

THE VETERAN ADVANTAGE

DAV Guide to Hiring
& Retaining Veterans
with Disabilities



“Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere,
who bravely bears his country’s cause. Honor, also,
to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field
and serves, as he best can, the same cause.”

—Abraham Lincoln

DAV GUIDE TO HIRING AND RETAINING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

America's veterans answered the call of duty, and many sacrificed in return. Now, more and more employers—both large and small—are stepping up to repay their sacrifice, at least in some small measure, by hiring veterans with disabilities. As a result, these employers are realizing several benefits. When you hire a veteran, your organization gets a loyal, team-oriented employee with job-ready skills, tested leadership abilities and a strong, mission-focused work ethic. Nearly 4 million veterans have a service-connected disability and are among the most resilient members of society, having served in the military and overcome adversity.

Nearly 4 million veterans have a service-connected disability and are among the most resilient members of society.

This guide is intended to help employers navigate the often-unclear terrain of recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans with disabilities. Much of the information and many of the strategies, lessons learned and best practices contained here also apply to hiring all veterans. What makes this a must-have resource for employers is that it explains the benefits of hiring veterans and focuses on solutions, including approaches unique to hiring and retaining veterans with disabilities, while weaving in the real-life experiences of different-sized employers and voices of veterans.

As one of the nation's largest nonprofit veterans service organizations, with more than 1 million members, DAV (Disabled American Veterans) is working to ensure America's veterans find meaningful employment. We are committed to helping employers like you successfully hire and retain veterans. Every year, along with our partners, we convene nearly 150 job fairs where employers can meet and recruit talented veterans. This guide is our latest effort to help the nation's employers fully realize the value veterans, particularly those with disabilities, bring to the workforce while also improving the bottom line.

Whether you are starting or expanding a veteran-hiring initiative, or seeking to reduce barriers to employment; promote job satisfaction, productivity and retention; or translate and understand the skills and experiences that a veteran can bring to your workforce, this guide equips you to make sound employment decisions that include veterans with disabilities. Consider this guide a map to empowering your organization to become a thought leader in the veteran employment space, while making it easier to do the right thing for the country and your company.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Marc Burgess".

J. Marc Burgess
DAV National Adjutant
and Chief Executive Officer

Sam Johnson,
Veteran



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CHAPTER 1

HIRING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES— VALUABLE ADDITIONS TO YOUR WORKFORCE

Disabilities are part of the human experience and quite common. An estimated 22 percent of adults in the United States have some type of disability.^{1,2} There are numerous types and levels of severity for disabilities. At the same time, a disability is simply a characteristic that should not define an individual.

Three things to keep top of mind when hiring veterans with disabilities:

1. Serving the country is a point of pride and honor for veterans; most identify as a veteran first and then as a veteran with a disability.
2. It is important to expect the same level of performance from all employees, regardless of age, disability, gender or ethnicity.
3. Accommodations for employees with disabilities come without costs in most cases and with minimal expenses for most others.

70% Disabilities are mostly unseen
The causes of disability vary greatly, but more than 70 percent of all disabilities are not visible or obvious.

Not all disabilities impact work performance. For some veterans with tinnitus, hearing loss, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other service-connected injuries, the effects of their injury do not significantly alter their ability to contribute as professionals.

Veterans offer unique skills and experience

Through military service, most veterans have acquired several attributes and skills prized by employers. These include leadership skills, the ability to work within and across teams, a strong work ethic and character, and a structured approach to getting work done.³ Research points to several other attributes of military experience that make a strong case for hiring veterans.⁴ In *The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran*:

Beyond the Clichés, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University outlined 10 strategic value propositions for hiring veterans:

1. Veterans are entrepreneurial.
2. Veterans assume high levels of trust.
3. Veterans are adept at transferring skills across context and tasks.
4. Veterans have advanced technical training.
5. Veterans are comfortable/adept in rapidly changing circumstances.
6. Veterans exhibit high levels of resiliency.
7. Veterans exhibit advanced team-building skills.
8. Veterans exhibit strong organization commitment.
9. Veterans have (and leverage) cross-cultural experiences.
10. Veterans have experiences/skills in diverse work settings.

A 2016 study found that

59%
of accommodations
are available at **no cost**
to employers

36%
were a
one-time cost

Only **4%** of employers reported that accommodation resulted in an ongoing annual cost to the company, and only **1%** said the accommodation required a combination of one-time and annual costs.

Veterans can strengthen corporate culture

Jack Roush, founder and chairman of Roush Enterprises of Livonia, Michigan, has been a longtime supporter of the military. Yet it wasn't until Roush's automotive engineering, testing, prototyping and manufacturing company launched the Roush Veterans Initiative Program (RVIP) in 2014 that he and others at the firm understood the true impact veterans can have.

Importantly, there was the epiphany that the core values that made the company and its 4,000-member workforce successful—a disciplined work ethic, teamwork, a commitment to quality, and the drive and motivation to succeed—match the qualities commonly associated with those who have served the country.

“Our support of veterans starts at the top with our chairman, Jack Roush, and is part of the culture that makes Roush a great place to work.”

—Rob Ells, Manager of RVIP

The company stepped up its veteran hiring and today employs more than 264 veterans, including several with disabilities. Roush partners with veterans organizations, regularly sends hiring managers to veteran job fairs and visits military installations around the country in search of quality veteran candidates. The company also works with the Employer Support for Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense program to help employers support employees' military commitments, including serving

in the National Guard and Reserve components.

In addition to mentoring new employees and training all managers and supervisors about working with veterans and those with disabilities, the company consistently increases awareness throughout its workforce about the veterans working at Roush—all of which has helped strengthen the corporate culture.



**Rob Ells,
Manager of RVIP**

Walk around Roush facilities and you're struck by the omnipresence of large U.S. flags. The company has created a presence and brand for RVIP, as well as designed a Roush VIP F-150 and Mustang, which it takes to all veteran job fairs, Guard and Reserve unit visits, and military posts. The company celebrates Veterans Day in a big way. For example, each year Roush's veterans are recognized at the world headquarters of Ford, a company customer. Some also receive an RVIP Challenge Coin and a letter from Chairman Roush, thanking them for their service and expressing appreciation that they had joined the Roush team.

“I think the education we have done with our new employees and new supervisors about our veteran hiring has given them a great appreciation for another aspect of the Roush culture, the effort and emphasis our executive leadership places on veteran hiring,” said Ells.

For additional reading:

The Business Case for Hiring a Veteran: Beyond the Clichés

ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/the-business-case-for-hiring-a-veteran-beyond-the-cliches

CHAPTER 2

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

Numerous financial incentives and other supports are available for employers hiring veterans with disabilities and other military-affiliated personnel, including those in the National Guard or reserves as well as military spouses. The perks—ranging from tax credits and reimbursements to on-the-job training and wage subsidies—are available through federal, state and even local governments. These incentives can often more than offset any cost associated with onboarding or providing workplace accommodations.



- **Activated Military Reservist Credit** provides employers with a credit up to \$4,000 for each Reserve or National Guard employee you pay when the employee is away from work on active duty.
- **State-specific tax credit programs** are available in several states to employers who hire veterans with disabilities, some based on the WOTC and others connected to accessibility improvements.

The following tax credits can lead to a substantial reduction in your organization's annual tax obligation. Remember, tax credits directly reduce your business's outstanding tax liability, and include:

- **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)** is available to employers who hire veterans based on hours worked and wages earned in the first year. For veterans working at least 120 hours, employers may claim a 25 percent tax credit for first-year wages, up to the tax credit range from \$1,200 to \$9,600, depending on the veteran hired. If the individual works at least 400 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the individual's first-year wages, up to the maximum tax credit as well.
- **Returning Heroes Tax Credit** provides up to \$5,600 to employers for each veteran hired who has been unemployed or has received supplemental nutrition assistance during the past year.
- **Wounded Warrior Tax Credit** provides up to \$9,600 to employers for each unemployed veteran hired who has a disability connected to his or her service in the armed forces.

Veterans benefits: a bonus for employers

When you hire veterans, they often come with a built-in set of benefits. Thanks to their military service, these benefits can include education, job training and medical benefits.

VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) sponsors the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program, which assists employers nationwide with information on incentives available for hiring eligible veterans, and works to match veterans with employers. VR&E also:

- Offers several vocational and employment services to veterans with service-connected disabilities to help them obtain suitable employment.
- Subsidizes veterans' salaries so that employers pay an apprentice-level wage while training veterans, via on-the-job training programs.

- Offers specialized tools, equipment and workplace modifications—at no cost to employers—to eligible veterans with disabilities, allowing them to perform their duties.
- Provides counselors to work with some veterans with disabilities to provide supportive services.

