

# Engaging combat veterans in the workplace

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, there are more than 20 million civilian veterans of war. Veterans are highly skilled and ready to contribute to the workforce with strong leadership qualities and accountability. Employers are in a unique position to help veterans integrate into normal, productive, and meaningful life, and here is a simple 2-step process:

## **1. Have a basic understanding of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

Military service is demanding, stressful, and dangerous. In combat, military personnel face life and death situations on a daily basis and suffer physical and psychological harm. It is estimated that 20% of veterans suffer from depression and stress-related disorders due to having experienced powerful feelings of fear and helplessness. Combat veterans with PTSD may have difficulty concentrating and feel irritable, depressed, and hyper-alert to danger. The effect of these events can last for a long time. Specific information that helps clear misconceptions and explain how these symptoms affect work-related quality of life and job satisfaction can be found here: [America's Heroes at Work](#).

## **2. Offer training and provide practical support**

The success of rehabilitation programs for veterans of war depends on how soon and how well veterans find a new purpose and meaning in life after returning from combat. Employers can help by offering prompt job reinstatement, accumulation of seniority, access to pension plan benefits, health insurance, training or retraining of job skills, accommodations for the disabled, and protection against discrimination.

A few additional tips to consider:

- **Structure:** Combat veterans may require practical changes in the structure and design of the workday to help reduce stress on the job. Modifying work schedules and allowing more frequent breaks will facilitate higher level of concentration and limit burnout and fatigue.
- **Privacy:** The need for privacy and security may require changes in the layout of workspace. Assigning private office or cubicle will limit distractions and promote working independently. Organizers and check lists help stay productive and on task.
- **Job Description:** Combat veterans are better able to perform job-related tasks when they are broken down to simple steps and more manageable projects. Implementing a job sharing practice will help minimize the potential for distraction, conflict, and stress.
- **Time Requirements:** Combat veterans suffer from poor concentration and may have difficulties with meeting project deadlines. They may not be able to work 5 days a week and 8 hours a day initially. Reducing the number of hours or days and then slowly increasing the time spent at work will help facilitate the veteran's on-the-job success.

[U.S. Department for Veteran Affairs](#) and [U.S. Department of Labor](#) offer additional practical tips and guides for employers and combat veterans, including where to find qualified veterans, how to design a successful hiring strategy, and how to structure compensation, benefits, and transition services.

Employers should also know about Federal Employment Incentives, including Work Opportunity Tax Credit, Special Employment Incentive (SEI), Disabled Tax Credit, and On the Job Training (VR&E). For more information, see [Step-by-Step Toolkit for Employers](#).