Tapping the Talents of Veterans with Disabilities:
Steps to Success
Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

- A resource for employers seeking to proactively recruit, hire, retain and advance qualified employees with disabilities
  - Access trainings, webinars and numerous publications
- Funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy
- Collaborative of multiple partners with different perspectives
- Visit website at [http://AskEARN.org](http://AskEARN.org)
How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of steps employers can take to attract and hire veterans with disabilities and facilitate their success once on the job?
Dr. Nancy A. Glowacki

Women Veteran Program Manager
Department of Labor (DOL)
Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS)
Are You Using Disability Etiquette Equally Among Both Veterans and Non-Veterans?

“When supervisors and co-workers use disability etiquette, employees with disabilities feel more comfortable and work more productively.”

Tips on Interacting With People With Disabilities,
United Spinal Association

“When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first – to focus on the person, not the disability.”

Effective Interaction: Communicating With and About People with Disabilities in the Workplace,
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
Which of the following terms do **NOT** practice disability etiquette?

- Individual with a disability
- Individual with a significant disability
- Disabled Veteran
- Special Disabled Veteran
“Put the person first. Say ‘person with a disability’ rather than ‘disabled person.’” —Tips, United Spinal Association

Which of the following terms do NOT practice Disability Etiquette?

- Individual with a disability
- Individual with a significant disability
- Disabled Veteran
- Special Disabled Veteran

AskEARN.org
“Effective communication… what information needs to be transmitted and how it is best transmitted.” Effective, DOL ODEP

So why do we have these terms and where do they come from?

**U.S. Code Title 29 – Labor**

Laws include “…disability employment policy…” and “…eliminating barriers to the training and employment of people with disabilities…”

**U.S. Code Title 38 - Veterans’ Benefits**

Laws include “…payment of disability compensation…” and “…assessment of the needs of veterans with respect to disability compensation…”

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Title 29 (Labor) Definitions Include:

- **Individual With a Disability:** Any individual who has a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.

- **Individual With a Significant Disability:** An individual with a disability who has a severe physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome, whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time, and who has one or more physical or mental disabilities determined to cause substantial functional limitation.

- **Disability:** A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment.
Title 38 (Veterans’ Benefits) Definitions Include:

- **Disabled Veteran:** A veteran who is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs and those who were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability.

- **Special Disabled Veteran:** A veteran who is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs for a disability rated at 30 percent or more, or rated at 10 or 20 percent in the case of a veteran who has been determined to have a serious employment handicap and those who were discharged or released from active duty because of service-connected disability.

- **Service-connected:** Such disability was incurred or aggravated in line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service.
“Disability does not define a person. Don’t make him/her into a hero or victim.” Tips, United Spinal Association

• Did you know that the Army Wounded Warrior program (AW2) was once called the Army’s Disabled Soldier Support System (DS3)?
  • Why do you suppose this changed?

• Today if you do an internet search for “wounded warrior” you’ll find government programs, non-profit programs, and private sector programs – each with it’s own definition.
“Etiquette is based on respect and courtesy… Do not make assumptions…”  **Effective**, DOL ODEP

- Avoid making employment-related assumptions based on terms that apply to qualification for health-care services and compensation benefits

  **Example:** Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is defined in Title 38 as “psychological trauma, which in the judgment of a VA mental health professional resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the veteran was serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training”

  - VA reports that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 100 men respond “yes” when being screened for MST
  - Did you know that these rates only apply to veterans receiving health care at the VA and cannot be generalized to all veterans?
Avoid negative, disempowering words like “victim” or “sufferer…” Tips, United Spinal Association

- MST is an experience, it is not a diagnosis.
- Did you know that half of active duty survivors of military sexual assault are men?
  - In a RAND Military Workplace Study, 1% of men and 4.9% of women were sexually assaulted (penetrative or non-penetrative) in the past year (estimated 10,600 men and 9,600 women).
- Did you know that women on college and university campuses are more likely to be sexually assaulted than military women serving on active duty?
  - According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 19% of undergraduate women reported experiencing sexual assault (completed or attempted) since entering college.
- Free treatment for mental and physical health related to MST is available through VA medical centers and Vet Centers.
  - Veterans do not need to have a VA disability rating, do not need to be eligible for other VA health care, do not need to have reported the incident, and do not need to have documentation to receive treatment.
  - Veterans should feel free to ask for a clinician of a preferred gender.
“People with disabilities are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and problems and joys. Treat them as individuals.”