The Special Employer Incentives program

The Special Employer Incentives (SEI) program is available for eligible veterans facing employment challenges and those served through the VA's VR&E program. Benefits of the SEI program include:

- Qualified veterans connect with a specific role at your organization, and you are provided assistance for hiring these veterans.
- Veterans who successfully complete the hiring program often stay on at your organization.
- You can hire a qualified trainee at an apprenticeship wage.
- Employers receive reimbursement for up to half the veteran's salary to cover certain supplies and equipment, additional instruction and other expenses.

Department of Labor and State hiring and job-training resources

Other resources your organization may want to check out include:

- The CareerOneStop Business Center, a U.S. Department of Labor resource for employers looking to recruit, hire, train and retain employees. A big part of the Center's focus is on helping employers hire veterans. To that end, the department deploys local veterans employment representatives to its 2,500 American Job Centers nationwide. These representatives can be particularly helpful connecting you to local and state resources and workforce training funding.
- State Veterans Affairs offices, which are state entities that may have additional assistance and financial resources for companies hiring veterans with disabilities.

Veterans are a ready, steady workforce

When Professional Solutions Delivered LLC, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, staffs up for a job or contract, it looks to those who've served—particularly veterans with disabilities. Half of the company's employees were once in uniform. The firm—a Veterans Affairs-certified Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business—relies on veterans, as they are trained and have experience in the three areas the company operates in: logistics, IT solutions and project management.



That's not the only reason veterans are the go-to talent for Professional Solutions Delivered, however. "They tend to be more loyal, and you don't have the turnover you do with nonveteran workers," noted Tricia Moore, the firm's HR manager.



Tricia Moore,
HR Manager

The company's client base is spread through various federal and commercial contracts. Professional Solutions Delivered leverages current veteran staff to refer potential applicants and also participates in recruiting fairs and trade shows at various military installations.

An added benefit of hiring veterans? "They bring their own benefits with them," Moore added, "which cuts down on the cost of benefits."

Boon to business: Veterans come with top-notch training, leadership development

Research indicates that veterans perform as well as or better than others in the workplace.⁵ That's no wonder, given the wealth of advanced training and leadership development the military provides.

While in the military, service members undergo rigorous training programs to become experts in a wide range of skills and concepts that are transferable to the civilian workplace. For example, service members receive:

- Significant ethics and leadership training that promotes intangible soft skills that employers seek.
- Rigorous and purposefully high-stress training.
- Technical military occupational specialty training.
- Professional military education courses and academies.

After basic training, all service members receive advanced individual training skills aligning with their assigned military career fields. Depending on career specialty, service members attend one of many diverse skill-training schools where they learn the skills necessary to succeed in that specific career via hands-on training, classroom sessions and field instruction. The military also provides ongoing development opportunities, ranging from advanced leadership and ethics training to project and program management. Clearly, veterans provide you a job candidate who brings extensive skills and is ready to get to work.

Veterans bring a built-in set of education and job preparation benefits to employers

Veterans transitioning out of the military also come to employers with a range of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-provided benefits that advance their knowledge, experience and bona fides. That's one more perk for employers who hire veterans with disabilities.

Money for college, technical training and other job preparation funding is a big benefit of military service, and veterans have access to many tuition support programs, including the GI Bill. Employers of veterans

can benefit from these employees' additional schooling, paid for by the federal government. Military experience also can translate into civilian licensing and certification for careers, for example as an electrician or software engineer. Many veterans can use their benefits for:

- Associate, undergraduate or graduate degrees.
- On-the-job training.
- Apprenticeships, and technical and vocational programs.
- Licensing and certification exams.

Many veterans also receive benefits related to their health and financial security. For example, various health care options exist for military veterans with a service-connected disability. These options—which can range from extension of the military's TRICARE coverage to health benefits from the VA—vary depending on factors such as when and where a veteran served, their length of service and type of discharge.



Veterans with disabilities boost diversity and inclusion efforts

A diverse workplace plays an instrumental role in creating an environment that celebrates ability while respecting individual differences. In today's global economy, diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts are essential to business growth.⁶ While companies may measure D&I success in different ways, adding veterans with disabilities can also add to the company's bottom line.

The veteran population itself is rich in diversity. Of the estimated 21 million veterans living in the United States in 2015, 1.8 million were women.⁷ Approximately 7 million veterans are 54 or younger;

nearly 3 million are under the age of 40. Veterans come from all races and ethnicities; approximately 23 percent of veterans are from a racial or ethnic minority population. Meanwhile, 3.9 million veterans are thought to have a service-connected disability.⁸ Besides age, gender, race and ethnic diversity, veterans also bring diversity of thought and career and world experience. Strategically including veterans with disabilities in the hiring mix of qualified candidates helps companies meet or exceed multiple components of their D&I goals.

For additional reading:

Work Opportunity Tax Credit
doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)
benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/employers.asp

Special Employer Incentives (SEI) program
benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/docs/SpecialEmployerIncentive.pdf

CareerOneStop Business Center
careeronestop.org

American Job Centers
careeronestop.org/site/american-job-center.aspx

State Veterans Affairs Offices
va.gov/statedva.htm

GI Bill
benefits.va.gov/gibill

Fiserv Salutes leads diversity and inclusion efforts

In 2014, First Data launched the award winning program First Data Salutes—an innovative military engagement strategy that provides the military community with career opportunities, best-in-class education resources and premier business solutions for veteran-owned businesses.

Since the program's inception, First Data has earned numerous awards and accolades for leading the private sector in military programing, including topping the Military Times' list for "Best for Vets: Employer" for three consecutive years. Since First Data completed a historic combination with Fiserv, the newly branded Fiserv Salutes will carry on our corporate mission of giving back to those who serve.

At the heart of the program's mission is the idea that Fiserv can do well by doing good. Dr. Vivian Greentree, senior vice president and head of global corporate citizenship, has always seen value in creating opportunities for populations beyond the military community.

"Focusing on veterans with disabilities and better

serving them through the company's recruiting, hiring and retention efforts has made us more mindful of all disabilities," said Greentree.

Fiserv Salutes has sparked open discussions on inclusion and belonging, driven efforts on enterprise corporate diversity policies and programming, and propelled opportunities for meaningful engagement around diverse talent.

"Fiserv operates in a rapidly changing industry, and our success lies in building a global workforce that represents our company's diverse customers and clients," said Greentree. "Military veterans and veterans with service-connected disabilities are an instrumental part of driving our company's mission in creating a workforce with associates who bring unique skillsets and leadership experience."



Vivian Greentree,
Senior Vice President

CHAPTER 3

STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING AND HIRING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

If your organization wants to start, expand or fine-tune a veteran-hiring effort, be assured you don't have to go it alone or reinvent the wheel. Below you'll find seven best practices that employers often adopt to successfully launch and drive initiatives to hire veterans with disabilities.

1. **CEO and executive buy-in is vital for success.**

Top leadership needs to embrace and champion such initiatives to achieve success. Buy-in from the top for veteran hiring sends a message throughout the organization, from vice presidents to hiring managers to frontline workers, that an initiative is important. Both executive and hiring manager sponsorships of veteran-hiring programs empower everyone in the organization to participate in the effort. These champions can serve as key influencers to communicate the value of veterans, including veterans with disabilities, to your workforce. Top leadership endorsement assures resources get allocated to fulfill goals and ensure execution and follow through. It's how organizations from Starbucks and Comcast NBCUniversal to small employers like Professional Solutions Delivered have been successful in their veteran-hiring initiatives.

2. Drive an internal marketing campaign. Get your own employees on board and in line with the campaign. Highlight the executive-level focus on the initiative (which is why it's crucial to have top leadership buy-in) and the value of hiring veterans with disabilities. Create an environment where veterans with disabilities feel valued.

3. Establish enterprise-wide military hiring and retention goals. In doing so, an organization sets goals, holds itself accountable and can monitor its performance. These goals are aspirational and motivating to your team, and allow for adjustment along the way. Organizations from Amazon, Starbucks and AT&T to many smaller companies have made enterprise-wide commitments to hiring veterans, including veterans with disabilities.

In 2015, AT&T achieved its goal of hiring 10,000 veteran employees and doubled its commitment to hire 20,000 veterans by 2020.⁹ In 2013, Starbucks committed to hiring 10,000 veterans and military spouses by November 2018. By March 2017, the company reached that goal, pledging to increase that number to 25,000 by 2025.

