



HIRING SERVICE-DISABLED VETERANS: AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED

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ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PERSONNEL AND PROCUREMENT STATISTICS, tens of thousands of veterans serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and surrounding duty stations have lost a hand or limb, been severely burned, blinded, have lost hearing, been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a traumatic brain injury (TBIs) or other service-connected disabilities. Although these service-disabled Vets may require an accommodation in the workplace, many are ready and able to work in the private sector.

While most employers are familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which protects Veterans with disabilities, many are not as familiar with The Uniformed Services Employment Reemployment Rights

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Act (USERRA), which has requirements for re-employing veterans with and without service-connected disabilities.

Although USERRA and the ADA both include reasonable accommodation obligations, USERRA requires employers to go further than the ADA by making reasonable efforts to assist a veteran who is returning to employment in becoming qualified for a job. What this means is that the employer, regardless of size, must help the veteran become qualified to perform the duties of the position whether or not the veteran has a service-connected disability requiring reasonable accommodation. Additionally, reasonable accommodations may be available under USERRA for individuals whose service-connected disabilities may not necessarily meet the ADA's definition of “disability.”

Though not required, an employer may decide to give a veteran with a service-connected disability a preference in hiring. In fact, federal agencies may use specific rules and regulations, called “special hiring authorities,” to hire

individuals with disabilities outside the normal competitive hiring process, and sometimes may even be required to give preferential treatment to veterans, including disabled veterans, in making hiring, promotion, or other employment decisions. Even if a Veteran has a visible disability, an employer cannot ask questions about when, where, or how the injury occurred. Unfortunately, these Vets get asked such questions quite often, leaving them in the uncomfortable position.

Disabled veterans represent a rich talent pool. They have been trained in military specialties that offer knowledge and experiences transferable to the civilian workforce. Disabled veterans are loyal employees who have proven they can commit to a job and an organization, and they certainly know the meaning of discipline and teamwork. With all these positive attributes, they should represent a sought-after talent pool. Unfortunately this is not so. In response to this problem, Congress enacted The Returning Heroes and Wounded Warrior Tax Credits. These Credits provide businesses that hire unemployed veterans with a maximum credit of \$5,600 per veteran, and for businesses that hire veterans with service-connected disabilities with a maximum credit of \$9,600 per veteran. These tax credits were included in the American Jobs Act and were signed into law by President Obama on November 21, 2011.

Everyone knows the importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Successful reintegration of service disabled veterans into the civilian labor force should be a core component of any CDO's strategic plan.

In 2010, 8.7% of all Veterans in the U.S. were unemployed. Of this group, the most likely to be and remain unemployed were and continue to be veterans with service disabilities. Join those companies embracing veterans in realizing the potential of these talented individuals and the business imperative to hire them. **PDJ**

Nadine Vogel is President of Springboard Consulting LLC. Springboard is considered a global expert; working with corporations, governments and organizations on issues pertaining to supporting the disability community in the workforce, workplace and marketplace. She is also the author of Dive in: Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce.