

# Welcoming Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace

**will begin at 2 pm ET**

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- TransCen, Inc.
  - Mission Statement: Improving lives of people with disabilities through meaningful work and community inclusion
- Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, a project of TransCen, Inc.
  - Funded by National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



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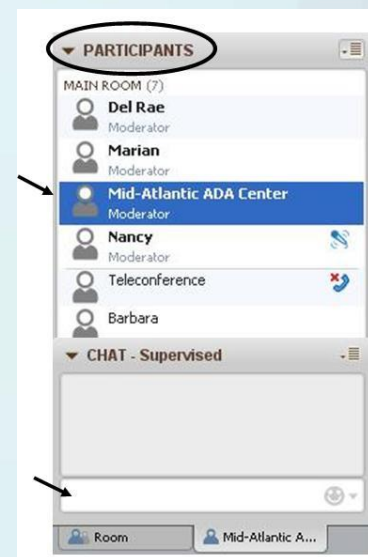
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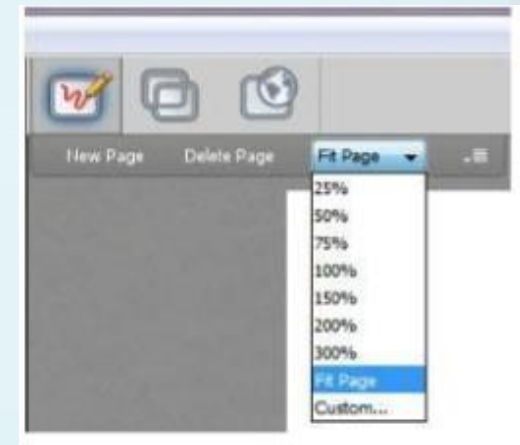
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# Welcoming Veterans with Disabilities in the Workplace

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# Agenda

- Who is a Veteran?
- What Veterans Say – Pilot Study
- Military Culture 101 and impacts work culture and employee engagement
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Creating the most welcoming workplace possible
- Resources



# Purpose

- To educate the community about veterans with disabilities transitioning to the workplace.
- To learn how to create a welcoming environment for veterans with disabilities in the workplace.
- Enhance awareness of unique aspects of military culture
- Identify attitudes and behaviors that can effect veterans with disabilities and examine how that might impact on employee engagement in the business culture.



# Who is a Veteran?



- Might not know or recognize
- No standardized legal definition of "military veteran".
- Former member of an Armed Forces Service (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) who served on active duty and discharged under other than dishonorable (VA, 2015)
- Different Components (Active, Guard, Reserve) Officers, NCO's, Warrant Officers, and Enlisted.
- Differences in experiences / combat, special operations, units, positions, and jobs.
- Veterans have own language, symbols, and gathering places.
- Veterans as a group not often viewed as a culture

# Background: Military Terms



**Branch of Service:** Army, Air Force,  
Navy, Marines, Coast Guard

**Component:** Active, Reserve, Guard

**Rank:** Officer, Warrant Officer, Enlisted

Department of Defense (DoD)  
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

## Combat Veteran (CV)

- ✓ Military member ordered to foreign soil or waters to participate in direct or support activity against an enemy (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).
- ✓ Military member who experiences any level of hostility for any duration resulting from offensive, defensive, or friendly fire military action involving a real or perceived enemy in any foreign theater.



# Background

- 22 M Veterans of the US Armed Forces (Manzo, Bruno, & Duncan, 2016).
- Monumental shift in military strategy and increased stress on 2.8 M CV's (Brodie, 2015; Baylis & Gray, 2015; Freedman, 2015).
- CV's face difficulties coping with their personal lives, relationships, and families when they return to life as a civilian (Currier et al., 2015).
- 22 Veteran suicides daily (Bryan et al., 2015; Smith, et al. 2016).
- 46% diagnosed with a mental health illness effecting ability to function in society (Smith, Goldstein, & Grant, 2016).



