back, if you will, is not a natural act for most veterans, so we kind of have to give them a little tough love and say, "Get over yourself. You have to get out there, you have to pitch, you have to pitch yourself, you have to sell yourself as a product." So, our grantees are wonderful at that.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

On the employer side, and WorkingNation's talked about this before too, you have to look where the opportunity is. The fact is most jobs in the economy are in small and medium-sized businesses, not in huge companies. I think many, many huge companies are actually doing pretty well. There's always room for improvement, but in terms of being receptive to hiring veterans, it's the smaller and medium-sized companies.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

They're not sure where to start, they're not sure where to find the veterans, they don't understand the difference between someone who's a veteran or someone who's a transitioning service member and a guardsman or reservist who's actively drilling who could be called up. So they have this notion of, "Gosh, if I hire this military person, maybe they'll get called up and they'll leave me high and dry." There's all kinds of laws out there to protect both the employer and the member for guardsman reserves.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

I was a reservist myself, I did active duty for nine years and for the next 18, I was a reservist, so I get it. I've also hired people in the civilian sector and I get those concerns too, but it's an overblown concern

that can be dealt with. Of course, it's really getting employers to think more broadly about the value veterans bring.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

I have a good friend, Chris Ford, in the space. He's a retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, and he says all the time, "Companies hire on skills and they fire on values." I think companies can be rather unimaginative when they're looking for a role. They want someone to fit that job description perfectly, and sometimes they can be very unimaginative about people's ability to grow into roles. I would never say hire anyone who isn't qualified, but be a little more open-minded when you're assessing someone's qualification for the role. I think that's a message we're also going to continue to push with employers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, I'm happy to share that message, as well as the message about the veterans medics through this new campaign, code medical heroes from the Call of Duty Endowment. Dan, thank you so much for being with me.

Dan Goldenberg, Call of Duty Endowment executive director:

Thanks so much, Ramona.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Dan Goldenberg, the executive director of the Call of Duty Endowment. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.