4. Educate and train recruiting and hiring managers on veterans' skill sets, as well as the types of disabilities and how they do and do not impact the workplace. Educate your team to understand the core components of veteran resumes and jobs. The more familiar recruiters and hiring managers become with interpreting resumes with military-related language and experiences, the more successful your screening process will be. Hiring managers should also emphasize the soft, non-technical skills that veterans bring to the workforce. If your organization's hiring team does not have someone with this experience, draw on



A veteran-centric hiring process

Don't forget to make your job application process veteran-friendly. Mention on your website and recruiting materials that you support the hiring of veterans with disabilities. Provide contact information for a member of your team to whom a veteran can reach out directly with questions about the hiring process and how his or her military experience can translate to a job at your company. Ideally, this person should be a veteran.

Comcast NBCUniversal: It starts at the top

Since its founding in 1963 by Ralph Roberts, a Navy veteran, Comcast has recognized the contribution of those who've served. In 2012, Comcast made a public two-year commitment to hire 2,000 veterans to its workforce—a goal it achieved early. After acquiring NBCUniversal in 2013, Comcast NBCUniversal made an impressive enterprise commitment: hire 10,000 veterans, including disabled veterans, by the end of 2017.

“The company is on track,” said Carol Eggert, senior vice president of military and veteran affairs for Comcast NBCUniversal and a retired Army brigadier general. The 10,000 include veterans, those serving in the National Guard and Reserve, and military spouses. With about 250,000 service members transitioning out of the military each year, companies like Comcast NBCUniversal view it as a duty to support veteran-hiring initiatives. The commitment goes beyond hiring to supporting and advancing military employees in their careers. Such efforts led the Department of Defense to award the company with the 2017 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, given to employers for supporting employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.



Carol Eggert,
Senior Vice President
of Military and Veteran Affairs

To succeed in reaching audacious goals, it starts with leadership. “It’s critical to have senior leadership involvement and support,” said Eggert. “It tells everyone that this is an important initiative of the company.”

The company designed Eggert’s position to report to the top echelons of both divisions of the giant corporation—to the president and chief officer at Comcast and the president of operations and technology at NBCUniversal. Eggert’s team is primarily former service members and actively serving members of the National Guard and Reserve.

Company officials have a strategic view of veteran hiring. By recruiting and retaining those with military experience, along with their can-do attitude and loyalty, the company is addressing a strategic necessity to retain staff. Comcast NBCUniversal offers a generous suite of benefits to military members, including annual paid time off for military training for National Guard and Reserve employees, along with a pay differential and continued benefits when they are called to full-time military service for extended training or deployments.

employees with military knowledge or experience to review resumes and address questions or gaps until your team gains experience. Quality candidates can be overlooked if their qualifications are not understood. Keep in mind that a veteran may not have interviewed or negotiated for salary and benefits in the past. Make sure that your recruiters and hiring managers understand common disabilities among veterans and how to have an appropriate conversation about disabilities and accommodations should it be raised by the applicant. (See Page 17.)

- 5. Use veterans in recruiting.** Engage current employees who are veterans to support your veteran-hiring and retention initiative. They can help review candidate resumes, translate relevant skills and job experience, and train others in hiring, finding, screening and interviewing military candidates.¹⁰ As individuals who have successfully navigated the process, these employees can

Educating recruiting and hiring managers

Fiserv works to educate recruiting and hiring managers to look more broadly beyond simply one or two technical skills a veteran possesses, to other skills, such as abilities to manage people, resources and budgets, and teamwork. Veterans tend to bring technical skills and understand logistics.

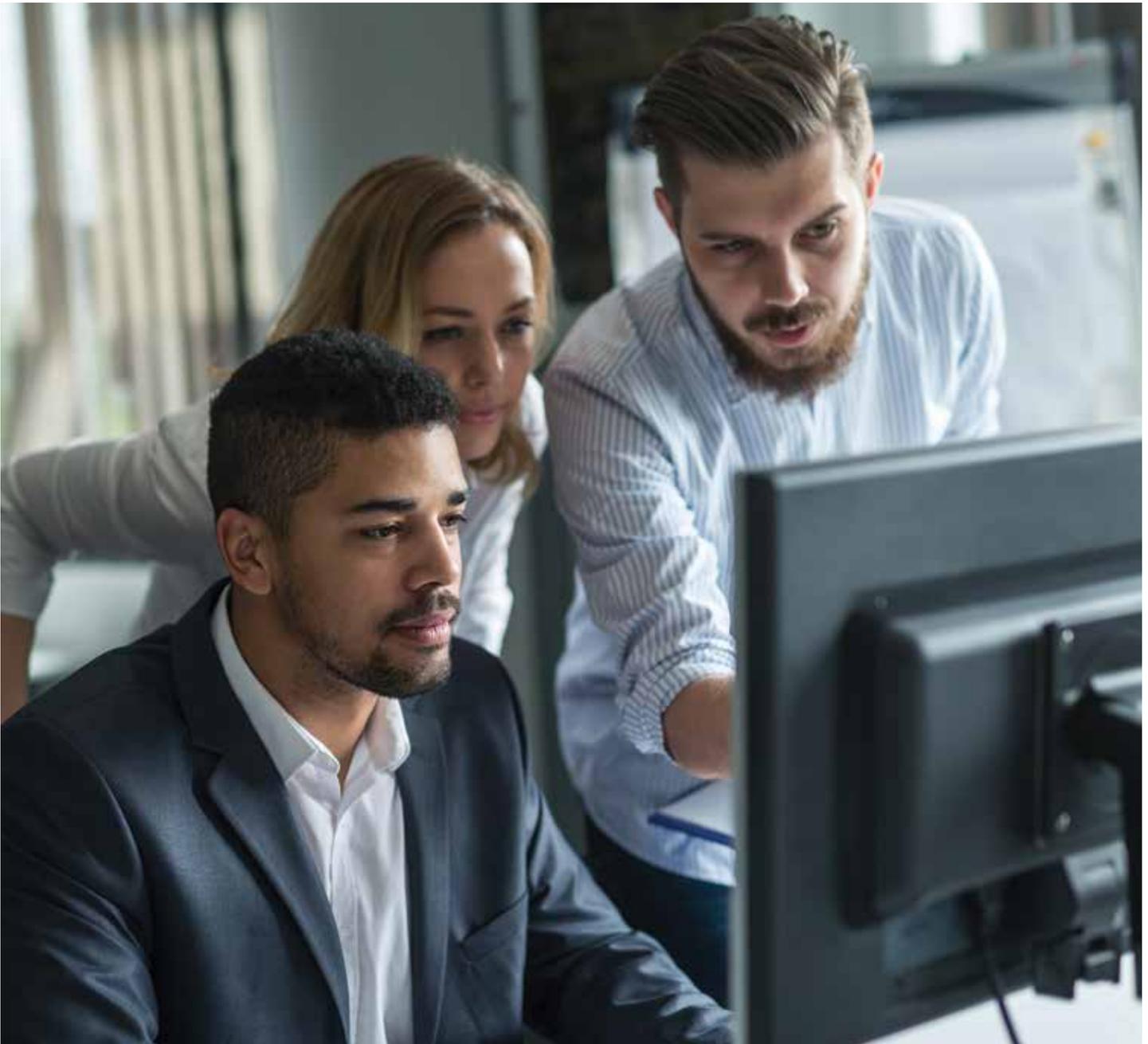
The company added military experience into its job descriptions and actively considers military experience equivalency. While a candidate may not have a college degree, he or she may have other attractive qualifications. In hiring, Fiserv seriously considers military experience. If two candidates are equally qualified, Fiserv will hire the candidate with a military background. The company has set this in written policy. A testament to the value of this training is the fact that, according to a 2016 survey, 41 percent of military-affiliated employees were referred to Fiserv by a current employee.

help you create internal processes that veteran applicants can more easily navigate.

- 6. Consider including veterans with disabilities on your hiring team.** A veteran employee who has a disability, visible or unseen, can be an asset to talk to veteran applicants who may have disabilities and help them understand how they can thrive at your company.
- 7. Assist veterans with the hiring process.** Help veteran job candidates present their skills and experiences in a way that resonates with your organization. Verizon has a dedicated military careers site and skills matcher tool that helps veterans match their military job to a Verizon career. The company also created a network where veteran candidates can connect with other veterans who work at the company to learn more about their experiences and company culture. If you have employees who are veterans, consider offering them opportunities to coach job candidates before the interview. And if some of your veteran employees have disabilities, consider including them in the coaching process. It will help make applicants who have disabilities more comfortable and more likely to succeed in the hiring process.
- 8. Connect with local veterans service organizations.** Teaming up with a veterans service organization, such as DAV, can help you fast forward your company's effort to recruit and hire veterans with disabilities. For example, DAV's employment program connects employers with military veterans and their spouses seeking meaningful employment opportunities. DAV has access to one of America's largest databases of military veterans and spouses, and can help your company find highly qualified candidates through career fairs and other efforts. DAV can also provide a great service to your company's veterans with information seminars and other free assistance that can improve the lives of your employees who served. DAV also connects companies with volunteer efforts through its new website volunteerforveterans.org.