# What Veterans Say...Recent Pilot Survey

## Direct Data from Ten (10) Veterans with Disabilities:

- Exposed to good leaders and do not accept poor leadership (9)
- Not all veterans are alike (combat, support, admin, medical, etc) (6)
- Expect to be held accountable and hold leaders accountable (8)
- Clear chain of command and decision making authority critical (8)
- Exposed to war, aggression, hostilities, and life threatening situations (7)
- Our training is often just as difficult and extreme (7)
- Witnessed atrocities, human suffering, and people at their worst (6)

# What Veterans Say...(cont.)

- Deployed multiple times to many locations around the world (8)
- Move our families every 3 years and change jobs every year or so (8)
- Accustom to a physical fitness component for our development (7)
- Taking care of the people under us is a major priority (6)
- Well defined, expectations, and job description is important to us (7)
- Selfish and substandard behavior is frowned on and not accepted (8)
- We are willing to work long and extra hours (9)

# What Veterans Say...(cont.)

- Straight shooters and “tell it like it is” (not political) (6)
- Motivated by values and service versus business and money (9)
- Like to think outside the box (8)
- Expect opportunities to lead (8)
- Motivated by rewards, promotions, and advancement opportunities (6)
- Family component is very important (6)
- Enjoy working in teams (5)
- We are also the same as other people (6)
- Used to time off and not “mickey mouse stuff to just work on” (8)

# Military Culture and its Impact in the Workplace

- Good Leadership
  - Involvement in planning for accommodations with leadership
  - Knowledge that accommodation will be in place and taken care of
  - Orientation to the organization, leadership, culture, and mission
  - Ensure understanding and support from leadership chain
  - Ensure all leaders in the company know how to address disability concerns

# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- Exposed to extreme emotional and physical threats
- Knowledge of individual concerns
- Placement and orientation of cubicle/office
- Access to fire routes and evacuation plans
- Heightened sense of safety for self and others
- Physical conditioning and family time is very important

# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- High Degree of Accountability and Responsibility
  - Autonomy is important
  - Expected to be held accountable for the team success and failure
  - Involvement in the planning process is recommended
  - Solicit feedback and advice

# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- Strong Teamwork
  - Works well in teams
  - Opportunity to relate to other veterans within and outside the organization
  - Opportunities to train and care for subordinates paramount



# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- Unique Communication Style
- Clarify use of acronyms
- Clear and direct decision making authority/chain of command
- Clarify expectations and job requirements

# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- High degree of dedication and mission focus
- Loyalty to organization and belief in mission – more than just a job
- Opportunities to grow within the organization (promotions, awards)
- Values mentoring and supporting others in the organization

# Military Culture 101 and Impact in the Workplace

- Different yet Similar Experiences
- Important to get to know individual and their experiences in the military – ask questions
- Expect fair treatment and acknowledge difference in experiences and value that difference contributes to the workplace

# Other Culture / Considerations

- Pre-dispositioned prior to Service
- Trauma: Sensitivity to triggers and heightened sense of safety
- Mental health stigma and help from others
- Counseling: performance vs. mental health
- Trained to reactions - Less sense of emotions and feelings
- Trained in specific skills – And all “warfighters” at basic training
- Used to “hurry up and wait” culture, and held responsible for their people

# Other Culture / Considerations (Continued)

- Allowed to have a voice and provide input: Then follow orders
- Be open to listen without judgments: Do not stereotype
- Professionally trained force: Officers plan and NCO's execute
- Officers are also diplomats
- Lots of responsibility at young age: Sense of confidence
- Applicability to other professions

# Common Disabilities Experienced by Veterans

- Amputees
- Hearing Loss (Tinnitus)
- Back Problems
- Muscular-Skeletal Disorders
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Mental Health – depression, anxiety, addictions, PTSD



# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)



- Trauma- and stressor-related disorder - Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence
- 7 - 8% will develop PTSD (10% of women; 4% of men)
- Military Veterans: 11-20% (Afghanistan and Iraq), 15% of Vietnam veterans and 12% of Gulf War veterans
- Symptoms can include:
  - Re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognition and mood, and arousal.
  - PTSD symptoms usually start soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later.





## Lets Discuss Reasonable Accommodation



# Reasonable Accommodation

- Any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities
- *Purpose - Equal employment opportunity: opportunity to attain same level of performance or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment*



# When Can Accommodations Be Requested?

- Application process
- Performance of the essential functions of the position
- Enjoyment of equal benefits and privileges of employment



# Accommodation Basics

- Must be an *effective* accommodation
- Need not be *best* accommodation, just *effective*
- Personal devices not required
- Employer not prevented from providing extra accommodations



# Effective/Reasonable...



- Making modifications to increase facility accessibility
- Job restructuring
- Flexible scheduling
- Acquiring new equipment
- Providing qualified readers and interpreters
- Modification of application and testing procedures and training materials

# Basic Roles & Responsibilities

## Employees

- Request/disclose
- Provide documentation
- Participate in the process

## Employers

- Verify need
- Maintain confidentiality
- Participate in the process

# The Interactive Process: Questions to Cover

- What are the specific essential functions the employee is unable to perform?
- What ideas does the employee have for accommodations?
- What documentation do you need to verify the need for accommodation?
- What accommodation will be effective?



