

# Onboarding Military Veterans



A Practical Playbook For  
HR And Managers



# 01 Welcome Note



Dear Colleagues,

If you are reading this, chances are you already believe that veterans have a meaningful role to play in the corporate world. For that, I want to begin by saying—**thank you**. Choosing to hire veterans reflects intent, openness, and a willingness to look beyond conventional talent pools.

At ABCEL, we work closely on questions of life transitions and enriched living across stages of life. Supporting Armed Forces veterans as they navigate this shift is an important part of that work.

Veterans bring with them qualities that are hard to teach and even harder to replace—discipline, resilience, accountability, leadership under pressure, and a deep sense of ownership. In many ways, they are exceptionally well prepared for the world of work. And yet, the transition from military service to corporate life is not always straightforward. Early challenges often stem not from capability, but from differences in context, language and ways of working.

This playbook has been created to make the early transition more visible and manageable - for veterans and for their managers and HR teams who support them. It captures everyday moments where language, structure, hierarchy, or culture work differently—and where small, thoughtful actions by HR teams and managers can make a disproportionate difference.

It is not meant to over-simplify the transition, nor to place the burden only on organisations or only on veterans. Instead, it invites a shared understanding and a shared responsibility.

Think of this as a practical companion rather than a rulebook. Use what feels relevant. Adapt it to your organisation's culture. Share it with managers who are onboarding veterans for the first time.

We also see this as an evolving, collective resource. If your organisation has insights or practices that have helped veterans integrate well, we would love to hear from you.

Our hope is simple: that veterans who join your organisation are not just able to adjust, but are truly enabled to contribute, grow, and lead—so that both they and your organisation can realise the full potential of this transition.

With gratitude,  
Nupur Joshi  
Head - ABCEL



**“ A veteran’s transition doesn’t begin on their first day in your office; it begins the day they start imagining life beyond the uniform.”**



This handbook is not just about onboarding. It is about recognising that the journey from **military service to corporate life** is a profound shift, one that requires empathy, structure, and foresight from every manager who welcomes a veteran into their team.

# Understand Your Veteran's Transition Journey



## WHEN TRANSITION STARTS:

- ◇ For most veterans, the transition begins **one year before separation from service**. This is when they start preparing mentally, emotionally, and professionally for civilian life.
- ◇ Unlike typical career changes, veterans leave the forces only at **pre-decided levels of mandatory service experience**. Their transition is not optional—it is a structural milestone.
- ◇ Indian **military officers have three main exit pathways: Short Service Commission (SSC), Premature Release (PMR), and Full Service retirement**. Each represents a different stage and choice in a veteran's career journey.



## 1. Short Service Commission (SSC)

SSC officers typically serve for **10 years**, with the option to extend up to **14 years** depending on service rules.

This is a planned, contractual exit. Officers know from the beginning that their tenure is limited.

Depending on tenure, SSC officers may receive gratuity, pension (if minimum service years are met), and resettlement benefits.

### TRANSITION IMPLICATIONS:

- ◇ SSC officers are usually younger (late 20s to early 30s) when they leave.
- ◇ They often seek second careers in corporate, entrepreneurship, or higher education.
- ◇ Their challenge is translating military skills into civilian terms early in life, while balancing aspirations for long-term stability.



## 2. Premature Release (PMR)

PMR refers to **voluntary retirement before completing the prescribed age or qualifying tenure.**

PMR officers may quit service for following reasons:

- ◇ Personal obligations (family, health, relocation).
- ◇ Professional aspirations outside the military (corporate, entrepreneurship, civil services).

PMR officers may be eligible for pension if minimum service criteria are met, though benefits vary depending on length of service and terms of release.

### **TRANSITION IMPLICATIONS:**

- ◇ Officers leaving under PMR often have **20+ years of service.**
- ◇ They face a mid-career transition, where identity and financial planning are critical.
- ◇ They may struggle with leaving behind a structured system earlier than peers, and need strong onboarding support to adapt to ambiguity.



