

RETAINING OUR VETERANS: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

King County Department of Community and Human Services,
Veterans and Human Services Levy



King County

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OVERVIEW

This guide is designed for employers who hire Veterans and want to keep them. It provides ideas for creating work environments that encourage Veterans to stay and grow with their current employers. Employers who use the guide should find at least one idea for reducing Veteran turnover.

The guide has been field tested with two employer test groups who intend to hire and retain Veterans in their respective organizations.

Veteran is capitalized throughout the guide in honor of their service.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Retaining Our Veterans: A Guide for Employers

In late 2011, as US troops were preparing to leave Iraq, Time Magazine featured a cover story called “An Army Apart.” The focus was on the contrast between the experiences and priorities of our troops stationed around the world, and the totally different lives and priorities of civilians back home. The article’s tag line was “45,000 troops are coming home to a country that doesn’t know them.”

Much has been written about hiring veterans. Not so much has been written about knowing, supporting, retaining, and connecting with them after the hiring. Who are they? What do they know? What do they have to contribute? What do they believe? What do they expect? What do they value? What have they experienced? How might the cultures they bring with them differ from the cultures created by employers here?

Should employers hire Veterans and just hope for the best? If you are, or know an employer looking for a better way, this guide is for you. Here is what you will learn.

Module 1: **From Tourists to Travelers** – How to compare and contrast military and civilian cultures, and apply these differences to the workplace.

Module 2: **Recommended Strategies and Practices** – Examples of successful strategies and practices, and ideas for making any workplace more “Veteran supportive”.

Module 3: **Veteran Resources** – The abundant array of resources available to assist Veterans and individuals who work with them.

Module 4: **Americans with Disabilities Act and Accommodations** – How understanding and using the Americans with Disabilities Act can improve Veterans’ workplace retention and success rates. It also includes strategies to ensure that Veterans in your workplace feel competent, confident, connected, and valued.

Module 1

FROM TOURISTS TO TRAVELERS

Traveler/writer Rick Steves once wrote about the difference between a tourist and a traveler. *“A tourist visits all the big sights, sees spectacles on stage, and returns home unchanged. A traveler engages with the culture and comes home enriched...”* Tourists have experiences. Travelers experience transformations.

All Veterans,
are like some
Veterans, are
like no other
Veteran.

Many Veterans enter the civilian workforce as tourists. Employers will want to help them become travelers, who engage with their new workplace, form new identities, and become enriched by their experiences.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

First, by remembering that no two veterans are exactly alike. While they have all had similar experiences, they served at different times, in different places, with different individuals, in different branches of the service. Many served in combat zones, but most did not. **There is no such thing as a “typical Veteran”** any more than there is a “typical employer”. Neither is there a “right way” to create a workplace that supports and retains Veterans. However, we do know some things about Veterans’ experiences that can be used to increase their chances for success in the civilian workplace.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF THESE THINGS WE KNOW?

We know that anyone who has served in the military performed tasks that helped them feel competent, confident, and connected. The military services make sure that members acquire these 3C’s.

For many Veterans, leaving the service means leaving the 3C’s behind. Helping them regain these feelings as a civilian is one of the most important things an employer can do.

We know that Veterans are coming from an organization that is different from most civilian workplaces. They are leaving a “Warrior Ethos” where the focus is on the unit rather than on individuals, and on outcomes rather than processes. They are accustomed to clear boundaries, objectives and missions. They may never have questioned the reasons for what they do, or thought about their individual strengths, skills, talents, interests and personalities. Analyzing situations from different angles, sharing differing points of view, and thinking about how their actions affect others, are often foreign to them. Simply stated, they may have little experience with the soft, interpersonal skills desired by employers.



Following are the four pillars of the Warrior Ethos, followed by selected items from *The Warrior Ethos: A Definition* (Pressman, 2011), one person's attempt to describe behaviors consistent with the pillars. Although this is not an official definition, it can have an impact on the beliefs Veterans might have when they enter the civilian workplace.

The four pillars:

- 1. I will always place the mission first.**
- 2. I will never accept defeat.**
- 3. I will never quit.**
- 4. I will never leave a fallen comrade.**

Sample items from *A Definition*: Traits a person must possess as part of the Warrior Ethos.

- **A person who understands that their most important job is the one they have right now, not one they may have in the future.**
- **A person who knows that politics and niceties have no place in training or on the battlefield.**
- **A person who hates to lose.**
- **A person who understands that being a warrior is a mental and physical way of life.**
- **A person who enjoys a physical contest of skill, strength, and endurance.**
- **A person who expects subordinates to be cocky and proud, within professional standards and the commander's intent.**
- **A person who knows that unit traditions build pride, cohesion and boost morale.**
- **A person who understands that the military cannot be a reflection of society or a social experiment.**
- **A person who makes what is within their command and control the best it can be.**

Veterans might be accustomed to a right/wrong, we/they, friend/foe view of the world. While serving their country, they needed an enemy to justify their existence. This can affect trust levels with colleagues and relationships with supervisors. A workplace with no conflict may be viewed as frivolous, or soft, or as not to be taken seriously.

Veterans thrived in an organization that became their identity, day and night. They were “military” and everything else became secondary. Their work life, personal life, social life and family life all revolved around the military. They wore a military uniform, lived by a military Code of Conduct, acquired a military jargon, adopted a military schedule, assumed a military posture and so on. Even time was viewed and described in military terms. They were always on duty. There was no such thing as overtime. Imagining themselves functioning in any other world will be difficult for some Veteran employees.

“Veterans are
mission
driven.”

Veterans often enter the civilian workplace feeling ambivalent. On the one hand they need and want a job. On the other hand, they are unsure of their skills, and feel disconnected and out of place. On the one hand, they are happy to be out of the service and home safely. On the other hand they miss their “brothers and sisters” and may feel guilty about leaving them behind. On the one hand, they had traumatic experiences that are still troubling them. On the other hand, they believe that seeking help is a sign of weakness, and that they should be able to work things out on their own.

Veterans are mission-driven. They were continually given missions to carry out and evaluated on their ability to perform them. Without a clear mission in their new workplace, they may not see the purpose in the tasks they are assigned or may have difficulty organizing their time effectively. They may question the value and even the necessity of what they are being asked to do.

Veterans worked in an organization where they knew their place. They memorized a chain of command, from their individual units up to their Commander in Chief, the President of the United States. They knew exactly where they fit into the scheme of things. When they became a civilian they lost that. “I don’t seem to have a place” is a common lament of Veterans who struggle to make it in the civilian world.



Veterans entering the civilian workplace must do more than simply move from one work setting to another. **They must literally change their identities.** Emotions, principles and behaviors that helped them succeed in the military may cause them trouble in the civilian world. Living by principles such as “Never back down,” or “If you don’t know them, assume they are the enemy,” or “Second place is never acceptable,” are examples of this.