Many veterans fear discrimination

A survey of veterans with disabilities transitioning to the civilian workforce estimated that 57 percent feared hiring discrimination due to disability, while 71 percent of those with a diagnosed mental health condition had no intention of disclosing this information in an employment situation. Further, 73 percent did not intend to ask for a disability-related accommodation during employment.³¹ More than one in four veterans in today's workforce are reported to have a service-connected disability,³² although the disclosure of a disability is a personal decision so the actual number is likely unknown.



Do's and Don'ts of interviews

Interviewing a veteran with a disability should be performed no differently than interviewing any other job candidate. It is important to ask all questions of all candidates, without exception. A good interviewing practice is to ask all candidates the following questions: "Have you read the job description? Yes or no, can you, with or without a reasonable accommodation, perform the essential functions of the job?" You are not asking candidates to disclose if they have a disability but are ensuring they can perform the job. Additionally, you make it clear that as an employer you understand this process and are not likely to discriminate due to disability.

Questions relevant to experience or training received while in the military are acceptable. However, you should avoid the following questions:

- "What type of discharge did you receive?" Only federal agencies, organizations that assign a veteran's hiring preference or have requirements related to security clearances can ask questions related to military discharge, especially in a pre-employment phase.
- "I notice that you're in the National Guard. Are you going to be called up for duty anytime soon?" This is akin to asking a woman if she is planning to get pregnant. Remember, it is unlawful to discriminate against someone because of membership in the National Guard or Reserve, a state defense force, or another state or federal reserve unit.
- "Did you see any action over there? Did you lose your arm getting hit by an IED? Have you seen a psychiatrist since you've been back?" Questions



related to deployments to war zones or conflicts may be interpreted as trying to determine if the veteran has post-traumatic stress disorder or a brain injury, and could be construed as a violation of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Most of the standard behavioral interview questions should be no different than those you would typically ask any other candidate (e.g., management style, problem-solving abilities, strengths or weaknesses related to teamwork). Consider phrasing your questions to ensure the interviewee clearly understands that you are referring to both civilian and military work experience.

Four things employers should know when hiring National Guard and Reserve members

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) is a federal law that establishes rights and responsibilities for members of the National Guard and Reserve, and their civilian employers. USERRA affects employment, re-employment and retention in employment, when employees serve or have served in the uniformed services. Here are some USERRA basics for employers:

- **Know their rights and yours.** USERRA protects employed National Guard and Reserve service members called to active duty. Employers must make reasonable efforts to help employees coming back to work become qualified for either the job they would have had if they hadn't left for military duty, or another similar job.
- **Assign a supervisor or mentor.** Ease the transition of your employees returning to work by assigning them a supervisor or mentor who can explain different policies, procedures or programs as well as leadership changes within the organization. The supervisor or mentor can also discuss a plan for re-entry into the job.

- **Connect them with support.** Connect your employees with resources that can meet their needs, such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, an effort across the Department of Defense to promote the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members, their families and communities by offering practical advice and information on a range of benefits.
- **Show appreciation.** Show appreciation for your employees in simple gestures and words, which can build community and morale. The more support your employees feel, the more likely they'll engage in the workplace and invest their talents and skills into their job responsibilities.



For additional reading:

DAV's employment program

www.dav.org/veterans/employment-resources

USERRA basics for employers

dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/userra_fs.htm

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

www.yellowribbon.mil/yrrp

Built to Serve Military Veterans and Families

Known for its products and services designed to help military members, veterans and their eligible families achieve financial security, USAA also is recognized for its military culture, military talent strategy and advocacy programs serving the military community. USAA has committed to hire 1,000 veterans and those actively serving in the National Guard and Reserves, and military spouses in 2019, with a focused effort to grow its overall military-affiliated population to 25 percent. USAA also will continue fulfilling its responsibility as a national role model supporting veteran and military spouse hiring initiatives and inspire other companies to do the same.

“As an organization created by and for the military community, hiring veterans and military spouses has been a long-standing commitment for USAA,” says John Bird, senior vice president of Military Affairs at USAA and retired Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy. “We recognize that veterans bring tremendous technical ability, problem-solving skills, leadership and loyalty and take a holistic approach focused on transition assistance, skills development and retention.”

USAA has several veteran hiring and development programs, including:

- **Combat to Claims.** Trains newly-hired veterans to become automobile non-injury and property claims managers.
- **Veterans Transition and Leadership Development Program (VetsLead).** Targets, transitions and develops newly-hired veterans as part of a one-year program to close business skills gaps and increase their potential for future leadership opportunities. Participants can attend leadership and business acumen trainings within a comprehensive support structure of peer sponsors and executive mentors.
- **VETNet.** Celebrating its 10-year anniversary, the VETNet employee resource group focuses on the retention of existing USAA military talent. The program leverages the diverse military experience of USAA’s more than 7,500 veteran and military spouse employees to create greater understanding, awareness and appreciation of the military community through events, volunteer engagements, and educational briefings from military guest speakers.

In addition to veterans receiving training through their transition, USAA encourages executives and managers to have a minimum of five hours of military acumen training per year, which can be in the form of military event participation or attendance at one of USAA’s regular military guest speaker series or military-specific professional development classes.

Because of USAA’s initiatives, nearly 15,000 veterans and military spouses have been hired since 2005, helping attain a top Military Friendly® Employer for 10 consecutive years.



USAA means United Services Automobile Association and its affiliates.

USAA is an equal opportunity and affirmative action employer and gives consideration for employment to qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other legally protected characteristic.

STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

A 2014 survey of military professionals, HR professionals and hiring managers by Monster.com found that 68 percent of employers did not have retention programs in place to serve their veteran employees. A study of more than 1,200 veterans in 2013 and 2014, conducted by VetAdvisor and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, found that almost half of veterans surveyed who left their first post-separation position left in 12 months or less and over 65 percent left within two years.

Here are some strategies to keep the veteran employees you've worked hard to recruit and hire:

- **Implement a formal onboarding process.**

Research suggests designing a specialized onboarding program to help veterans integrate into the civilian workforce is a promising practice.¹¹ Help military-affiliated employees transition into their new jobs by including the following in your organization's onboarding materials:

- ▶ **An overview of your company's organizational structure.** Veterans understand chain of command. Help them understand where their role and department fit into the overall organization.
- ▶ **Company policy on promotions.** Include an overview of the performance-review process and the responsibilities of the employee and the organization.
- ▶ **Discussion of both written and unwritten company rules and forms.** The civilian workplace can sometimes be ambiguous for veterans. Set expectations upfront.
- ▶ **Information on accommodations for veterans with disabilities,** as well as employee resource groups valuable to veterans with disabilities.
- ▶ **Information about DAV or other veterans service organizations,** the Job Accommodation Network (see Page 17), and a list of internal contacts and resources for employees with disabilities.

In addition, consider implementing a "new hire partner" program. Match a new veteran employee

with a current worker who would be responsible (and willing) to schedule some early check-ins and respond to general questions in order to avoid unnecessary confusion. Research suggests that pairing a new veteran hire with someone already well-established in the organization who has a similar military background can provide the new employee with the insight and connection they need to be successful.¹² For veterans with disabilities, consider pairing them with an employee who also has a disability.

- **Create an employee resource group or other network of support for veterans, including those with disabilities, at your organization.**

Veteran retention is highest when organizations provide ongoing professional development and connection to a support network. Start a built-in network, or employee resource group, to help facilitate veteran transition and continued growth and development.¹³ Veterans working in the civilian workforce report that employee resource groups focused on veterans (also called military affinity groups or business resource groups) are tremendously helpful in retaining these employees. These internal veteran support networks can:

- ▶ Support veteran employee growth and development within your organization.
- ▶ Serve as a catalyst for others in a company to better understand veteran-related issues.
- ▶ Create awareness of experiences and accomplishments of veterans in your organization, building an appreciation for the contributions they make.

- ▶ Help veterans understand their tailored benefits.

Consider forming a disability resource group as well, so veterans and other employees with disabilities can share common experiences and understand that, as an employer, you support them.