### 3. Full Service (Superannuation)

These are officers who serve their **entire career until retirement age**, which varies by rank (generally between 54–60 years).

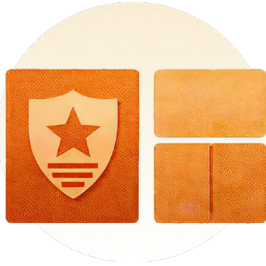
This is the traditional pathway—completing full tenure and retiring with pension and post-retirement benefits.

At superannuation, officers receive full pension, gratuity, and other post-retirement welfare entitlements.

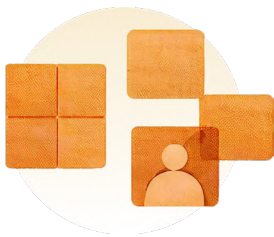
#### TRANSITION IMPLICATIONS:

- ◇ Officers are older (mid-50s to 60s) and may seek advisory, consulting, or leadership roles post-retirement.
- ◇ Their challenge is less about financial stability (since pensions are assured) and more about **identity shift**—moving from a life-long military identity to civilian roles.
- ◇ They may need support in adapting to corporate culture and technology, but bring immense leadership and mentoring experience.early in life, while balancing aspirations for long-term stability.

# 02 What Transition Entails for Veterans



**1. Identity Shift:** Moving from a world defined by rank, uniform, and command to one shaped by collaboration, ambiguity, and self-driven goals.



**2. Cultural Adaptation:** Military life is rooted in clarity and hierarchy; corporate life thrives on flexibility, networking, and informal communication.



**3. Skill Translation:** Veterans must learn to express military skills in civilian-friendly language—turning “mission leadership” into “project management,” or “operational discipline” into “process excellence.”

Not all veterans experience all three equally

# 03 How To Use This Handbook



Having spent a majority of their career in a set-up that values different traits, most veterans experience a period of adjustment when entering corporate environments. These are not shortcomings, but common transition points as they adapt to new ways of working.

This whole handbook has been created to facilitate visualisation on what military veterans experience when they transition into a corporate life, using real-life scenarios contributed by veterans and HR leaders.

There are four sections:

1. **Communication, Language, Corporate Buzzwords**
2. **Structure, Routine, Discipline**
3. **Cultural Norms**
4. **Compensation & Service Privileges**

As you explore the playbook, we encourage you to capture your reflections and insights and share them with us on our email address mentioned towards the end of this playbook. You are also invited to share these thoughts and reflections with us, your perspective will help us make the veterans' onboarding experience richer.