Veterans may have had intense, even traumatic experiences they are still trying to work through. This may result in bursts of anger, depression, or the inability to concentrate for long periods of time. Making sure they know up front that they are free to take a walk or perform other types of self-care when necessary, can alleviate a lot of anxiety and uncertainty, which can be troubling for Veterans in this situation.

Veterans have been taught to take their work seriously, especially where the slightest slip up may have life or death consequences. Some Veterans find it difficult to work around individuals who joke or trivialize their work. “Do you realize that people were dying over there, while you were here making jokes, and worrying about unimportant things? What are you doing to make their sacrifices worthwhile?” For Veterans, this can easily translate into, “What am I doing to make their sacrifices worthwhile?” If Veterans can’t justify what they are doing, they may leave.

All of this “differentness” between the military and civilian worlds can result in feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. This can result in a Veteran’s hunkering down to protect him/herself, which increases the isolation.



SO WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO ADDRESS THESE SITUATIONS?

Imagine that you are a Veteran described in the above paragraphs. How would you answer the following questions?

- **What could your new employer do to help you settle in and feel welcome?**
- **What would this new workplace look like?**
- **What would keep you going to that place every day?**
- **What would you look forward to?**
- **What questions would you have? How would you like to have them answered?**
- **How would you like to have your duties explained?**
- **What would make you feel like you have something to contribute to the organization?**
- **How would you like to feel at the end of each work day?**
- **What new relationships would you like to develop?**
- **What words would you want to use to describe this workplace to your friends and family?**

Probably the single greatest thing employers can do is help create a sense of connectedness and belonging for their Veteran employees.

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Employers can ensure that they avoid “assuming and stereotyping” when working with Veteran employees. Veterans have a variety of reasons for behaving as they do.

Employers can ensure that Veterans recognize and internalize the importance of seeking help, such as asking questions about things they don’t understand. It is not enough simply to tell them about this. Information, by itself, rarely changes emotional and value-driven behaviors. Employers will want to make sure that Veterans fully understand the impact on the organization if they do not seek help or choose not to ask questions when something is unclear.

If an organization has more than one Veteran employee, employers can make sure they have the opportunity to connect and provide support to each other. Arranging for them to have breaks at the same time, or even to meet occasionally, can increase the likelihood of their settling in and staying with the organization.

Employers can become familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and make sure Veterans know how they can use the ADA to improve their chances for success in the workplace. Some Veterans may shy away from any transaction with “disabilities” in the title. Employers can make it clear that in their organization, managers (the people in “command”) expect employees to stay healthy so they can accomplish their mission. Let them know up front that “toughing it out” is neither helpful nor a sign of strength in your organization. Remind them that in the military they learned how to use every available resource to accomplish their mission, and that in your organization, seeking help when needed is viewed as a resource.

Employers can help Veteran employees see how the assignments they are given in the civilian workplace are really a “second mission.” Make sure they are consistently reminded of your organization’s mission and purpose, and of the important role they play in helping you achieve it. This helps them see that they are serving something larger than themselves.

Employers can help Veterans begin to change their identities by talking frequently about their *strategic place* in the organization, not just about the work they are doing. Talking with Veterans about their future with the organization and asking them to think about where they would like to be three years or five years from now, can plant the seeds for connectedness and bonding with the organization. (Long-term future planning is not part of the Warrior Ethos.)

Employers can be explicit when giving instructions to Veterans. “We need this done, in this format, with these elements, designed to produce these results.” This makes clear what needs to be done and how the Veteran can make it happen. When the task has been completed, the employer can ask the Veteran to describe what he/she learned from the assignment, and how that can be applied in the future.

Employers can ask Veterans specific questions about their military experiences, and show how their responses correlate with their new jobs in the civilian workforce. **The more Veterans see how their civilian work is similar to what they did in the military, the easier it will be for them to identify with their new setting.** Questions might be as simple as, “How did you decide to join the military?” “What functions did you perform when you were serving?” “What are examples of things you accomplished?” “What were your favorite assignments? What made them so?” “What made you most proud?” Link their answers to their current position in your organization. If they can see how what they are currently doing with you is related to what they did in the military, they are more likely to “take hold” and stay with your organization.

Employers can ask Veteran employees about their preferred work styles. How much direction do they expect or need? How important is feedback from a colleague or supervisor? How comfortable are they figuring things out for themselves? How do they feel about adopting a routine that occurs day after day? How would they feel about having a work day that is broken up into observable tasks where they can see progress regularly?

Employers can make sure Veterans know they were hired for their strengths, skills, talents, experiences, potential, and for what they bring to the organization. They were not hired simply because they were a Veteran who needed help.

Employers can share this guide with individuals throughout the organization who are likely to be working with Veterans.

Research suggests that a major predictor of success in the workplace is self-efficacy, a person's belief in her/his ability to perform a task or manage a situation. **Many Veterans don't believe in their "hearts and souls" that they can make it in the civilian world.** Employers can change this by:

- **Giving them tasks they can perform successfully. Feelings of success raise self-efficacy; feelings of failure lower it.**
- **Letting them know about others in similar situations who have successfully transitioned into the civilian workplace. If possible, let them meet these individuals.**
- **Helping them develop a sense of the future.**
- **Letting them know that everyone in the organization believes in them and in their ability to make it as a civilian.**

Closely related to self-efficacy is resiliency, the ability to overcome obstacles and rebound from setbacks. Employers can increase Veteran's resiliency by:

- **Ensuring that they view the organization as a caring place, truly interested in their well-being and future success.**
- **Having high expectations for them, so they have high expectations for themselves.**
- **Giving them a voice and enabling them to contribute to something beyond themselves.**

Employers can help Veterans begin to change their identities by talking frequently about their strategic place in the organization, not just about the work they are doing.

“...resiliency,
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There is an old story about two brick masons working on a project when a passer-by asked what they were doing. The first replied, a bit annoyed, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m laying bricks.” The second smiled and said softly, “I’m building a cathedral.” **Employers who create “cathedral building” experiences for their Veteran employees are much more likely to retain them, and to help them create successful futures.**

Following are questions employers can use to learn about and engage Veteran employees. This is not an exhaustive list, but includes questions that others have found helpful.