**Choice of language depends on the purpose**

- To determine qualification for a specific program:
  - “This program requires a service-connected disability rated at 30% or more – do you meet that criteria?”

- To measure how your organization is doing in terms of diversity:
  - “We are reviewing our hiring practices to ensure inclusion of veterans with service-connected disabilities. Employees who wish to help can fill out this form. Responses are/are not confidential”

- To provide reasonable accommodations:
  - “Are there any accommodations you will need to perform the duties of this job?”

- To refer to an individual person or group:
  - “Yes, we have hired many veterans with disabilities – both with service-connected disabilities and with non-service-connected disabilities.”

- When in doubt – be clear about the purpose and simply ask the individual what their preference is!
Tapping the Talents of Veterans with Disabilities: Steps to Success

Brett Sheats
National Project Director
EARN

AskEARN.org
The Transition Mindset

• An unexpected, often unwanted transition
  • How do I deal with completely new life circumstances?

• Loss of identity, motivation, vocation
  • What am I capable of doing?
  • What does “meaningful work” mean to me?
The Transition Mindset (continued)

- Almost 60% of respondents feared disability discrimination in hiring
- Almost half (46%) agreed/strongly agreed that their disability would prevent them from obtaining many jobs
- Less than half (44%) were comfortable communicating their accommodation needs with an employer
- Those with PTSD/TBI fear disability discrimination more

*EARN Research on Veterans with Disabilities, 2013*
Creating an Inclusive Workplace

Inclusive Culture

• Include veteran and disability-related topics in diversity initiatives
• Include in internal and external policy statements
• Establish universal policies for productivity tools and workplace flexibility
• Provide guidance to mid-level managers and supervisors of roles and responsibilities
• Communicate to employees at all levels
• Establish an employee resource group
Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Veterans

Veterans’ Employee Resource Group

Addressing the benefits of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in promoting a disability-inclusive work culture

- Builds camaraderie and morale
- Promotes self-disclosure
- Assists in recruitment and retention
- Boosts productivity
- Promotes and educates staff on veteran and disability-related issues
- Helps companies improve their products and reach new customers
- Supports important projects and initiatives

"Fostering Disability-Inclusive Workplaces Through Employee Resource Groups“
Veteran and Disability Etiquette

• By knowing the appropriate language when interacting with a veteran with a disability, you can overcome the concerns of saying or doing the wrong thing:

  • **Don’t ask:**
    • Did you see combat?
    • Did you have to kill anyone?
    • How did you get hurt?

  • **Do ask:**
    • What did you do in the military?
    • What was your rank? What does that mean?
    • Where were you stationed?
    • Did you like being in the military?
    • Did you go anywhere during your time in the military?
    • What do you miss from military life?
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Pat Maldonado
Military Program Strategist
HirePurpose
Best Practices

• Identify key roles in your organization
• Identify resources in your organization to help source talent
• Train Hiring managers and Recruiters
• Attend base career fairs
• Leverage Employee Resource Groups (ERG)
• Identify and promote benefits and perks that are specific to service members/veterans your organization offers to candidates?
Best Practices Continued

- Accommodate individuals with disabilities
- Accessible parking, building entries and bathroom access
- Office environments are modular and can adjust to accommodate most needs
- Make adjustments to accommodate as needed
Contact Information

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Resources

• Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN): http://www.AskEARN.org/
• Job Accommodation Network (JAN): http://AskJAN.org/
• Veterans.gov Employment Resources: http://www.Veterans.gov/
• DOL VETS Women Veterans: https://www.dol.gov/VETS/WomenVeterans
• Veterans Crisis Line:
  • Chat online https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/
  • 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1
  • Or send a text message to 838255
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