01

# Communication, Language, Corporate Buzzwords

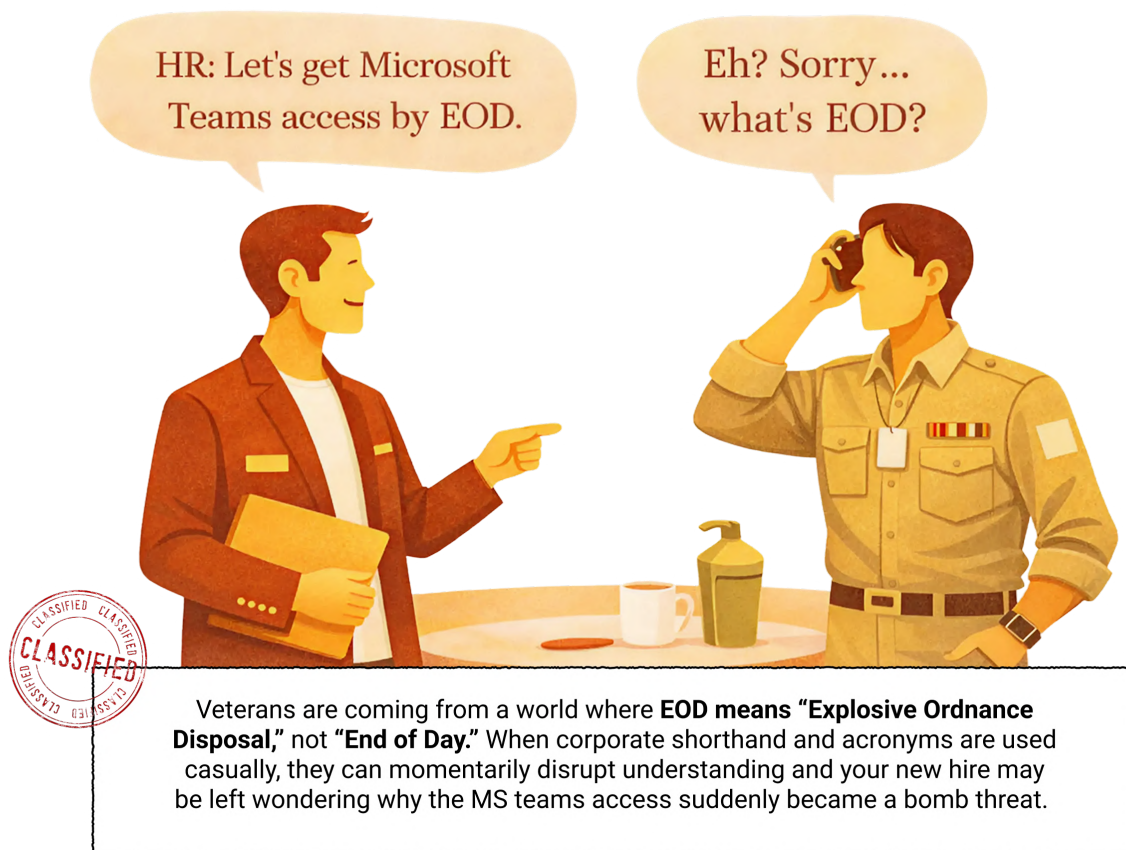
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# MISSION 01

## THE LANGUAGE CONUNDRUM



### What might help?

Keep things simple, spell out abbreviations, avoid assuming shared meaning and create openness to ask without hesitation.



## MISSION 02



### FROM ORDERS TO OPINIONS - LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE DIFFERENTLY



Military life is all about clear, straight-to-the-point orders. **Corporate life**, on the other hand, is often more like a **group chat** — everyone shares, replies, reacts, and yes, communicates both top-down and bottom-up!

#### What might help?

Explain how decisions are usually shaped, provide a little hand-holding in meetings, and share tone feedback privately and early.