- **Ensure employee assistance programs (EAPs) include veteran-friendly practices.** Effective EAPs can be important when it comes to retaining veterans with disabilities.¹⁴ Promising practices for EAPs have been identified in the areas of intake, assessment and referral; assistance for veterans; management and supervisor consultation; training programs; and more.¹⁵ Here are two helpful resources for employers looking to start or up their game in EAP support for veterans with disabilities:
 - ▶ **VA resources**¹⁶ specifically for EAP providers include when and how to screen for PTSD, how to ask about military service, and how to help veterans connect with additional treatment options, such as those provided by the VA.
 - ▶ Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families has a set of **leading practice recommendations** designed for companies looking to improve their EAPs to support veterans, which includes ensuring that at least one member of the EAP team is trained in issues facing veterans and veterans with disabilities.¹⁷
- **Provide professional development.** Unlike the military, the civilian workforce is not generally known for having a consistent and regimented structure. Decentralized processes and procedures are more the rule than the exception in the private sector. This can be challenging for transitioning service members and veterans, who are accustomed to military ranks and a structured career path. It is helpful to communicate professional standards and what is expected of them to advance.

To smooth this process, your organization may want to offer professional development activities.

Be transparent about career pathways and growth opportunities, especially regarding how the performance management process impacts both. Consider offering meaningful training opportunities and ways to connect everyday responsibilities to overall organizational purpose, vision, mission and values. In the military, all objectives link to a singular goal: Support and defend the Constitution of the United States. For veterans, understanding the mission is important. Help veterans understand how their jobs impact the organization, and where and how they fit in.

- **Consider mentoring programs.** Mentoring can be both a formal and informal process. Mentoring helps veterans understand what it takes to be successful in a business environment versus a military one. Some organizations offer mentoring as part of their business resource groups, while others have separate mentoring initiatives. Mentoring can come in many forms. (See box.)

Mentoring is beneficial to not only the person getting mentored but also employees at all levels who can benefit from this type of workplace relationship. Research suggests people who have the opportunity to serve as mentors experience greater job satisfaction and a higher commitment to their employer.¹⁸ While the majority of veterans may prefer another veteran as a mentor, others may prefer a civilian. In turn, a veteran with a disability may prefer a civilian with a disability as a mentor.

Types of mentoring

- Traditional mentoring (1:1)
- Peer mentoring
- Professional networking
- Group mentoring
- Virtual mentoring
- Reverse mentoring
- Cross-generational mentoring

- **Train managers to support and supervise veterans with disabilities.** Disability awareness and reasonable accommodation training is helpful for managers and supervisors in organizations of all sizes. This training should not be touted as a one-and-done type of event but rather an opportunity to begin and continue an important dialogue. Remember, not all veterans have disabilities, so it is important to make no assumptions. However, if a veteran does have a disability, the likelihood that he or she, or any other employee for that matter, will disclose this information at work will depend on the immediate need for a reasonable accommodation and a supportive work environment.

Managers and supervisors should also be educated about the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). JAN is a free service provided by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. A leading source of expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues, JAN serves both employers and employees across the U.S. and around the world. While this service offers one-on-one consultation about all aspects of job accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act, JAN-trained counselors also offer guidance to help managers approach a worker about issues related to a disability in an appropriate way.

- **Put in place effective and affordable workplace support and accommodations.** The military is a team environment, and veterans report missing the camaraderie of the military. Having colleagues who understand you is important, whether in the military or in the civilian workplace. Employee resource groups, EAPs and mentorships go a long way to support veterans with disabilities in your organization. Beyond these, you may need to provide reasonable accommodations to veterans with disabilities. Here's what is important to know:
 - ▶ **A reasonable accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things**



Photo by Airman Rhett Isbell/U.S. Air Force

While service members have to follow a strict chain of command, military personnel at all levels are routinely called on to solve problems. This is especially true for veterans who have overcome hurdles related to their sacrifices in uniform. Veterans, in fact, could be your top problem-solvers and are well-versed in studying and improving workplace processes.

are customarily done that allows a person with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities. This can span from the application process to the work environment to benefits.

- ▶ **Not all disabilities impact work performance.** For many veterans with service-connected injuries, the effects of their injury do not significantly alter their lives. Many look, sound and perform the same or similarly to their counterparts. Among those veterans with visible injuries, many have learned to manage their wounds in ways that keep them from adversely affecting productivity or working relationships.
- ▶ **Productivity aids or accommodations in the workplace often come at a very low—or no—cost.**²⁰ A recent study by JAN indicated a high percentage (59 percent) of accommodations

cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest typically cost less than \$500.²¹ JAN has developed the Employers' Practical Guide to Understanding Reasonable Accommodation.

- ▶ **The interactive process is considered a best practice when it comes to identifying reasonable accommodations.** This process allows dialogue, trial and error, and importantly, an opportunity for the veteran with a disability to believe he or she can make a difference in your company. It should be an ongoing conversation between the employer and the veteran. Keep in mind that some veterans with disabilities may be reluctant to ask for help. They are trained to be independent and to solve problems themselves, so it can be helpful to design a support system that's easy to tap into and promotes an ongoing conversation with the veteran employee.
- ▶ **It is the responsibility of the employee, in most cases, to disclose and request an accommodation.** This is why communicating your organization's accommodations process early and often is so important. Including procedures regarding the reasonable accommodation process in onboarding materials for all employees is one way to set your company apart from many others.

25%

An estimated 25% of post-9/11 veterans in the workforce reportedly have a service-connected disability, and 68 percent believe their disability has not interfered with obtaining or maintaining employment.¹⁹

- **Provide military-cultural awareness training to all employees.** Distinct from disability awareness, this training provides civilians a chance to increase their knowledge and understanding about military culture and help them better understand, relate

to and support your military-affiliated employees. Courses typically provide an overview of military rank; the branches of service, along with their missions and core values; active versus reserve status; demographic characteristics; and key terminology, as well as specific training to help veterans with disabilities succeed in the workplace. Here are some resources to incorporate:

- ▶ The VA offers an online Veterans Employment Toolkit to help employers, managers, supervisors, human resource professionals and EAP providers support their veteran employees and members of the National Guard and Reserve.
 - ▶ Supporting Veterans in the Workplace is a web-based program developed by the VA about how to support and help veterans address some common readjustment issues they may encounter in the civilian workplace. This training is helpful for anyone interested in supporting veterans at work.
- **Track and measure performance.** To understand how well your veteran recruiting and hiring strategies are working, you must see if your hires are satisfied with their jobs and whether they feel their skills are being put to use. You'll want to track if and when your hires leave.

Increasing performance feedback efforts yields improved performance for veterans and other employees.²² As Comcast NBCUniversal expanded its commitment to hire more military-affiliated workers, it began tracking and measuring performance of veterans and others. "Our military hires rate very high working with customers," Eggert said. Today, 11 percent of the company's hires are veterans, National Guard and reservists, and military spouses. Meanwhile, Melissa Bird, program manager of corporate citizenship for Fiserv, recommends companies "find ways to listen to your employees, and let their feedback drive your programs. We recommend an engagement survey focused on your military population. This can help to gauge what your company is already doing well and how to focus your future efforts."

Common requests for accommodations

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, an individual may use “plain English” and not mention disability, the law or use the phrase “reasonable accommodation” when requesting an accommodation. Therefore, any time employees indicate they are having a problem related to a medical condition, employers should consider whether the employees are making a request for accommodation under the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Examples of accommodation requests may include:

- Time off for medical appointments or treatment related to the disability.
- Screen readers, interpreters or other alternative formats that would allow veterans with vision or hearing-related disabilities to access information.
- An adjustable work station, anti-fatigue matting or ergonomic chairs for veterans with back or spinal injuries.
- A flexible work schedule, job sharing or telecommuting options for veterans continuing treatment with ongoing or temporary medical appointments.
- A job coach for veterans with injuries that might have impacted memory.
- Assistive devices or modified equipment for veterans with limb loss.

For additional reading:

Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families’ leading practice recommendations toolkit.
vets.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/LP-Examples-Assimilation.pdf

Job Accommodation Network
askjan.org/empl/index.htm

Employers’ Practical Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)
askjan.org/publications/employers/employers-guide.cfm

Veterans Employment Toolkit
va.gov/VETSINWORKPLACE/index.asp

Veteran-Friendly Employment Assistant Program Practices
va.gov/VETSINWORKPLACE/docs/em_EAP_practices.asp

Supporting Veterans in the Workplace
va.gov/VETSINWORKPLACE/workplaceProject.asp



Not sure where to find veterans?

Attracting veterans to meet the demands of your workforce can be challenging. Fortunately, many resources are available to help you along the way.