- **What do you think are your greatest strengths, skills and talents?**
- **How did these attributes help you when you served in the military? How do you see them helping you here?**
- **What do you like best about being part of this organization?**
- **What would you think about acquiring new skills in the area of _____?**
- **How are your experiences here different from what you encountered in the military?**
- **If you could change anything about your current situation here, what would it be? How would that be an improvement? What difference would it make?**
- **What would be your response if we asked you to get additional training?**
- **You’ve mentioned some disagreements with other employees. How did you handle this sort of thing when you were in the service? How might you use that experience to improve the situation here?**
- **Where do you feel the most connected with our organization at this time? Where would you like to feel more connected?**
- **You’ve mentioned feeling a bit out of touch with others in the organization. What would it take to change that?**

Other parts of this guide address such topics as best practices, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and an array of resources.



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Module 2

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

OUTCOMES

- 1. Highlight strategies and practices that will maximize the strengths of Veteran employees.**
- 2. Describe strategies and practices that will create a supportive workplace environment.**
- 3. Promote the consideration and development of ideas that will increase Veteran retention.**

Most organizations have a culture, mission, vision, and practices that generate behaviors to keep them viable and successful. Veterans are coming from one such organization into another where the mission, vision and practices are likely to be significantly different. The military culture makes sure that every member assumes a mission-driven identity, twenty-four/seven. Helping Veterans translate this into the civilian workplace is a task faced by many employers.

Employers know that Veterans bring a wide array of qualities and experiences to their respective workplaces, and have created programs to support and acknowledge them. They are designed specifically to maximize the strengths, skills and talents of their Veteran employees, and to help them 1) connect with fellow employees and 2) identify with the mission of the organization.



The following questions can assist employers who want to retain their Veteran employees:

- **How would a Veteran or family member know your organization is Veteran-aware or Veteran-supportive?**
- **What are the visible signs and symbols that demonstrate Veteran awareness and support?**
- **Who in your organization can champion veteran-related initiatives?**
- **What practices can be employed to support and maximize the strengths, skills, talents and potential of your Veteran employees?**
- **What can be done to create and enhance supportive relationships within your organization?**
- **What might cause an employee not to self-identify as a Veteran?**
- **How might your organization address this?**

KING COUNTY EMPLOYER EXAMPLE

An example of a nationwide company (with a presence in King County, WA) that has created a welcoming and supportive environment for its Veteran employees is described below.

A group of Veterans at the corporate office formed a **Veterans Committee**. A Coast Guard Veteran designed a company **Challenge Coin** and the Chief Executive Officer provided funds out of his budget to fund its production. The coins were presented in person to Veteran employees at a formal ceremony held at company headquarters. On another occasion, the company temporarily closed a call center so coins could be presented formally to Veterans employed there.

Challenge Coin

There are varying stories on the origins of the **challenge coin**. One of the most popular traces back to World War I when a lieutenant from a wealthy family had bronze medallions struck with the squadron insignia. A squadron pilot was shot down behind German lines, captured, placed in civilian clothes, and the only item left in his possession was the medallion. He escaped after a bombing, was captured by the French and readied for execution, assumed to be a spy and saboteur. The pilot produced the medallion and when it was verified, his life was spared.

The tradition is for all members to carry the coin. One can be “challenged” by another unit member to produce the coin and if not in possession must buy the challenger a drink. If the coin is produced and slammed down, the challenger must buy.

Coins foster unit affiliation, esprit de corps, honor, gratitude, recognition, and service. This military tradition has been adopted by business and higher education organizations as a bridge between cultures. When given with sincerity and heart, the coin will have invaluable meaning to the recipient.



The company has developed three different Certificates of Appreciation to accompany the presentations of their coins. One accompanies coins presented to Veterans, another is used to acknowledge anyone in the company who demonstrates extraordinary support for Veterans or current members of the military, and a third is for Veteran-friendly civilians outside the organization.

The **Veterans Committee** created a “Battle at Home Training.” These cultural competency trainings have been offered at their headquarters and a proposal is currently underway to offer trainings to hiring managers and supervisors nationwide.

As of November 11th, 2013, Veterans Day is now a paid holiday at this company. Employees are encouraged to use the day to engage in events with their families that honor those who have served our country.

Deployed National Guard and reserve employees receive up to 15 weeks of continued healthcare benefits and all life insurance/survivor benefits remain in place for the duration of the leave. The company also provides full pay for the first two weeks following deployment, and supplemental pay for up to 90 days to cover situations where the military pay is lower than civilian pay.

While the company is committed to hiring the most qualified candidates, it also holds Veteran-specific hiring events, such as the 2013 initiative to recruit Veterans at various locations around the country. The company’s careers website also has a special section for military.

Finally, there is an initiative underway to create a Veterans’ Wall of Honor at the company’s corporate headquarters.

This is just one example of how a company committed to the success of its Veteran employees can initiate deliberate and collaborative strategies and practices that epitomize connection and the creation of a Veteran-friendly and Veteran-supportive environment.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES



The publication, *Veterans in the Workplace: Recruitment and Retention*, summarizes nationwide survey data from 245 businesses and in-depth interviews with six Fortune 500 Companies. Included were businesses in manufacturing, consulting, defense, food services, healthcare, and technology.

Several Veteran-supportive practices are recommended in *What Makes an Organization Veteran-Friendly* (October 2013), a PowerPoint presentation from the *Veterans Employment Toolkit, Veterans in the Workplace Training Series*.

Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families cites recommendations in its publication, *Leading Practices*.

Following is a list of “innovative and promising practices” most often discussed and advocated in these three documents.

1. **Mentorship Programs** – Topping the list was a mentorship program. Some companies established formal mentorship relationships as part of their onboarding process, where newly hired Veterans were paired with Veteran employees more experienced in the civilian work environment. Other companies had more informal programs where new Veteran employees were mentored by managers or by others they met through company networking or affinity groups. In some organizations, senior Veterans mentored Veterans who were in the job seeking or networking process.
2. **Peer Support, Affinity or Networking Groups for Veterans** (Employee Resource Group) Another popular and effective practice is the creation of peer support, affinity or networking groups. One networking group that was cited offered education on the transition experience, and another on professional/career development in the organization. One included a recruitment component and another focused on Veteran community initiatives. Informing Veterans about these groups can occur during orientation, through posters, company emails, hardcopy newsletters or mailings, periodic announcements at meetings, word of mouth and as part of the formal mentoring program.
3. **Programs that Address Veteran Transition, Job Hunt and PTSD Needs** – One company created a “transition/networking/recruitment program” for service members with invisible wounds, including post-traumatic stress disorder. The program identifies potential career opportunities for Veterans, both inside and outside the company. For example, when a Veteran with a known invisible wound is hired, the Human Resources (HR) talent acquisition system automatically triggers contact with the section nurse (the only person in the network provided with this information), who then has a detailed conversation with the Veteran about the disability. The nurse also inquires about VA care and collaborates with the case manager. Nearly 100 companies took interest in this practice, and formed networks to create similar programs.