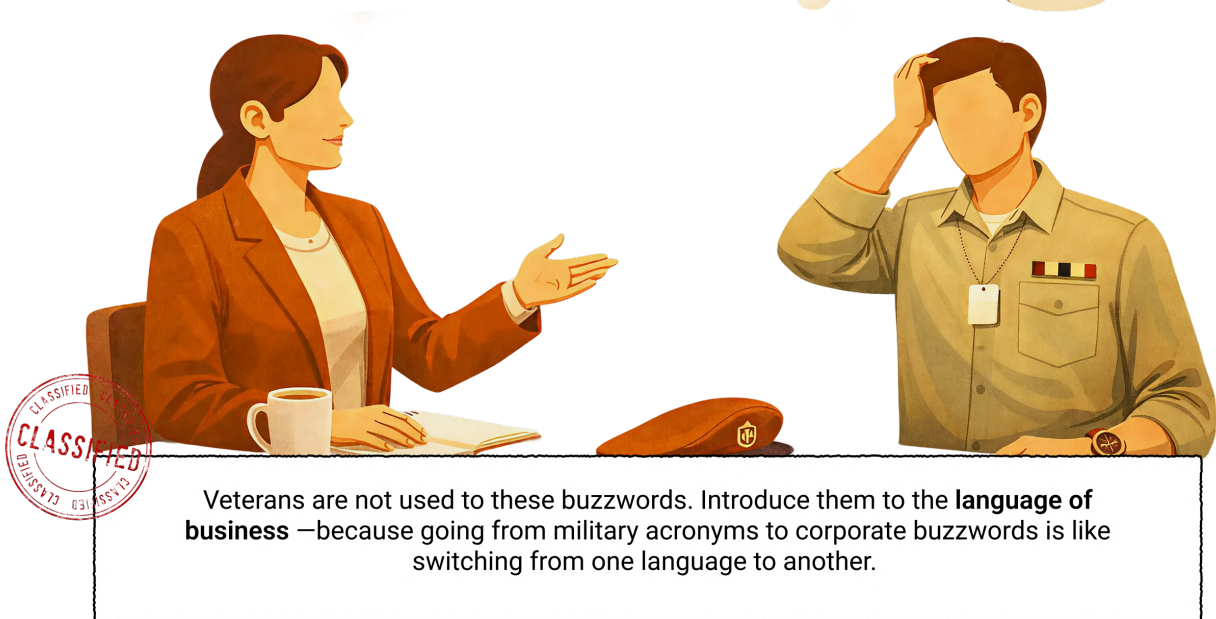
# MISSION 03



## THE FANCY BUSINESS BUZZWORDS

It's year end meeting. People are talking about Topline, Bottomline

What is topline & bottomline?

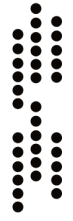


### What might help?

Speak in easy-to-understand terms, pause to explain any new jargon, and make sure veteran feels safe to ask questions anytime.




# MISSION 04



## WORKING BEYOND THE ORGANISATIONAL CHART

A veteran has joined the organisation as a Program Analyst and is assigned to a project at improving the employee onboarding experience across the company.

The project requires collaboration with multiple teams, including HR operations, IT, Learning & Development, and communications.



I don't have experience in HR operations, IT, and others, how do I contribute? What to expect? And what is my role?



Understand that veterans come from a set-up where team roles and responsibilities are very well defined, everyone contributes in accordance with the role definition, without any ambiguity. Hence, a cross-functional team is an unfamiliar territory for most veterans.

### What might help?

Explain what is expected contribution from a cross-functional team member, and help the veteran understand that the roles and responsibilities will evolve as conversations.



## MISSION 05



### FROM CAMOUFLAGE TO COFFEE CHATS: THE VETERAN'S NETWORKING DILEMMA

I will meet people from different teams like sales, marketing etc. How will I strike a relevant conversation? How will I network in this set-up?

There is a round table Sales & marketing conference coming up in the next 10 days.



In the military, networking was easy—everyone had the same haircut, the same schedule, and the same 'hurry up and wait' stories. But in the corporate world, veterans suddenly find themselves surrounded by people from different teams who talk about Q3 projections instead of field rations. They're not antisocial; they just don't know which conversation starter works best when no one else has ever jumped out of a helicopter.

#### What might help?

Ease their transition by giving them a veterans' "starter kit" for networking — a few safe, go-to questions that work in any room, pair them with a friendly colleague initially, and normalise that networking takes time.

# 02

## **Structure, Routine, Discipline**

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# MISSION 01



## FROM COMMANDING SQUADS TO COLLABORATING SQUADS: A VETERAN'S PLOT TWIST

As a leader of **Vendor Relations**, you are required to collaborate with different teams and get the first task done.

How do I ensure all teams (procurement, sales, HR teams) are available? I am not their direct manager too!



Military veterans come from a culture where they get the work done by someone who is either directly or indirectly working under them. Now they are told, 'Get this done.' And they are left bewildered as most of the people involved in task completion are not in their line of control. Working with different sets of stakeholders, cross-functional teams, etc is a whole new battlefield.

### What might help?

Share knowledge about different stakeholders and their working styles.  
Share practical tips on what has worked with you in influencing others without throwing your authority around.



# MISSION 02



## FROM ORDERS TO REMINDERS

Follow up meeting for the task is going to start.

I am the project lead and I have to **give update on this task**. But no one came to me with an update. How does it work here? Do I have to follow up with others on whether they have completed the assigned task?