Email employment@DAV.org for assistance placing your vacancies where transitioning military members and veterans can find them.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE AND WORK

Putting yourself in the shoes of a service member transitioning to civilian life and workforce can help you better understand the military-to-civilian journey, ultimately helping you set up a more effective effort to hire veterans with disabilities. Although veterans may share several common characteristics, each is an individual. While there is no one typical transition to the civilian workforce, veterans do commonly face a cultural learning curve.

The journey back to civilian life

Consider that many members of the military are transitioning out of a system that focused on mission first. As a result, the system is structured to ensure service members and their families are taken care of, and those transitioning out of the services may be dealing with several things they never or seldom encountered, such as finding a job or looking for nonsubsidized housing. Employers should realize, too, that members of the military find significant meaning and purpose in their mission to serve and defend the country. Those two basic elements can be diminished when a service member transitions to civilian life.

As a whole, military culture stresses:

- Mission before self, putting an emphasis on unit cohesion.
- Devotion to duty.
- A strict chain of command.

However, civilian cultures tend to emphasize:

- Individuality.
- Independent achievement.
- Personal freedom.
- Fluid social relationships.

As if the changes are not jarring enough, veterans then need to obtain employment to support themselves and their families. Understanding and addressing the learning curve veterans experience can help employers more quickly get the talent they need while preventing unnecessary frustration by veterans. (See table on Page 21) Where each branch of the military shares its own unique culture and values nationwide, civilian

organizations have unique values and are structured based on size, leadership styles and industry. Veterans are resilient and able to adapt to unique situations, but that process is made easier when an employer understands veterans' perspectives and experiences.



Lost in translation: transitioning into the civilian workforce

Obtaining employment is one of those hurdles veterans with disabilities typically encounter. Even though more than 80 percent of military jobs reportedly translate to a civilian equivalent,²³ the translation of military skills, experience and certifications to a civilian environment continues to be a transition obstacle many veterans and employers face.

The military/civilian gap

Military culture

Hierarchy is displayed (on uniforms)

Processes and procedures are codified and explicit

Support (e.g., battle buddy):
“I’ve got your back”

Strong sense of family and community (brotherhood and sisterhood)

Direction is direct—straightforward communication

Clear chain of command

Routine

Rank equals respect

Well-defined career ladder and growth

Super-structured, mission-first leadership

Civilian culture

Introductions are necessary

Basic rules may need to be explained (e.g., arrival time, leave, breaks) and may include when to speak up and offer opinions

Employees often need to figure things out on their own; coworkers may not be as reliable and dedicated

Often a disjointed and disconnected community

Colleagues may tend to “beat around the bush”—brainstorming

Often unofficial or stream of influence

Choice; personal freedom

Need to earn and build trust and respect

Often murky career growth path; performance reviews; need to “toot own horn”

Structure and leadership often seen or perceived as ambiguous

According to a Prudential survey, 60 percent of employers indicated the translation gap to be the biggest obstacle to hiring veterans, while the majority of veterans worry about how to translate their skills to a business environment.²⁴ Meanwhile, nearly half of all veterans voiced concern that civilian supervisors without military experience do not understand the military culture.²⁵

Employers who’ve committed to hiring veterans and veterans with disabilities report that former military members do a notable job of explaining what they can do but tend not to promote themselves. On the employer side, too often hiring managers and recruiters don’t have military experience or have not been

trained to translate that experience into the civilian workplace. A lack of knowledge or insight on the part of employer hiring representatives, combined with veterans’ hesitancy to market themselves, can lead to disappointing job interviews.

Eggert calls this the “lost in translation” phenomenon. She encourages employers to do a better job of learning the language of the military and to understand the perspectives of transitioning service members. Considering that less than one-half of 1 percent of U.S. citizens are actively serving in the military and only about one-third of Americans know someone who serves, there is a “significant lack of interface” among

the populace related to the military and those who serve. Companies would be wise to educate their hiring managers and recruiters, and it would be in their interest to educate their own workforce about military service, the value of it and what veterans bring to the workplace. “It’s our job to inform and provide context and enable military-associated hiring,” said Eggert of employers.

The strength of the military culture can be translated into civilian organizational outcomes. (See table on Page 23) Understanding how much veterans hold mission in high esteem, along with a loss of mission many feel when transitioning out of military service, employers may want to consider incorporating “the mission” theme into veteran-hiring programs. It may

Veterans’ voices: transitioning out of the service

There is a significant lack of interface between military and civilian worlds. Here are two veterans’ experiences of transitioning, along with tips for employers and veterans on ways to narrow the cultural learning curve.

“It was like going through adolescence again,” said Leah Nicholls, a former U.S. Marine who served in Afghanistan and then worked her way into becoming the area manager for Encompass Home Health & Hospice in Murray, Utah. “I felt like I was going through some of the most awkward things in my life, and here I was, a combat veteran with what felt like years’ worth of knowledge standing in a suit in front of people and sweating.

“As for my disability (she has PTSD and a traumatic brain injury), it always affects everything that I do, and all parts of my life. However, I do not let it disturb me in a negative way. While transitioning, I felt insecure and scared, but I knew that if I let it, I could climb into a very dark hole with my disabilities and not move forward with my life. I couldn’t afford that, and I don’t know anyone who willingly takes that path. I took matters into my own hands and became my own advocate. I sought out mentors and educational paths to help me get ahead of it and move along in my transition.”

Sam Johnson, who led Marines as a field artillery officer for 10 years, said he initially felt lost communicating in the civilian workplace.

“Two different languages,” he said. “Even though we’re saying the same thing, the military has its own language, while corporate America has its own.”

Johnson, who has a degree in mechanical engineering, today works as a project manager for a large regional power company.



Leah Nicholls, Marine

“The linchpin is the recruiter,” he said, adding many recruiters don’t know or understand the military. “It’s a real barrier, and something that companies who want to hire veterans need to address.” He also suggests that employers can help transitioning veterans by starting, encouraging or supporting business resource groups. (See Page 13.) Johnson also has advice for transitioning service members: “They need to manage their expectations as they transition out of the military. They have lots of high expectations of jobs they are qualified for and earning potential; however, they need to realize that starting in a leadership position could be a challenge and they may have to find work that is more entry level at first.”

be an effective way to attract veterans. An example: “Let us provide you with your next mission” may be a message to weave into your outreach to veterans. Other ideas may come from the table below.

To help address this “lost in translation” gap, Fiserv requires military awareness training for all hiring managers, supervisors and recruiters. This training includes military cultural awareness for the managers, as well as targeted behavioral interviewing techniques to help get a better understanding of how a candidate’s military experience relates to the job.

Unique challenges facing veterans with disabilities

Another layer to the transition challenge for veterans with disabilities involves figuring out if and how their injury or disability will impact day-to-day job performance. Many fear workplace discrimination.

This concern over job discrimination is not exclusive to veterans; it’s a common issue in the workforce, as

more than one-fifth—or 53 million—adults in the United States live with a disability. As is the case with anyone who has returned to work after acquiring a disability, much of this learning process is likely figured out in time, by trial and error, and with an understanding that the impact of a disability may also change over time.

Bottom line: employment is quickest way for disabled veterans to integrate

Stigma and negative perceptions of veterans in the media have contributed to a military/civilian cultural gap that dates back to the Vietnam War. As a result, too often those who have not served prejudice those who have. That extends to veterans’ skills, any service-connected injuries they have experienced and disability in general.²⁶ However, research shows getting a meaningful job provides the swiftest channel to a successful reintegration for veterans with disabilities.²⁷ A solid job may be the best and quickest way to support a productive transition from military to civilian life and to bridge the “lost in translation” gap.

Translating military strengths into organizational outcomes

Military strength	Translation	Organizational outcome
Team driven, highly structured	Trust and faith in team, leadership	Increased cohesion, morale, performance
Focused on contingency planning	Flexible, adaptive, problem-solver	Adaptation to changing priorities, goals, tasks
Requires world travel	Tolerance, cultural sensitivity, ability to work in highly diverse team environments	Adaptation to globalized business environments and demographic changes

Northrop Grumman, others lend a helping hand with transition

Northrop Grumman is a company leading the way in hiring and helping veterans with disabilities transition to the private sector. Through Operation IMPACT (Injured Military Pursuing Assisted Career Transition), the company, based in Falls Church, Virginia, has designed an award-winning diversity program that assists post-9/11 veterans with significant disabilities as they transition from the military to civilian careers by providing career transition support to military service members and their families.