4. **Network of Corporations** – Several companies described how they meet bi-monthly to share innovative practices that promote Veteran success.
5. **Employee Training Workshops and Courses** – Some companies provide training on military-related issues, readjustment and transition and post-traumatic stress. **One cited company offers a three-day mandatory training to all newly hired employees.** Another offers training on military vs. civilian leadership, similarities and differences between civilian and military culture, professional development in the civilian workplace, networking, and project management. These trainings promote discussion, dialogue, cultural awareness and affiliation among employees.
6. **Workplace Accommodations** – One participant described how his company created a comprehensive approach to workplace accommodations where the changing needs, and physical and mental health of employees are continually being addressed.
7. **Translation of Military Skills** – One company hosts a “Skills and Awareness Committee” and supervisors are educated about military specialties to include the background and responsibilities assumed by a particular rank, military training, etc. The committee chair communicates with the supervisor to better understand the needs of the position and how the skills translate to the private sector. This company is also in the process of creating a skills database to assist supervisors. The Home Depot organization hosts skills’ translators at their website: www.homedepotmilitary.com/skillstranslator.html.
8. **Military Leave** – Participants described formal and informal strategies and policies that address military leave. These include needs of the employee's family, the education of the employee regarding benefits prior to military leave, and the education of the employee's supervisor. **For example, one company’s affinity group specifically focused on supporting family members of a deployed employee, and educated supervisors about leave issues.** They also collaborated with HR to ensure the employee had benefits information. Another HR director described how their company has a clear, well-defined policy when a National Guard or reserve employee is called to active duty. This company continues benefits and makes up the difference between the corporate and military salaries. Military leave training is offered to employees before their last day and a “welcome home” orientation upon their return.

Military Leave

Following are more specific practices that will support a deployed Veteran employee:

1. Create plans or procedures for when employees deploy.
2. Upon their return, have employees meet with their managers or HR to review what has transpired during their absence, e.g., tasks that were delegated to others, procedures that have changed, changes in personnel, etc.
3. Upon their return, determine what training, retraining or accommodations that may need to be implemented. Develop individualized reintegration plans.
4. Discuss how the employees would like information about their deployment shared with others.
5. Keep coworkers updated on deployed employees and remain in contact with family members.
6. Send newsletters, notes, emails, Facebook postings, etc. to the deployed employees.
7. Offer farewell and/or welcome home events.

9. **Veteran Internship Programs – Rather than hire temporary staff from organizations such as Kelly Services, one company attempts to hire Veterans.** It also offers fellowships that bring medical service corps officers into the company for three months. Another example is the Heroes Employment Reintegration Opportunities (HERO) Program, which places Veterans in paid, 30-hour-a-week internships that match their experience and career interests.
10. **Communication Strategies** – Some companies use social media to share information and to promote communication and discussion on Veterans issues. Affinity and networking groups develop list-servs, websites or intranet sites to facilitate collaboration on social activities or blogging sessions. Some employers have a dedicated military section on the organization's website.
11. **Veteran-owned Business Development – One large company created a program to assist smaller Veteran-owned businesses.** Another identified a Veteran-owned business that could be a supplier for their company and assigned an executive with special expertise to meet with and mentor this supplier on a regular basis.
12. **Employer Group Education** – The emphasis here is for businesses to become champions for Veterans and educate employer groups such as Chambers of Commerce, Kiwanis, and Rotary Clubs on Veteran recruitment and retention.
13. **Coaching** – Some employers are asking managers and supervisors to be employee “coaches,” i.e., to actually model and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to perform effectively on the job, and to advance within the organization. Assigning coaches to work specifically with Veterans could be another strategy for retaining and promoting valuable employees.

The strategies and practices mentioned here are examples of employers' efforts to build connections and relationships between newly hired Veterans and coworkers and to maximize the contributions Veterans can make to further the organization's mission. They may not apply to every work environment.

Employers using this guide may also have established equally interesting and effective practices in their organizations. The overarching principle behind all of these strategies is to create personal relationships and manifest sincere support for Veteran employees.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES WORKSHEET 2.1

Following is a checklist of potential strategies and practices that may apply to a work environment. Other strategies can be created once an initiative is employed to create a Veteran supportive culture.

	Strategies and Practices	Yes	No
1	Mentorship Programs		
2	Peer Support, Affinity or Networking Groups		
3	Programs that Address Veteran Transition and Retention		
4	Network of Corporations		
5	Employee Training Workshops and Courses		
6	Culture of Accommodation		
7	Translation of Military Skills		
8	Military Leave Policy		
9	Veteran Internship Program		
10	Communication Strategies and Social Media		
11	Veteran-owned Business Development		
12	Employer Group and Community Education		
13	Veterans Resource Team		
14	Challenge Coin		
15	Recognition of Military/Veteran-related Holidays		

Each company must determine how best to assist Veterans in their professional/career development, to educate employees on military culture, to develop policies that support military leave, and to create a culture of accommodation. The important thing is for employers to know there are many ways of increasing Veterans' success rates in the workplace, other than hiring and "hoping for the best."

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES WORKSHEET 2.2

The following exercise can be implemented prior to or after the introduction to this module, or after highlighting strategies and practices currently being employed by businesses.

Individuals, after considering the following questions, are asked to brainstorm a list of strategies or practices that best fit their organizational environment. This activity can be performed individually or in groups.

1. What practices can be employed that will support and maximize the strengths, skills, talents and potential of your Veteran employees?
2. What are the signs and symbols that would demonstrate a Veteran-friendly work environment?
3. How would a Veteran or family member know your organization is Veteran-aware or Veteran-supportive?
4. What strategies can be employed to create and enhance supportive relationships? What would cause an employee not to self-identify as a Veteran?

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION VETERAN FRIENDLY?

What Makes an Organization Veteran-Friendly? (October, 2013) Veterans Employment Toolkit

1. Does your organization have a strong Veteran recruitment and hiring program?
2. Does your organization have supportive policies and practices in place for members of the National Guard and Reserve?
3. Does your organization support affinity groups for Veterans?
4. Does your organization provide orientation training to new Veteran employees?
5. Does your organization have a mentorship program for new Veteran employees?
6. Does your organization recognize employees for their military service?
7. Does your organization provide training to supervisors on Veterans' issues and available resources?
8. Does your organization offer Employee Assistance Program services provided by professionals trained in Veterans' issues?
9. Does your organization encourage Veteran employees to seek assistance for professional or personal issues?
10. Does your organization give preference to Veteran-owned businesses when vendor support is needed?
11. Does your organization support a military-focused philanthropic effort?