Military culture runs on command and clarity – an order is given, and it gets done. Corporate culture, however, runs on calendars and gentle reminders. For a veteran, the idea of a “follow-up” can feel confusing.

### What might help?

Introduce veterans to the “art of the follow-up” – explain reminders are not a sign of doubt, just a normal way of keeping tasks on track. Show them simple follow-up templates and timelines, and reassure them that a polite nudge is perfectly acceptable.



## MISSION 03



### AMBIGUITY EVERYWHERE, SOP'S NOWHERE- WELCOME TO THE OFFICE

We have recently integrated a new team and process. There isn't a clear SOP yet. I would like you to help align how things work across functions.

What exactly is the output expected from me? How do I know what is the right approach? Where's the SOP for this?



Military life is all about clarity: tasks, responsibilities, and procedures are mapped out like a battle plan. If something's ambiguous, there's usually a Standard Operating Procedure ready to solve it. When responsibility comes without an SOP, it can feel unclear where authority begins, what's negotiable and what is the 'right way' of operating.

#### What might help?

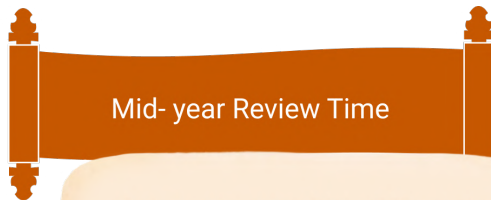
Support the veteran in discretionary decision-making. Clarify what's fixed, what's negotiable. Explain decision boundaries and escalation points. Offer closer guidance in the early phase, then step back gradually.



# MISSION 04



## FROM 'YES SIR' TO 'SET YOUR OWN GOALS?'



Mid-year Review Time

Set your own SMART goals with the timelines (while the veteran is onboarded)

How do i write my own goals?  
How is the review done here?  
I have always seen yearly reviews.



Military veterans come from a world where goals are given to them—straight, clear, and usually shouted loudly. Then they join Corporate and suddenly someone says, “Make sure to document your SMART Goals on the system”. Naturally, the veteran is thinking, “Umm... where’s the person who usually tells me what to do?”

### What might help?

Walk through the first cycle together - As their manager, guide them through their first goal-setting exercise, as you would for a fresher. Explain reviews, metrics, timelines. Normalise iteration as performance goals are not always cast in stone.



# MISSION 05



## FROM FOLLOW ORDERS TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS

The goal-setting activity is completed. Now to accomplish goals, tasks need to be initiated.

Shall I wait for my manager to give me approval to initiate the task? Do I have the freedom to ask other teams to give me deliverables?



Military veterans are used to receiving clear orders from their boss. In the corporate world, the orders seem to be 'understood, not given' – which leads to a new daily mission: Do I wait? Do I decide? Do I follow up? ... who approves the budget?

### What might help?

Be clear on what they can decide, Tell them when it's okay to check in and encourage judgement, not waiting.

# 03

## Cultural Norms

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# MISSION 01



## TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK- THE MEETING DILEMMA

In a team meeting, the veteran is not speaking up and waiting to be invited to speak by someone.

No one has invited me speak, should I speak by myself without permission?



In most corporate meetings, no one invites you to speak and any team member can speak if they want to express their opinion. However, in the military, one speaks in a meeting only when invited to speak. So a veteran may wait for their turn rather than proactively speaking up; And may not be able to contribute to their full potential.

### What might help?

Nudge the veteran gently to contribute, ensuring their voice is included.

## MISSION 02

### BUDGET POSSIBLE- GETTING THE JOB DONE AT ANY COST VS GETTING THE JOB DONE WITHIN OPTIMAL COST

The veteran's manager is guiding him to solve the issue online to save cost, and not travel to an offline location.

How do I solve this problem remotely? I have always travelled on a temporary duty to resolve this issue..



For military veterans, the idea of getting work done within a cost is a whole new adventure—because in the forces, the budget is the budget, and no one's asking them to justify why they needed three extra zip ties. In the corporate world, however, every pencil, post-it, and paperclip seems to have its own financial tracker.