In 2009, the company further boosted its efforts to help those with service-connected injuries get career transition help, leading to stable

employment, with the launch of the Network of Champions. The notion in starting the network was understanding that there's no one company that fits everyone's needs; the network helps give candidates their best job opportunities. As part of the network, private-sector employers, nonprofit organizations and federal agencies share the commitment to provide a wider network for job opportunities for veterans. The Network of Champions boasts dozens of employers, from Aetna to Wal-Mart, who are also committed to transitioning and hiring veterans with disabilities. The employers involved also share and adopt best practices when it comes to recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans with disabilities.

A photograph of Retired Army Col. Gregory D. Gadson, a Black man with a beard, wearing a dark suit and tie, sitting in a wheelchair. He is positioned on a stage, looking towards the left. In the background, there are several American flags and a podium. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the subject against a dark background.

Retired Army Col. Gregory D. Gadson, is a shining example of the resilience shown by so many veterans who've sacrificed for our nation. After losing his legs serving in Iraq, he went on to find and manage Patriot Strategies LLC. With his unique understanding of the abilities of veterans – even those changed by military service – he consults and assists companies with rapid staffing on matters related to security. A member of DAV Chapter 11 in Alexandria, Va. and a motivational speaker, Gadson is perhaps best known for starring in the movie Battleship as Lt. Col. Mick Canales.

(Photo by Mike Kaplan/U.S. Air Force)



Research shows getting a meaningful job provides the swiftest channel to a successful reintegration for veterans with disabilities.

Employee resource groups help bridge military-civilian divide

Supporting our nation's service members and veterans has been a driving mission at Ford Motor Company for 98 years. It began with Henry Ford, who first hired disabled veterans returning from World War I. In 1922, he donated 50 Model T Fords to help DAV's founding members attend the organization's second national convention. The company has continued its dedication to the military community and their families, and today employs more than 6,000 veterans and hundreds of reservists and guardsmen.

This commitment to veterans goes beyond hiring—Ford understands the importance of providing support to retain its military workforce. For example, when National Guard and Reserve members were increasingly called upon during the military surge of 2007, the company launched an initiative to help its returning employees.

“We saw a clear need to help our co-workers who were struggling with reintegration issues,” explained Dan Fink, a retired Marine and Ford fuel economy planning analyst, who serves as recruiting lead for Ford Veterans Network Group. “We knew we had to do something.”

Ford Veterans Network Group, or VET NG, is a voluntary, worker-led network of military veterans,

guardsmen and reservists. The group seeks to raise awareness within Ford about its veterans, as well as advance their growth and development. It also helps others at the company better understand veteran-related issues and these individuals' unique contributions and value.



VET NG also supports military members and their families during deployments by sending their deployed colleagues care packages and helping those families affected with home front concerns, from home repairs and maintenance to answering questions about benefits and resources.

In addition, the company holds service members' jobs for their return, supplements their salaries while they are deployed (should military pay fall short) and helps ease their transition when they return to work.

“Whether they are re-assimilating after deployment or joining an organization for the first time, people want to feel like they are part of the team,” Fink said. “A veteran corporate affinity group like VET NG can accelerate that process by linking them with people who have shared the same experiences and understand military life.”

CHAPTER 6

UNDERSTANDING PTSD AND TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Research reveals that many veterans are perceived or stereotyped by employers as having a disability such as depression, PTSD or brain injury.²⁸ Since people can have difficulty understanding something they cannot see, education and awareness is critical for employers and employees alike.

Understanding PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a traumatic event or ordeal in which a person thinks that his or her life or others' lives are in danger. PTSD can be diagnosed in anyone who has trouble coping with or recovering from a trauma.

Some traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults (physical, sexual, child abuse), witnessing death or injury, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents and military combat. In fact, 60 percent of all men and half of all women will likely experience at least one trauma during their lives.²⁹ Not every traumatized person develops ongoing or even short-term PTSD—and not everyone with PTSD has been through a dangerous event. Some experiences, like the unexpected death of a loved one, can also lead to a clinical diagnosis of PTSD.

Understanding TBI

Traumatic brain injury, or TBI, occurs in both civilian and military populations. In fact, TBI in the civilian population is eight times as frequent as breast cancer, AIDS, spinal-cord injury and multiple sclerosis combined. According to the Center for Deployment Psychology,³⁰ an estimated 10 to 20 percent of all service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan sustained a TBI, with most being mild (sometimes referred to as concussions).

People with PTSD and TBI can work and be effective employees in a wide variety of different jobs. Accommodations often are simple to put in place, and do not cost much time or effort on the part of

the employer. For example, an employee might dim the lights, use larger fonts, remove distractions, take regular breaks, implement organizational skills or take notes in meetings, among many other potentially helpful changes. Other helpful resources employers hiring veterans with disabilities should know about include Make the Connection and the Veterans Crisis Line.

It often takes little, if any, accommodation to help an employee with PTSD or TBI, whether a veteran or not, to be a tremendous asset to your company.

For additional reading:

Make the Connection
maketheconnection.net

Veterans Crisis Line
veteranscrisisline.net



Misconceptions about PTSD

Christian Benedetto Jr., a Marine veteran of the Persian Gulf War, is the founder of PTSDJournal, a print and digital publication that delivers in-depth research articles, personal narratives and alternative solutions for managing post-traumatic stress. He says stereotypes and misconceptions about invisible wounds create a professional hurdle for those who've served.

"The idea of the 'crazy veteran' has become immortalized in film and media," he said. "That inevitably leads to misconceptions that employers might have about veterans and adds another potential hurdle in their transition to civilian life.

"But invisible injuries aren't limited to those who have served in the military. It's been said the most common causes for PTSD and traumatic brain injuries in the United States are automobile accidents. But an employer would never avoid hiring a qualified candidate because he or she was rear-ended.

"In spite of how a veteran may have been changed by their military service, on the whole they are far more reliable and focused on mission accomplishment than their peers who did not serve. Veterans are, by nature, resilient and loyal. They are collaborators who take care of their team members and make the organization's needs and goals their priorities. Foremost, they're looking for an opportunity to contribute. And employers who make hiring and retaining veterans a priority are making good decisions for their corporate culture and their bottom line."



Christian Benedetto, Marine

CHECKLIST

HIRING AND RETAINING VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

You've discovered a proven pool of talent to hire from: veterans with disabilities. America's veterans are team-oriented employees with job-ready skills who come with tested leadership abilities and strong work ethics. Here's a checklist for success in hiring and retaining these highly prized workers.

Hiring

- Secure leadership buy-in. Get top brass to prioritize hiring veterans with disabilities. The *DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities* can help you make the business case.
- Identify one or more veterans in your organization to help with the hiring initiative. Recruit employees in your organization who have military experience to help review candidate resumes and translate relevant skills and job experience. They can also help assess how a candidate may best fit into your organization.
- Train your recruiting and hiring managers. They should be knowledgeable about the skill sets veterans bring, military job types and types of disabilities veterans may present with. The *DAV Guide to Hiring and Retaining Veterans with Disabilities* lists several resources that can help you get started.
- Make your organization's hiring process veteran-friendly. Make sure job announcements communicate your support for hiring veterans with disabilities and how veterans' skill sets will fit in your workplace. For promising candidates, consider matching them with an employee who is a veteran to provide tips before job interviews.
- Team up with DAV or another veterans service organization with an employment program. This can help you jump-start your company's effort to recruit and hire veterans with disabilities.
- Once you've found the right veteran hire for your organization, put in place steps to ensure long-term success for both you and your new employee.

Retaining

- Add information to your onboarding process that is specific to veterans. This can include your organization's structure, promotion pathways, and employment and disability resources.
- Alert human resources and employee assistance personnel of best practices in disability employment. Veteran retention is highest when organizations provide ongoing professional development and connection to a support network.
- Bookmark the Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org/index.html). The network is a helpful, ongoing training and one-on-one guidance resource for managers to support and supervise veterans with disabilities.
- Identify employees who can serve as mentors to new veteran hires. Mentoring helps veterans understand what it takes to be successful in a business environment versus a military one. Pair your new employee with someone who has long-term experience.
- Get feedback from all your employees, including veterans. Whether through surveys or regularly checking in with employees, feedback can help you know how your veteran-hiring strategies are working, gauge the satisfaction levels of your hires and help improve company hiring efforts.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Disability is complex, multidimensional and very personal. The definition of the word “disability” often depends on the context—and conflicting definitions are common, all leading to confusion. For example, disability is defined differently by the Social Security Administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the World Health Organization, post-secondary education and the civilian workforce.

