

IN THE LAW FIRMS

Hughes Hubbard Offers Internship Program for New Veterans

BY CHRISTINE SIMMONS

FOR EIGHT weeks this fall, two men who each spent four years on active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps worked on the 15th floor of Hughes Hubbard & Reed's downtown Manhattan office, sitting behind desks, working on spreadsheets and analyzing invoices.

No longer in uniform, the former Marines, John Ly and Ephraim Agbenor, learned the basics of corporate accounting. They were taught how to handle invoices and pay bills, accounting reconciliation and the general nuts and bolts of law firm finance. It was their first private sector job out of the military.

"This was a big adjustment for me personally," said Agbenor. "In the military, we are so used to doing things in a certain way," but in an office environment, "people are really allowed to do stuff on their own."

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DAVID HANDSCHUH/NYLJ

VETERANS **Ephraim Agbenor**, left, and **John Ly**, right, are interns at Hughes Hubbard & Reed. They were photographed in their financial district office with firm CFO **Robert McGowan**.

Hughes Hubbard hired Agbenor and Ly as part of the firm's second year running a veterans internship program that was started by Robert McGowan, the firm's chief financial officer and a former Army officer.

McGowan said the firm would like to continue the program and see it spread to other law firms in New York, citing an increasing need to help the large population of veterans

transition out of the military and into the private sector.

While McGowan said some law firms in Boston had similar veteran internship programs, he is not aware of a law firm in New York that specifically targets the veteran population for internships. And two firms that previously had internship spots for veterans in Boston—Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr and Locke Lord—said they don't have them

this year, although they offer pro bono assistance and other support for veterans.

McGowan initiated a veteran internship program at his prior firm, Edwards Wildman Palmer, a legacy firm to present-day Locke Lord, in 2013 in London and 2014 in Boston. When he moved to Hughes Hubbard in 2015, the firm had its first class of three veterans who worked in the marketing, finance or office facilities departments. Although the firm did not have any veteran interns last year, it resumed the program in 2017, hiring Ly and Agbenor to work in its finance department. They were paid \$15 an hour on a part-time internship schedule because they were full-time college students.

Both said they are hoping to use the Hughes Hubbard experience as a stepping stone in their careers to the private sector. Agbenor, 30, a native of Ghana who moved to New York in 2010, spent four years in the Marines, including two years stationed in Japan. He is now studying finance at Pace University. Ly, who grew up in Camden, New Jersey, joined the Marines right after high school and was stationed in Hawaii, at one point traveling to Japan for training. He is now enrolled at Baruch College, majoring in accounting.

McGowan said the internship program is simple enough that any law firm could do it, noting

the interns are paid a flat fee and can offer assistance in any support department. "Any law firm could do this with very little logistical effort because they all have a back office," he said.

McGowan said the goal isn't necessarily to motivate the interns to focus on the legal industry or becoming lawyers. "Our goal is more modest, to give them that jump start into that first career," he said. "Understanding our civilian office environment is very helpful, particularly with young people who have gone straight into the military in a very structured environment."

And the benefits work both ways, he said.

"You get good service from them, and our folks learn something from them," he said. "These young people have lived a lot more life than the average young person by the time they have gotten out of service."

Meanwhile, the veterans learn business basics, including how to pay a bill when an invoice is due and accounting reconciliation. "It's not glamorous," he said. "It's really the nuts and bolts of finance. But it's wonderful for them to be able to put it on their resumes to say they worked at an Am Law 200 firm in the finance department."

Ly, 26, said the experience helped him understand how a company works. In addition, it "helps me

prepare for when I actually get a full-time job," he said.

Ly and Agbenor said such a program at other firms would be useful for veterans overall.

"I strongly believe there are so many people who are seeking opportunities like this," Agbenor said. "I highly recommend that any law firm or corporation or organization really wanting to help veterans [should] take up initiatives like this and help vets transition to the corporate world."

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