#### What might help?

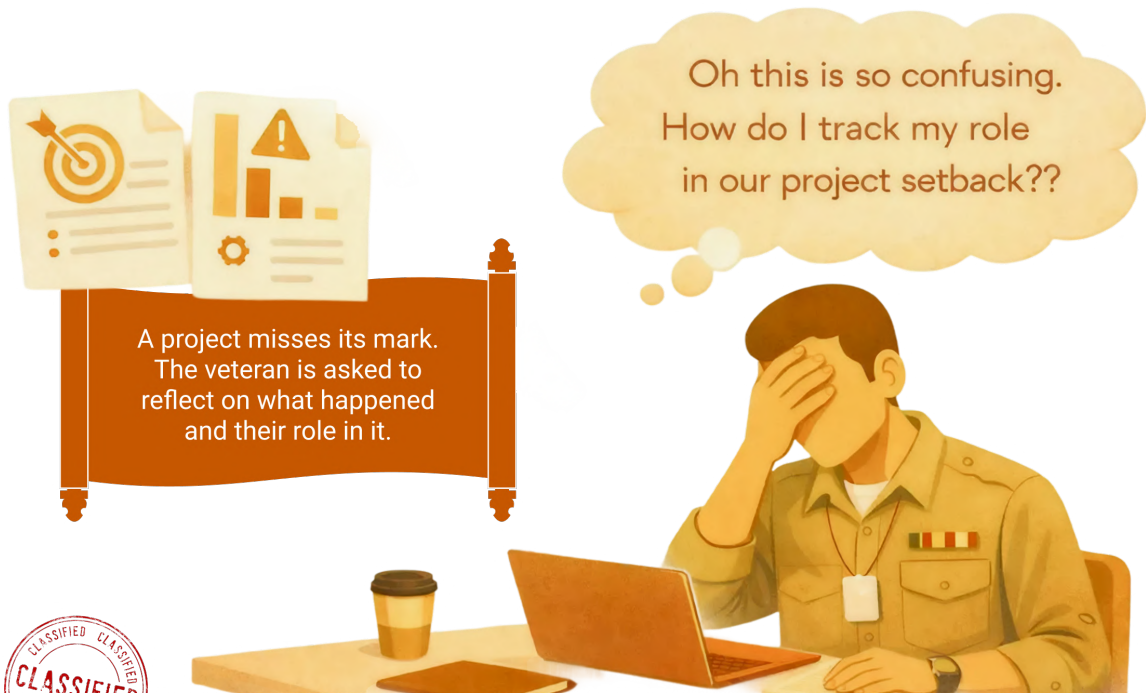
Explain cost-impact trade-offs, align their goals with budgets and model decision rationales for them to learn from.



# MISSION 03



## NAVIGATING SETBACKS: INDIVIDUAL LENS



In the military, failure is usually examined at the level of the mission or plan, with collective accountability. Individual reflection- especially in formal settings is less common. In corporate environments, failure is often analysed in a more granular manner including roles, decisions and outcomes. Individuals are often expected to reflect on their own decisions, actions and learnings as part of growth and performance conversations.

### What might help?

Explain how accountability works in project reviews and that reflection is about learning and not a blame game. Create space to talk about what worked and what didn't and what could be done differently.

# MISSION 04

## DECODING CORPORATE HIERARCHY: NO RANKS , NO MEDALS, JUST DINESH FROM FINANCE



### What might help?

Decode your cultural quirks to the veteran; If your organisation follows a "first-name culture," do clarify this to the new veteran. Reinforce that first names reflect culture and not disrespect. Encourage gradual practice without overt correction or embarrassment.



## MISSION 05



### DECODING CORPORATE HIERARCHY, BEYOND WORKPLACE : NO SIR, NO MA'AM!

It's an after-office party, the colleagues have come with their family.

How do I address my colleague's wife? Do I call her Ma'am...