This guide to various legal requirements should help you better navigate this complicated terrain.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else, including employment opportunities. Title I of the ADA prohibits an employer from treating an applicant or employee unfavorably in all aspects of employment—including hiring, promotions, job assignments, training, termination and any other terms, conditions and privileges of employment—because of disability, a history of having a disability or because the employer regards a person as having a disability. The ADA also limits the medical information employers may obtain and prohibits disability-based harassment and retaliation. The ADA provides that applicants and employees with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation when it comes to applying for jobs, performing their jobs, and enjoying equal benefits and privileges of employment.

Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974

The Rehabilitation Act of 1974 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in three areas: employment by the executive branch of the federal government, employment by most federal government contractors, and activities funded by federal subsidies or grants. Section 503 of the act requires any entity or party entering into a contract exceeding \$10,000 with a federal department or agency for the procurement of personal property and nonpersonal services (including construction) needs to take affirmative action to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities, including veterans who identify as a person with a disability. Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. Section 504 is to the executive branch, federal contractors and most institutions of higher education what the ADA is to private and other employers (with 15 or more employees), including state and local governments.

Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) grants qualified employees a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during a 12-month period for health-related reasons, including ongoing medical treatments and doctor appointments, childbirth, family illness or personal health reasons that prevent the person from performing job duties. In most cases, the employee is guaranteed return to work in the same or comparable position. FMLA applies to private employers with 50 or more employees, state and local governments, and most federal employers. In January 2008 and 2010, the FMLA was amended to permit:

- **Qualifying Exigency Leave.** Eligible employees who are the spouse, son, daughter or parent of a military member may take up to 12 weeks of FMLA leave during any 12-month period to address the most common issues that arise when a military member is deployed to a foreign country, such as attending military-sponsored functions, making appropriate financial and legal arrangements, and arranging for alternative child care. This provision applies to the families of members of both the active duty and reserve components of the armed forces.

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- **Military Caregiver Leave.** Eligible employees who are the spouse, son, daughter, parent or next of kin of a covered service member may take up to 26 weeks of FMLA leave during a single 12-month period to care for the service member who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation or therapy; is otherwise in outpatient status; or is on the temporary disability retired list for a serious injury or illness incurred or aggravated in the line of duty. This provision applies to the families of members of both the active duty and reserve components of the armed forces.

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act

The Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployments Rights Act (USERRA) is intended to ensure that individuals who serve or have served in the armed forces, Reserve, National Guard or other uniformed services are not disadvantaged in their civilian careers because of their service or discriminated against in employment based on past, present or future military service. The act also requires that service members are promptly re-employed in their civilian jobs upon their return from duty. Under USERRA, employers must make “reasonable efforts,” such as training, to help a veteran who is returning to employment after military service to become qualified to perform the duties of the position, whether or not the veteran has a service-connected disability.

Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act

The Vietnam Era Veteran’s Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) requires that businesses with a federal contract or subcontract in the amount of \$25,000 or more take affirmative action to employ and advance qualified disabled veterans. VEVRAA also requires these businesses to list their employment openings with the appropriate employment service and to give covered veterans priority in referral to such openings.

Other resources for employers

To learn more about recruitment, hiring and retention of veterans with disabilities, explore the extensive resources published by the industry thought leaders and government entities committed to supporting transitioning service member and veteran hiring.

Department of Labor

The Department of Labor has a number of resources available for employers, including the following:

- Resources for Employers
- Veterans’ Employment and Training Services (VETS)
- Work Opportunity Tax Credit information
- Compliance Assistance: Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides patient care and federal benefits to veterans and their dependents. Some VA services are available to assist with veteran employment:

- Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Services: VetSuccess Program
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment
- Make the Connection
- Veterans Crisis Line

Institute for Veterans and Military Families

Resident at Syracuse University, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is an interdisciplinary academic institute singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation’s military veterans and their families.

- Online toolkits and best practices for employers

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- Employment topics
 - The Workforce Readiness Research Series

Job Accommodation Network

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) offers one-on-one guidance on workplace accommodations, the ADA and related legislation, and self-employment and entrepreneurship options for people with disabilities.

- Employer Information
- Training
- Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Military Cultural Competence Online Course

The Military Cultural Competence online course offers more information about military rank structure, branches of service, the difference between active and reserve components, demographics of military personnel, and general and deployment-related terms.

National Center for PTSD

The VA's National Center for PTSD conducts research and education on trauma and PTSD. The website offers extensive information for employers about veterans and on coping, treatment, educational materials and more.

PyschArmor Institute

The PyschArmor Institute provides free education and support for all Americans to engage effectively with the military community. It features the Comcast NBCUniversal-sponsored employer course School for Guard, Reserve & Veteran Employers.

Society for Human Resource Management

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management, and includes information on military employment.

USERRA Advanced e-Learning Course

The USERRA of 1994 is the federal law that establishes rights and responsibilities for members of the Reserve and National Guard and their civilian employers. USERRA affects employment, re-employment, employment benefits and retention in employment, when employees serve or have served in the uniformed services.

Veteran Jobs Mission

Employment and training resources.

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) provides free training, resources and publications on disability inclusion topics.

Veterans Employment Toolkit

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Employment Toolkit also provides the following one-pagers aimed at educating the civilian workforce about military service and veterans overall:

- A brief introduction to the military workplace culture
- Chain of Command and Authority
- Positive Outcomes of Military Service
- What It Means to Be Mission Oriented

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Americans with Disabilities Act: <https://adata.org/>

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 503: <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/section503.htm>, and Section 504, <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/sec504.htm>

Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployments Rights Act: <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm>

Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act: <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/vevraa.htm>

Department of Labor Resources for Employers: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/audience/aud-employers.htm>

Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS): <http://www.dol.gov/vets/>

Department of Labor Work Opportunity Tax Credit information: <http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/>

Compliance assistance: Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA): <http://www.dol.gov/whd/flsa/>

Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Services: VetSuccess Program: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/vsocfactsheet.asp>

Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp>

Department of Veterans Affairs Make the Connection: <https://maketheconnection.net/>

Veterans Crisis Line: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

Institute for Veterans and Military Families Online toolkits and best practices for employers: <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/2017/11/19/pvec-toolkit/>

Institute for Veterans and Military Families Employment topics: <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/research/topics/employment/>

Institute for Veterans and Military Families the Workforce Readiness Research Series: <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/research/topics/employment/workforce-readiness/>

Job Accommodation Network Employer information: <http://askjan.org/empl/index.htm>

Job Accommodation Network Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): https://askjan.org/disabilities/Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder-PTSD.cfm?cssearch=2447038_1

Military Cultural Competence online course: <https://vets.academy.reliaslearning.com/Military-Cultural-Competence-Online-Course.aspx>

National Center for PTSD: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>

PyschArmor Institute: <https://psycharmor.org>

School for Guard, Reserve & Veteran Employers: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/hiring-retaining-national-guard-reserve-members>

Society for Human Resource Management Military Employment: <https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/Pages/Military-Employment-Resource-Page.aspx>

USERRA Advanced e-Learning Course: <http://nvti.ucdenver.edu/training/userra101basics.htm>

Veteran Jobs Mission: <https://www.veteranjobsmission.com/employer-resources>

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion: <http://www.askearn.org/>

Veterans Employment Toolkit: A brief introduction to the military workplace culture: <https://content.iospress.com/download/work/wor01987?id=work%2Fwor01987>

Veterans Employment Toolkit: Chain of Command and Authority: https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_authority.asp

Veterans Employment Toolkit: Positive Outcomes of Military Service: https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_positiveChanges.asp

Veterans Employment Toolkit: What It Means to Be Mission Oriented: https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_missionOriented.asp

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Recognizing excellence

Every year at its national convention, DAV honors entities who go above and beyond the call of duty to recruit, retain and recognize veterans and their spouses through the DAV National Employer Awards Program.

It recognizes companies and agencies in three distinct categories:

Large For companies with more than 1,000 employees.

Midsize For companies with 250–999 employees.

Small For companies with 249 or fewer employees.

Companies are evaluated based on the strength of their veteran recruiting/hiring efforts; retention and career-building efforts; company policies toward disabled veterans, active-duty, and veteran employees; and community outreach initiatives to support all veterans in communities where the business operates.

Information on the program and nominations can be found at jobs.DAV.org under the “FOR EMPLOYERS” tab or by emailing employment@DAV.org.



ABOUT DAV

A leading nonprofit, DAV provides a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations and their families. Every year, DAV helps more than 1 million veterans in positive, life-changing ways by helping them access the benefits they earned—like healthcare, education and disability—and connecting them to meaningful employment. Veterans helping veterans, DAV has over 1,200 chapters and more than 1 million members across the country.

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DAV offers employers and their veteran employees a wide variety of services that include:

- Hiring events • Benefits assistance • Information seminars • Diversity inclusion presentations
- Employer recognition • Volunteer opportunities

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