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Module 3

VETERANS RESOURCES

OUTCOMES

- 1. Describe county, state, and federal resources available to Veterans.**
- 2. Highlight applicable services offered by each Veteran-related government agency.**
- 3. Empower the Veteran employee and employer with resource information that can maximize support and success.**

This module is designed to help employers better understand the range of resources provided by King County, WA (KC), the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). Being able to use these resources effectively will enable both employers and their Veteran employees to increase workplace success rates for Veterans. It is possible that employers (and even Veterans themselves) may be unaware of available services and benefits, especially in agencies other than the federal VA. (Contacts and locations for these resources can be found at the end of this module.)

Before highlighting each of these governmental programs it is important to note that “Veteran” may be defined in a variety of ways, which can affect eligibility for specific services and programs. A KC Veterans Program or WDVA representative can answer questions, either from employers, or from Veterans themselves.



1. The **King County Veterans Program** assists eligible Veterans and their families with:

- **emergency financial assistance,**
- **housing assistance,**
- **employment guidance and assistance,**
- **case management,**
- **life stability,**
- **Veterans benefit counseling,**
- **mental health referrals, and**
- **other supportive services.**

Direct services are provided at two main offices in Seattle and Renton and various satellite offices in King County. Veterans in need of services can call the Seattle office at 206-477-8282 or the Renton office at 206-477-7022 to schedule an appointment.

For King County, a “Veteran” is defined as a person who served in any branch of the military, to include the National Guard, Coast Guard and Reserves, or who fulfilled an initial military service obligation for the Guard and Reserve or was called into federal service for at least 181 days, and received either an honorable, medical, general or under honorable conditions discharge. (See page 24)

Whether a Veteran qualifies for services can be found on Department of Defense (DD) form 214. (See page 24)

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/socialservices/veterans/AboutUs/WhoWeServe.aspx>

2. The **Washington Department of Veterans Affairs** “connects Veterans and their family members to the benefits and services they earned through military service.” Their central office is located in Olympia, WA and includes a call center and a Veterans Service Center. A WDVA Service (Call) Center, located in downtown Seattle, provides VA advocacy and claims assistance. They can be reached at (877) 904-VETS (8387). WDVA also provides no cost professional counseling by community-based mental health professionals and financial assistance through the Veterans Innovations Program (Defenders Fund) and Competitive Grant Program.

WDVA also offers cemetery benefits and serves Veterans in three Veterans homes in Orting, Retsil and Spokane, Washington.

http://www.dva.wa.gov/eastern_wa_vet_cemetery.html

http://www.dva.wa.gov/washington_state_veterans_homes.html

3. The **Department of Veterans Affairs** is comprised of three separate organizations: Veterans Health Administration (VHA); Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); and National Cemetery Administration (NCA). Most employees will seek assistance from VHA and VBA.

Within King County, the VHA includes the Puget Sound Health Care System, which includes Seattle VA Hospital, Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) (Bellevue, Federal Way, and Seattle) and Veteran Centers (Seattle and Federal Way). A Veteran enrolled in VA health care can use a CBOC for primary healthcare. A Vet Center provides counseling services to combat Veterans for readjustment, military sexual trauma and bereavement.

The VBA in this area is located in the Jackson Federal Building in Seattle and provides assistance for:

- **Disability Compensation Benefits, Vocational Rehabilitation**
- **Veterans with Limited Income**
- **Education and Training**
- **Home Loans**
- **Dependents and Survivors' Benefits**
- **Burial and Memorial Benefits**
- **Insurance**

The NCA provides burial in a National Cemetery to eligible individuals. Verification of eligibility for burial benefits can be made by contacting the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, 800-535-1117.

4. **Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)**
“educates service members and their civilian employers regarding their rights and responsibilities governed by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA).” ESGR is a no-cost service to employers and Reserve Component Service members. Training is available to employers on-line.

Military Discharges

The DD Form 214 is a certificate of release or discharge from active duty. This documentation verifies a Veteran's complete military history to include the type of discharge. Administrative discharges are given by a senior authority while those punitive in nature are given by a special or general court.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Honorable Discharge – The individual has met admirable and professional standards of performance and conduct while on active duty and is eligible for full Veterans benefits.

General Discharge (Under Honorable Conditions) – A service member's performance has been satisfactory, although not meritorious enough to warrant an honorable discharge (failure to meet fitness or weight standards, progress in training, minor discipline problems). A general discharge means one is eligible for some Veterans benefits, assuming one meets qualifying factors for that benefit.

Other Than Honorable Discharge – A service member's pattern of behavior significantly deviated from conduct expected within the military. This form of discharge is given in lieu of trial by court-martial. OTH recipients do not receive VA healthcare or most benefits provided through the VA.

Uncharacterized – Typically given when a military member is still in an entry-level status (within the first 180 days of service) and has not completed their initial training. One's service is not considered either good or bad.

PUNITIVE

Bad Conduct Discharge – A service member was charged and convicted in either a special or general court and was in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. This discharge is given for crimes such as being absent without leave, disorderly conduct, adultery, driving while under the influence, etc. One is typically not entitled to Veterans benefits and the Veterans Administration will make that determination.

Dismissal (Officer Discharge) – Dismissal is a form of discharge that can only be imposed on officers and is similar in nature to a bad conduct discharge.

Dishonorable Discharge – The worst of any discharge, a dishonorable is administered as a sentence by a general court martial and is often accompanied by a loss of pay grade, imprisonment or similar punishment, and is viewed as a felony conviction in many states. Serious offenses such as murder, rape or desertion of one's duty will cause a court-martial to order a dishonorable discharge. One is not entitled to Veterans benefits.

VETERANS RESOURCES WORKSHEET 3.1

Employers are invited to think about any Veteran-related work situation where they've noted a difference in performance or wondered what services are available to maximize the success of their employee.

1. Employers are provided 10-15 minutes and invited to form triads and share one or two situations each.
2. Once completed, employers are invited to share a scenario with the larger group and these will be debriefed by the facilitator and openly discussed with the audience.

VETERANS RESOURCES WORKSHEET 3.2

The following case studies are to stimulate discussion and understanding of Veteran-related situations and resources.

SCENARIO 1

Debbie was deployed with the Army National Guard for 12 months and has questions about how soon she can return to work and the position she is entitled to upon reemployment.

Answer: *If Debbie meets USERRA's eligibility criteria, then she must be promptly reemployed as soon as is practical and within two weeks of her application of reemployment. She is entitled to reemployment in a job position she would have attained had she not been absent because of military service. Further information can be found at www.ESGR.mil.*

SCENARIO 2

Theo's job performance has been exemplary since he was honorably discharged from the Marine Corp two years ago. He excelled in all aspects of his on-the-job training and probationary period, but recently you've noticed irregularities in his work. You approach him with your concerns, and he tells you he is having difficulty sleeping and concentrating, and doesn't seem to know why. He also mentions thinking about and greatly missing fallen members of his unit in Iraq. When you ask, he indicates a willingness to talk with someone who is not with VA.