In the military, formal address is a sign of respect and applies not just to seniors but often to their families as well. In an informal corporate social setting, those cues are missing.

#### What might help?

Explain preferred forms of address in your organisation's social settings.  
Model introductions so the norm is easy to follow.

# 04

## **Compensation & Service Privileges**

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# MISSION 01

## BASE PAY, BONUSES, AND PERKS - WELCOME TO CORPORATE COMPENSATION

The first salary slip arrives. There's basic pay, PF, HRA, Special allowance, Incentive and several new line items and deductions.

This is different from what I had expected as my monthly pay?!!



In the military, an officer's pay and perks are predictable, almost like a mission plan. Corporate compensation is more layered. This shift from certainty to variability can feel unsettling at first.

### What might help?

Walk the veteran through the salary structure (ideally at the time of job offer), Share how bonuses and benefits work and how to avail the same.



## MISSION 02



### FROM FULL SUPPORT TO FIGURE IT OUT YOURSELF!

Hello, I need help.

Sorry, I don't understand the context.



In uniform, for a woman officer, child-caring and home responsibilities come with an entire set-up – housing, support staff, and a helping hand from the unit.

After transition, that structure disappears overnight and the support system is suddenly replaced by one very familiar person: herself. Hence, this transition can be a lot more taxing for women veterans.

#### What might help?

Acknowledge the shift in support, even if solutions are limited. Treat transition challenge conversations with empathy and share practical resources early, where possible.

# Easing the transition – Shared Ownership

Successful onboarding works best when it is a shared responsibility. Small, intentional actions – taken early, can significantly ease the transition and set the foundation for long-term success.



## HR Team

- ◇ Provide early clarity of processes, expectations and workplace culture
- ◇ Anticipate common transition adjustments and prepare stakeholders in advance.
- ◇ Stay connected during the first 90 days, in particular, to listen and course-correct Enable peer support through a buddy/mentor where possible



## Line Manager

- ◇ Take ownership of the new joiner's integration into the team.
- ◇ Make goals, ways of working and decision boundaries explicit
- ◇ Check in regularly, especially in the first few months
- ◇ Sensitise the team and early stakeholders on common transition adjustments for veterans
- ◇ Offer timely, constructive feedback to build confidence and alignment



## Buddy / Mentor

- ◇ Be a safe, informal point of support
- ◇ Help decode everyday norms and ways of working

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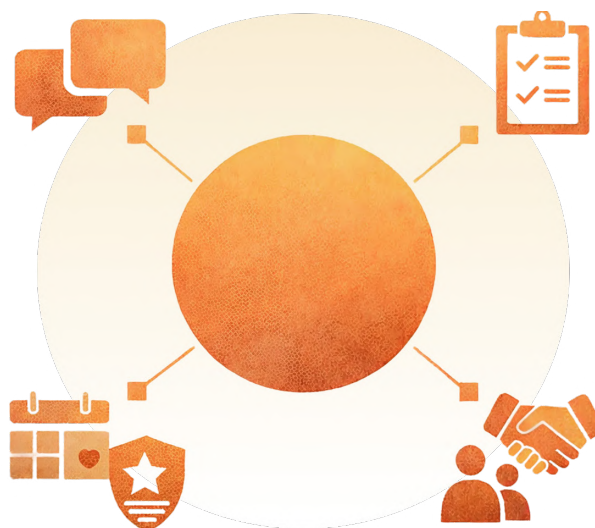
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# 04 Closing



## The Journey Forward Starts with You

Every conversation, every small gesture, and every moment of clarity you offer becomes part of a veteran's integration story.

Your role – HR, Manager or Buddy, directly influences confidence, productivity and retention.

Thank you for helping turn capability into impact.

We invite you to contribute your experiences and suggestions to build this playbook further.

Please email us at: [Info.abcel@adityabirla.com](mailto:Info.abcel@adityabirla.com) with the subject line: [Veterans@Workplace](#)

*When onboarding is approached  
with shared intent, veterans don't  
just adapt – they integrate.*



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