# Providing Reasonable Accommodation

- Develop expertise – know your accommodation resources
- Streamline the process
- Clarify sources of funding
- Centralize tracking and reporting
- Clarify who has a role in the process
- Maintain confidentiality
- Coordinate communication with employee



# Engaging Supervisors

- Because of role, they are the key gatekeepers of disability inclusiveness in the workplace
- Make sure managers and supervisors recognize requests
- Training is key!
- Don't forget to bring new managers up-to-speed on accommodations already in place





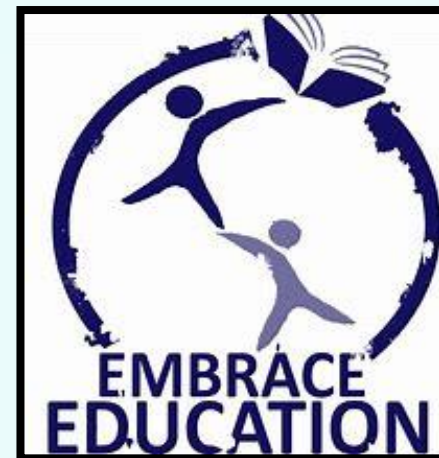
# Documentation

- Describe why documentation is needed (i.e., to verify existence of disability and need for accommodation)
- Describe the type of information needed in the documentation
  - Has a covered disability
  - Functional limitations that the person experiences because of the disability
  - Suggested accommodations in the workplace
- If the information provided does not clarify, employer may send to professional of their choice



# Confidentiality

- Strict legal limitations on use of medical information
- All medical information kept in file separate from personnel records
- Share medical information only on an as-needed basis



# Common Barriers

- Making assumptions about a diagnosis
- Focusing too quickly on leave or reassignment before other accommodations are considered
- Stopping the interactive process because you believe no RA would enable the employee to perform the essential functions
- Assuming a job function is essential simply because the supervisor says it is
- Accommodation isn't properly deployed



# Other Barriers

- Sharing with line managers all the specifics about an employee's impairment
- Dismissing an RA request because on its face it appears unreasonable
- Being too reasonable by eliminating essential functions
- Inconsistency in enforcing policies and standards
- Not creating an atmosphere of trust/ignoring the human element of disability in the workplace



# A Few More

- Eliminating accommodations because “things have changed and we can’t do it anymore”
- Considering performance in deciding whether a request is reasonable
- Failing to engage in the interactive process because the employee request doesn’t include specific ideas
- Defining undue hardship too broadly

# Accommodation Facts



- Estimates that over 70% of employees with disabilities never request an accommodation
- Cost effectiveness: 57% of employers reporting cost data paid nothing\*
- 73% of employers report that accommodations are effective\*

\*Job Accommodation Network (Original 2005, Updated 2007, Updated 2009, Updated 2010, Updated 2011, Updated 2012, Updated 2013, Updated 2014). *Workplace accommodations: Low cost, high impact.* Retrieved April 13, 2015, from <http://AskJAN.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html>

# Creating a Welcoming Environment

- Keep an open mind
- If you have met one veteran, you have met one veteran
- Remember all the aspects of military culture that can transfer to the work environment (leadership, loyalty, autonomy, dedication)
- Proactively educate your employees about accommodations
- When in doubt, ask
- Use your resources



# Resources

- JAN – [www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org)
- The Mid-Atlantic ADA Information Center: [www.adainfo.org](http://www.adainfo.org)
- Veterans Employment Toolkit:  
<https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/>
- Veterans and the ADA: A Guide for Employers:  
[https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada\\_veterans\\_employers.cfm](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada_veterans_employers.cfm)
- Hire Heroes USA – Employment resources for Veterans with Disabilities: [www.hireheroesusa.org](http://www.hireheroesusa.org)

Hire Heroes USA is a non-profit organization which creates job opportunities for US Military Veterans and their spouses through employment training and engagement in the workforce at no cost.



# Questions?



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