Answer: *While Theo is entitled to services from the Department of Veterans Affairs (hospital, CBOC and Vet Center) he may not be aware of the no cost community-based services provided through the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, PTSD Counseling Program. To access services one does not need to be diagnosed or living with PTSD, yet post war adjustment does warrant services. He will need to produce a DD Form 214 and can select a professional counselor from the provider list located at:*

http://www.dva.wa.gov/ptsd_counseling.html

SCENARIO 3

After her return home from Afghanistan, Jasmine immersed herself in her job. She worked long hours, even when encouraged by her supervisor to go home. At times she became frustrated with the process-heavy decision-making (or lack of it) that occurred in team meetings. Recently, her colleagues noticed she was more on edge than usual, after her office was temporarily relocated to a noisy wing in a suite of cubicles where her back faced the entrance. She had a conversation with a colleague at a company sponsored Vet affinity group and was encouraged to seek VA assistance. The company website offered contact information to a variety of county, state, and federal resources. Which would be the best resource for her situation?

Answer: *Jasmine could call King County Veterans Program to meet with a social worker, or seek a community-based WDVA Program Provider. The best option would be to schedule an appointment at the VA hospital with a clinician in the post-deployment health clinic or seek the services of the Vet Center. The latter would create the necessary documentation in case she was eligible for a service-connected disability or a workplace accommodation.*

Further questions for Reflection:

What Veteran-related resources exist in your organization? What examples of Veterans needing assistance have you encountered?

RESOURCES

King County Veterans Program

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/socialservices/veterans.aspx>

Seattle

206-296-7656

Satellite Sites (Various Locations)

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/socialservices/veterans/ContactUs.aspx>

Washington Department of Veterans Affairs

<http://www.dva.wa.gov>

WDVA Service Center – King County 877-904-VETS (8387)

Department of Veterans Affairs (VBA)

1-800-827-1000

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=234> <http://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp>

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

VA Hospital

206-762-1010 / 800-329-8387

<http://www.pugetsound.va.gov/>

Community Based Outpatient Clinics

CBOC Bellevue 425-214-1055

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=5371>

CBOC Federal Way 253-336-4142

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/GUIDE/facility.asp?ID=5368>

CBOC Seattle 206-384-4382

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?id=5594>

Vet Centers

Federal Way

253-838-3090 / 877-927-8387

<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=6091>

Seattle

206-533-2706 / 877-927-8387

<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=474>

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

<http://www.esgr.mil>

Module 4

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) AND ACCOMMODATIONS

OUTCOMES

1. Develop a global understanding of the ADA.
2. Comprehend the process of accommodating Veterans with disabilities.
3. Consider a variety of employment accommodations.

Although many employers are aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), they may not know how it applies to Veterans or be aware of other laws affecting Veterans in the workplace.

While there is a wide range of disabilities Veterans may have acquired in the military, many are non-apparent and may go unnoticed, even to the Veterans themselves.

Employers should know that the ADA protects Veterans with disabilities the same as other employees, independent of any military benefits rating. Veterans can choose whether or not to disclose a disability, have a right to request and receive reasonable accommodation, and a right to an accessible work environment. *Surveys indicate that many, if not most, Veterans are unlikely to report a known disability to an employer.*

A number of studies indicate that both employers and Veterans have misperceptions, incorrect assumptions and large knowledge gaps about Veterans and the ADA. They don't know what is legal, what is required, what is not permitted, or even where to get information.



The ADA was signed into law in 1990, and amended in 2008. Congressional intent for the ADA Amendments Act is to provide “**a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination**” by broadening the scope of protection available under the ADA. For more details about the ADA and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), see resources at the end of this module.

Detailed specifics of the ADAAA can be found on the following websites:

- **EARN: Reference Desk Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
http://askearn.org/refdesk/Disability_Laws/ADA
- **Job Accommodations Network (JAN)** <http://askjan.org>
- **Accommodation and Compliance Series: The ADA Amendments Act of 2008**
- <http://askjan.org/bulletins/adaaa1.htm#purpose>
- **U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**
http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adaaa_info.cfm

ADA HIGHLIGHTS

Employees must be qualified and able to perform the requirements of the job, with or without reasonable accommodations. Being qualified means the employee satisfies the requirements of the position, i.e., has the required knowledge, skills and abilities and is able to perform the **essential functions** or duties and tasks associated with the job.

The question of whether an employer can ask an employee if he/she has a disability usually arises when there are performance concerns. The employer has observed that the employee is not performing the essential tasks or functions of the job at the established standards. **In these situations, an employer cannot ask whether the employee has a disability or require an employee to undergo a medical examination.**

Essential functions are the fundamental job duties an employee must be able to perform on his/her own or with reasonable accommodations. Employers cannot reduce salary and benefits or remove an employee from a position because a disability prevents the employee from performing tasks and duties that are **not essential to the job.**

Employers can ask medical questions or require a medical examination for employees if documentation is needed to support a request for accommodations, or there is reason to believe that a medical condition is preventing the employee from performing essential functions safely and effectively.

If an employer is **aware** of an employee's disability, and suspects that it is causing a performance or conduct problem, the employer can ask the employee whether a reasonable accommodation is needed. If a disability **has not been disclosed**, employers should focus on the sub-level **performance** and engage in a discussion about what can be done to improve it. Employers should address each performance situation individually, following the same protocols and procedures that would be used with any employee. Without adequate information, employers should not assume that sub-level performance is related to an employee's disability, or even that there is a disability.



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REQUESTS AND APPLICATION OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Employers will want to ensure that employee handbooks have written policies and procedures describing how an employee might disclose a disability and/or request accommodations. This information should also describe actions the employer will take to respond to the disclosure or request.

Employers will want to have written standards to assess, evaluate, and monitor employee proficiencies, competencies and performance improvements, with and without reasonable accommodations. This means, at a minimum:

- **A position description of essential functions, as well as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and licenses required to perform the job.**
- **The percentage of time spent on each of the essential functions.**
- **Clear standards for the position, describing what “fully satisfactory” performance means, with measurable outcomes that address quantity, quality, timeliness, cost and safety.**
- **A description of the employee evaluation processes; how proficiencies and competencies are evaluated, including standards, benchmarks, and timelines.**

When evaluating performance, with or without accommodations, effective documentation is essential. The evaluation should **focus on actions and results** and must be accurate, explicit, consistent, and factual. Is the accommodation improving performance? If not, what changes or modifications might need to occur? The goal is to provide alternatives that remove or minimize the barriers created by the disclosed disability. Accommodations should never compromise the standards of the position or the integrity of the organization, and should be evaluated for reasonableness, undue hardship and safety hazards. Accommodations do not replace knowledge, skills or abilities or performance requirements and outcomes.

