Financial health gives veterans a better life

Home to more than 706,000 veterans who live and work right here, Illinois has the 10th largest state veteran population in the country. While we owe a debt of gratitude for the service of veterans and their families, we also owe it to ourselves to recognize how integral they are — and will be — to our lives every day.

The need for greater financial education among veterans and military families is as great as it's ever been. A 2015 study by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling found that service members carry higher credit card debt and unsecured debt balances than their civilian counterparts. And in a survey from Blue Star Families last year, financial issues rated among the top concerns for service members, veterans and their families. Nearly 90 percent of respondents said that financial readiness training should be more tailored to fit specific family needs.

Statistics aside, many simply struggle navigating the complex system of benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of

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Defense, and figuring out credit, lending, savings and mortgage options can be daunting for those who are facing them for the first time.

Proper financial education can make a massive difference for all of us and for military families in particular. It can help to relieve financial stress — one of the major causes of tension in service members' relationships — and it can improve the lives of entire families. For some, it can even be the difference between homelessness and gainful employment in a fulfilling career.

Here in the Chicagoland community, Bank of America works with military organizations like Bunker Labs, a not-for-profit organization built by military veteran entrepreneurs to empower other military veterans as leaders in innovation by providing educational programming, mentorship, events and thriving local networks. To date, Bunker Labs has generated a total of $17,432,094 in revenue, helping to create 290 jobs and fostering 1,442 connections that helped to lead to success.

In addition, through BetterMoneyHabits.com — a financial education resource that Bank of America developed with education innovator Sal Khan and Khan Academy — we launched new content earlier this year specifically geared toward veterans and military families. The new content offers transitioning service members guidance on issues like navigating the complexities of the GI Bill, a tutorial on how VA home loans work and a primer on buying a car.

It has never been more urgent to ensure our community's veterans have the financial education they need to succeed. More importantly, as citizens and members of the community, we each have a responsibility to use our unique skills and gifts to help unlock the potential of the veterans and military families we encounter every day. We, at Bank of America, are proud to do this through financial literacy.

• *Simon Wlodarski, senior vice president, public policy and state government relations, North Central Region, Bank of America & Major, Illinois Army National Guard and former Marine.*

Choosing a mobile device for your field personnel

There are several key components in managing mobile devices, keeping track of them and maximizing the investment.

Data Packages and internet Access

When you set up these devices, be sure to have a company gmail or icloud account to log into the device for management and access. Avoid using a staff member's personal email account, since you won't have the log on information.

These plans vary by carrier, so consider how the device will be used, which apps, and how much data will be needed. The data will be driven by the type of device and what the user will be doing. If it's a Surface or Tablet, they might have video conferences, stream music, upload videos or other media, and that can add up. Consider the size of their company email. On the Tablet or Surface, be sure you have anti-virus installed.

Does the carrier have a Mobile Hot Spot option? For a short-term project, we had someone use their tablet as the local Wi-Fi connection, and we were surprised by the data usage. It was still less expensive than purchasing a temporary internet plan, but much more than we anticipated. Public Wi-Fi is becoming more common, but not everywhere, and phone signals are unpredictable on many job sites, or even in rooms with a lot of glass (reflects) or concrete (absorbs).

How to Keep Track of All of This

Consider a Mobile Device Management (MDM) tool if the devices are company-owned. By installing

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Consider a Mobile Device Management (MDM) tool if the devices are company-owned. By installing the agent, you can track the GPS location, wipe the data on the phone remotely if it is lost or stolen, reset passwords, and utilize other features that vary by provider.

the agent, you can track the GPS location, wipe the data on the phone remotely if it is lost or stolen, reset passwords, and utilize other features that vary by provider. There is a monthly fee, but it's worth it!

There are some great new tools such as 'Find My iPhone' or 'Android Device Management' which can be installed when you set up the device — they are not automatically enabled.

Specific apps allow access to the phone to make it ring or check its location from a computer or another device.

Purchasing these devices is an investment that usually makes it to the Fixed Asset list. Consider an inventory list with quarterly updates from employees. We recommend assigning this to a specific person, someone with access to what has been purchased and who received which devices.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

This is very common and has its pro's and con's. You won't have inventory to track, and there's no large investment, but you trade control of company

data since you can't access the device, track it, or wipe the data if it is lost, stolen, or the person leaves the company.

Some Great Software for These Devices: Navigation with step-by-step directions such as Google Maps, Apple Maps; local weather (for that job site log); MS Project, Trello, and Slack have apps; website analytic apps include Google Analytics, Google Business Manager which can also tell you how your website stacks up (literally) on a cellphone; new dashboard offering including AD, Accounting System, Exchange, Excel, and MS Power BI to create a dashboard.

There's a new Field Integrated Time (FIT) System for job field time collection!

Where to start? Think through how you expect these devices to be used, then dive into what features or apps they'll need to get that job done. The right setup can save time and headaches later on. Put pieces in place to keep the devices and your company data secure!

• *Catherine Wendt is president of Syscon Inc., a technology solutions business based in Hinsdale.*