

## VETERANS IN CIVILIAN WORKPLACES

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When an employee of a small business in his home town called the EAP office, he said that no one understood him, so why should he come to EAP? The alarm bell went off in my head. This is a person who has experienced something so unique that it doesn't make sense in the world of common experience. So I asked him if he was a veteran. "Why do you think I am?" he replied. The conversation continued several minutes before he told me why his supervisor recommended that he call EAP.

It wasn't his family struggles, increased reliance on alcohol to "take the edge off", or his declining job performance that got him to come to EAP. It was his supervisor's comment, "I haven't served in the military. You have experienced something I will never really understand. I appreciate what you have given to this country, and I know you need to tell your story to someone who will be able to really listen to what you've been through." This supervisor encouraged the employee to contact the Veterans' Administration and his employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The supervisor also reminded the employee that EAP is a resource for the employee and those who live in his household.

Soldiers are a universal component of every civilization of recorded history. The experience of armed battle is a change maker in the lives of men and women who have experienced it. The soldier experiences the separation from the familiar patterns of life, family, community, and work. The soldier is trained in rigorous discipline, develops deep loyalty, and establishes principled patterns of behavior to protect and defend the welfare of the unit. The soldier follows the code of conduct and the rules of engagement that are specific and focused on the objective of the mission at hand. These are foundations for life skills that can be beneficial for future life in society. These same regimental formations are also part of the barrier to seeking help from those who 'do not understand.'

EAP counselors are people who understand that "In war, there are no unwounded soldiers."\* Each person who returns from active duty has experienced significant life events. And every member of their family has experienced a change in the way life was, is, and can be. As one veteran said six months after returning from 18 months of deployment, "Nothing has changed. Everything is different."

What is really different about the soldier of today? Because of advanced health care, a higher percentage of wounded and disabled veterans are returning home. With the technological capabilities of communication, families can be in touch during deployment, and a higher percentage of family members experience the front line in ways that have been unknown since the days of the Camp Followers of the Revolutionary War or the Civilian Corps of the Civil War. Physical wounds are not the only scars the returning soldier needs to heal. The soldier, family and friends are all part

of the renewal and restoration of healthy life at home and in the workplace.

While every veteran is different, as is every family and most workplaces, there are some common "readjustment problems" noted by the Veterans Family United Foundation that may occur. Some are noted below:

- Hyper arousal  
(sensitive to loud noises, crowds, light)
- Quick temper
- Oversensitivity
- Yelling
- Unpredictable
- Avoiding plans and people
- May be challenging to be successful in a job
- Missed appointments
- "All or nothing behavior"
- Secrecy
- Isolation
- Avoids making decisions
- Numb

The impact these behaviors may have on family, friends and coworkers include:

- They begin to adjust life around the veteran and attempt to reduce circumstances that might trigger the veteran's fear and arousal
- They begin to "walk on eggshells" for fear that the veteran will "go off"
- Family and friends may begin to think the veteran doesn't care about them
- They begin to notice that the veteran either totally avoids tasks/life circumstances or is fully engaged to the extreme
- Little by little, the veteran may begin to display an unwillingness to "connect" with people and communication decreases
- They may notice that the veteran is defiant and distrustful of authority
- Family, friends and co-workers may notice that there is little or no emotional sensitivity
- There may be an increase in the use of drugs or alcohol

It is important to note that, especially over the past 12-14 years, the divorce rate among military couples is the highest it's ever been. This can be attributed to PTSD, a high unemployment rate, and what can be a challenging transition from military to civilian life.

Infidelity may also play a role, but it is not as common an issue as one might think. It can take a few months or more to re-connect as a family. Changes in routines can cause anxiety for both adults and children.

Counseling services are now being offered to enlisted personnel and their civilian spouses. There are support groups for relationships through the service corps.

If readjustment behaviors are extreme enough to consistently and negatively affect the veteran and his family, it's important to seek help immediately. The sooner help is accessed, the better. These issues can be treated kindly and effectively. Please remember that the veteran is not PURPOSELY trying to hurt anyone. Some veterans may need help to work through these very real issues and return to healthy family and workplace dynamics.

EAP is a resource that can offer direction and support through the often long process of reclaiming the quality of life that becomes possible when there are people around who do care and want to understand.

\*Jose Narosky, [http://www.corpsman.com/2010/11/in-war-there-are-no-unwounded-soldiers-jose-narosky-veterans-day-2010/#Scene\\_1](http://www.corpsman.com/2010/11/in-war-there-are-no-unwounded-soldiers-jose-narosky-veterans-day-2010/#Scene_1) volunteer - N



## RESOURCES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES:

Veterans' Families United Foundation:  
<http://www.veteranfamiliesunited.org>

Department of Veteran Affairs:  
1-800-827-1000, Federal Benefits for Veterans Dependents and Survivors, 2012 edition, P94663VA Pamphlet 80-12-01, ISBN 978-0-16-090303-8

Women Veteran's Hotline: 1-855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)

National Center of PTSD: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov>

Mental Health Centers of Excellence:  
<http://www.dcoe.health.mil>

## RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS:

The Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM) Military Employment Resource Page:  
<http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/staffingmanagement/Articles/Pages/Military.aspx>

Department of Veteran's Affairs Employer Toolkit:  
<http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/support.asp>

VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program:  
[http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp\\_resources.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp_resources.htm)

America's Heroes at Work:  
<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers>

## EAP Can Help!

Your EAP is a confidential, assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your family members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization.

1.800.769.9819 ~ TTY dial 711 for TRS then dial 800.769.9819

## Online Work/Life Services

If your organization offers Online Work/Life Services, visit our 24-hour internet resource for information, advice and support on a wide variety of issues. Contact your human resources department for a company code then check our Work/Life Services at [www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)