When accommodations are in place, employers will want to:

- **Evaluate their effectiveness. (Do they make a difference in employee performance?)**
- **Hold weekly feedback and input sessions, decreasing to bi-weekly/monthly as needed.**
- **Provide praise and reinforcement.**
- **Compare and monitor work performance improvements based on existing standards and benchmarks.**
- **Allow time for the employee to integrate the accommodation into his/her work habits.**
- **Build on employee strengths to increase the accommodation's effectiveness in removing barriers created by the disability.**
- **Minimize attention to the disability, when the accommodations are working.**

ACCOMMODATIONS



A Cornell University employer survey found that 41 percent of respondents did not know where to find resources to help them accommodate Veterans with disabilities. The end of this module includes several such resources that employers may want to include in the employee handbook or on a separate employee information sheet. At the very least, information should include the organization's diversity and inclusion policies, access to disability-based information, and resources.

Reasonable accommodations are most successful when the employer and employee have an open discussion about problem areas and needs. In many cases, the employee already has an idea of what will work.

Accommodations can be simple and easy to implement, minimizing workplace barriers at little cost to the employer. According to a joint study conducted by the Job Accommodations Network, the University of Iowa, and the University of West Virginia, employers reported that providing accommodations:

- **Helped retain valuable employees**
- **Improved productivity and morale**
- **Reduced workers' compensation and training costs**
- **Improved company diversity.**

Participants in the study reported that 58 percent of accommodations required no extra costs, with the remainder typically costing about \$500.

Note: Accommodations are not necessarily permanent. If an employee is promoted, or the essential functions required to do the job change, or new technology comes into the picture, then new accommodations need to be considered.

EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Reasonable accommodations come in all types and forms. Following are examples:



1. A Veteran who has PTSD was returning to civilian work. He was assigned to a cubicle in an office setting. Because of the cubicle's placement, the employee had no choice but to have his back to the opening, which caused him to have flashbacks from when he was in combat. The individual was accommodated with a mirror that was attached to his computer monitor so that he could see when coworkers entered his workspace. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network).
2. A veteran lost the use of one hand and arm. She was accommodated when working with computer, electronic tools or other office equipment using computer speech recognition software and alternative input devices (e.g., one-handed keyboards, expanded keyboards, touch-screen monitors, miniature keyboards, alternative mice, and switches) are alternatives to using a standard keyboard. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network).
3. At the urging of his employer, a Veteran decided to return to college to pursue a degree in digital fabrication. After being in the program for two quarters, he told his supervisor about the difficulties balancing college and work, while also dealing with PTSD. He shared the challenges he faced to keep from having a meltdown, especially when studying for mid-term and final exams. He explained the difficulties in trying to "get better" while at the same time experiencing a lot of stress. He said the biggest challenge in the college program was learning to cope with what is normal stress for most students. He also shared that therapy sometimes interfered with work or school and vice versa. He said it was hard to participate fully in the therapy because he knew if he had a work or school deadline he would not be able to handle it all. His supervisor listened carefully and arranged an alternative work schedule to allow for therapy appointments and additional study time during his most stressful periods.
4. In an office setting, a veteran had difficulty manipulating blinds, accessing a telephone, using a staple remover, and cutting materials. Remote-controlled blinds were installed and voice activated databases/phone systems were made available. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)



5. A Veteran with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) had job functions that required the use of a computer. Because of his injury, he was unable to read past the midline when reading from left to right. Accommodations included changing the margin settings of his word processing program from 80 to 40 to limit right side reading, purchasing software that split the computer screen left to right and blacked out the right side, redesigning his workstation to place equipment on the left, and providing task lighting. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
6. A Veteran who has been on the job for five years with a health care company needs to enroll in required company computer classes to learn the new systems being adopted. While on active duty, she sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which affects learning and processing. She also has high anxiety because she knows she performs slowly when learning new things and is concerned that her co-workers will notice. After speaking with her supervisor and the instructor of the computer classes, she was approved to take each of the classes twice, if needed, to allow a slower learning pace, and was assigned a study partner to assist her with recall and application.
7. A Veteran who was a paraplegic was a medical transcriptionist. Her employer modified the transcription machine with hand control (instead of foot control) so the transcriptionist could continue working. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
8. A Veteran with an anxiety disorder is a server in a high-end, prominent restaurant. She does well in all her essential functions, but constantly talks to her co-workers about personal issues to the point that other employees have complained to management. A manager talks with her and explains that her conduct is interfering with work and making coworkers uncomfortable. The server shares she is a client of a mental health agency and offers to talk with her service coordinator about getting a job coach. The job coach teaches the employee how to talk with coworkers about impersonal topics (like the weather) and how to focus conversations on work tasks she and coworkers are performing. The job coach then helps the employee apply the new skills directly on the job and is able to fade out direct involvement after a couple of months. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
9. A veteran with paraplegia who became a prep cook was hired to work in a large kitchen with standup workstations. The employer purchased a standup wheelchair so the cook could work at a standing height. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)



10. A Veteran with PTSD who was employed as a computer programmer had difficulty communicating with a supervisor. Due to a previous incident, the employee's stress reaction was triggered by meetings with the supervisor. Instead of reporting to the supervisor for a weekly meeting on progress, the supervisor now pulls a report completed by the employee that shows progress on certain projects. A call-in policy where the employee was required to speak to her supervisor to report an absence was also modified. Now the employee calls an extension that was set up for the purpose of reporting absences. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
11. A veteran with quadriplegia was studying to be a digital fabrication drafting specialist. Because of the limited use of his upper extremities, the program provided speech-activated software. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
12. A retired Army medic, who is now a nurse, had difficulty managing stress in the workplace due to her PTSD. Her stress intolerance was intensified when she heard the emergency medical helicopter arrive and depart from the hospital where she works. The nurse was reassigned to a vacant position on a unit that is farthest from the helipad. Because she could no longer hear the helicopter, she was able to effectively manage her job stress. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
13. A sales representative with PTSD was reprimanded for arriving to work late because she had difficulty traveling during peak traffic times. She recently returned from National Guard service. She was accommodated by changing her start time to an hour later so she could avoid peak traffic times, and she was allowed to work from home two days a week. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
14. A Veteran with bipolar disorder and PTSD had issues with his medication and needed time off from work, approximately half a day, in order to take care of his medical appointments. The employee had been on the job for seven months and had used his accrued time. He was accommodated with unpaid, intermittent leave under the ADA. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)
15. A Veteran with PTSD had difficulty sleeping because of nightmares and focusing while having to multitask. He also experienced mood swings and lost his temper several times at work. He had not been disciplined for the outbursts, but decided it was time to disclose his disability and ask for accommodations. Because the optimal time for disclosing a disability and asking for an accommodation is before problems at work become too far advanced, a consultant at JAN provided technical assistance on how to disclose a disability and write an accommodation request letter. (Used with permission from the Job Accommodation Network)

16. A Veteran did not know he had depression and PTSD until he was in his late 30s. He stated that looking back on his college years (mid 20s) he could now recognize the symptoms and behaviors, but could not do so at the time. He described having a hard time getting along with people and never feeling good enough or smart enough. He had trouble concentrating and focusing, and his irregular sleeping patterns made it difficult for him to attend classes regularly and complete assignments on time. Now, faced with a new job requiring completion of an intensive six-week course, he fears that he will relive what he experienced in college.

After talking with his supervisor and the course instructor, several accommodations were put in place: allowing him to use a smart pen or electronic recording device for note taking; receiving course outlines early; study guides and other instructor-produced materials for additional review and preparation; and a private room along with extra time to take the required competency tests.

17. A Veteran working in a busy real estate company encountered high levels of stress and anxiety when startled by loud noises (windows/ doors slamming, cars backfiring, etc.) or people she did not see or hear approaching. Referred to as startle response, the condition was alleviated when her desk and computer monitor were repositioned so she could see people coming toward her, and she was provided with sound suppression ear buds.

TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS

There are now many electronic tools that can be used to provide accommodations. Following are examples:

Best estimates are that only eleven to twenty percent of Middle East Veterans show any signs of PTSD and only fourteen to twenty-four percent have experienced a traumatic brain injury.

- **Computers**
- **Tablets with touch screens**
- **Larger monitors (two or three)**
- **Screen reading software or e-readers**
- **Voice-to-text software**
- **Reading pens**
- **Smart pens**
- **Calculators (talking and non-talking)**
- **Calendar minders/schedulers**
- **Task-list software with pop-up reminders**
- **Smart phones**
- **Mind mapping organizational software**
- **Electronic graphic organizers (software)**
- **Photocopiers/scanners**
- **Various apps and widgets**
- **Social networking applications**

There are also low-tech tools and accommodations that can be explored.

- **Colored paper**
- **Colored overlays (colored film put over text)**
- **Journals and specialized notebooks**
- **Colored sharpies**
- **Laminated checklists**
- **Organized work areas**
- **Sample displays or models**
- **Calculators (talking and non- talking)**
- **Sticky notes (various colors)**
- **Quiet spaces**
- **Wall calendars**
- **Consistent labeling (paper/email and e-files)**
- **Consistent color-coding**
- **Pictures, symbols, diagrams, graphs**
- **Templates**
- **Social networking applications**

SUMMARY

Employers cannot directly ask employees if they have a disability. However, they can have discussions about poor performance, and what can be done to improve it.

Once the employee has disclosed a disability, the employer has a responsibility to learn how this affects work performance and what accommodations can be provided to address it. If non-work issues related to the disability arise, employers will want to have a procedure for referring employees to the appropriate resources. If “those other things” are not addressed, the workplace accommodations may lose some of their effectiveness.

A final note about diversity and the inclusion of Veterans with non- apparent, mental health disabilities. In many organizations, there is a stigma associated with any type of mental health issue.

- **Stigma prevents employees from seeking and getting treatment and accommodations.**
- **Stigma and untreated disabilities can easily result in poor work performance.**
- **Stigma comes both from the public’s reaction to mental health disabilities and from the Veteran’s reluctance to appear “weak” and unable to handle things. “Needing help” is a stigma for many Veterans.**
- **The more intangible or hidden the disability, the more society believes the individual should be able to control it, and the greater the negative impact of being unable to do so.**

Here are four simple ways to combat stigma in the workplace:

- **Avoid labeling employees with a condition or disability.**
- **Avoid stereotypes. (“S/he has this condition which makes him/her this way.”)**
- **Avoid any “we/they” or “us/them” thinking. Inclusion means that “we are all us.”**
- **Avoid discriminatory language or thinking.**

Note: Much has been written and spoken about Veterans with post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. **Best estimates are that only eleven to twenty percent of Middle East Veterans show any signs of PTSD and only fourteen to twenty-four percent have experienced a traumatic brain injury.** Many of these individuals are leading productive lives and contributing significantly to a variety of civilian workplaces. With appropriate accommodations, many more could be doing so.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

A survey from The DBTAC, Northeast ADA Center, Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University, New York found most employers do not have employee assistance programs with expertise in assisting Veterans with disabilities. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the respondents cited having an employee assistance program, but only 38 percent listed having employee assistance programs with expertise in Veteran situations, needs, and disabilities. This means a first step in retaining Veterans with disabilities may be to ensure that employee assistance programs are prepared to meet the specific needs of Veterans.

Another DBTAC survey found that fewer than half of the Veterans surveyed were comfortable communicating their accommodation needs to an employer, and only 29 percent believed they were ready to advocate for themselves.

The decision on whether to disclose a disability is closely related to the type of disability. Veterans with non-apparent disabilities such as PTSD or TBI report choosing to disclose at a somewhat lower rate than those with physical disabilities.

REFERENCES

Accommodation and Compliance Series: The ADA Amendments Act of 2008

<http://askjan.org/bulletins/adaaa1.htm#purpose>

ADA: Know Your Rights: Returning Service Members with Disabilities

http://www.ada.gov/servicemembers_adainfo.html

Cornell University, ILR School, Employment and Disability Institute <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/> EARN: Reference

Desk Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) http://askearn.org/refdesk/Disability_Laws EARN Webinar Archive

<http://askearn.org/m-archive.cfm>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/employment_disabled_veterans.cfm

From Deployment to EMPLOYMENT: Nathan D. Ainspan. United States Naval Institute. Proceedings. Annapolis: Feb 2011. Vol.137, Iss. 2; pg 44, 6 pgs.

Heroes at Work: Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace; 5th Webinar in the "Addressing Disabilities Series" Central Western New York Business Leadership Network

http://ilr-edi-r1.ilr.cornell.edu/bln/docs/CWNYBLN_6-7-12_Veterans%20with%20Disabilities.pdf

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Pressman, Steven. March, 2011. The Warrior Ethos: A Definition. Black Irish Entertainment LLC.

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U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adaaa_info.cfm

Veterans and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A Guide for Employers

http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada_veterans_employers.cfm

Veterans Toolkit for Employers (Tool 6 – About Accommodations and Tool 7 – What Can You Do to Ensure and Inclusive and Welcoming Workplace? Organizational Strategies)

<http://www.makingworkhappen.org/Veterans/Employers/index.cfm>