



LEADING PRACTICE

Leading Practices: Assimilation and Employee Assistance

Companies have highlighted issues or specific approaches to existing resources in assimilating veterans and providing Employee Assistance Programming. The following are leading practice recommendations and highlights:

- Veteran hiring falls often under diversity initiatives, due to compliance requirements, related to USERRA, VEVRAA, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the ADA. An additional reason for location in diversity initiatives is the ability to respond to varied and differing needs of veterans, particularly wounded veterans, or to diverse veteran populations. Leveraging this infrastructure may provide facilitated entry, assimilation and employee assistance. However, because in some businesses the diversity function is less integrated into the hiring manager's regular process, this may create barriers to assimilation.
- Assimilation may include resource groups, affinity groups, mentoring and sponsorship, peer supports, and other focused activities, which provide opportunities to understand the company and the employee fit. Even when activities are housed within diversity initiatives, focus must be maintained on creating opportunities for mainstream assimilation and inclusion.
- Some companies have tailored their employee assistance programs to veterans in a supportive way, incorporating the education of company employees on providing tangible assistance to veterans, beyond awareness training, instead of just referring or sending them to the VA. For example, at Ernst & Young, the company never sends people to the VA, and instead, they have a robust employee assistance program that was started in 1975, with people who enjoy devising solutions to new problems. The robust program initially served employees with alcohol abuse issues, and it later added parental care. Now, they leverage these professionals and are training them more on the specifics of veterans' issues, to provide the needed in-house assistance.



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- Walmart leverages the existing network of health professionals, Resources for Living, to provide services to veterans. Through Resources for Living, Walmart provides a free, confidential service to help give associates and their family members physical, mental, emotional, financial and career wellness coaching. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.¹
- There are companies, which have created positions specific to new veteran employee assistance. For example, Lockheed Martin has created its Military Relations Manager position.² Four regional Military Relations Managers at the company have the sole responsibility to help those transitioning from the military to Lockheed Martin.
- Cornell University has restructured its Faculty and Staff Assistance Program to include a counselor who has special training on issues facing veterans, including PTSD.
- While many companies have created positions with military employee-specific responsibilities, the majority are aimed at recruitment, and only a few have positions dedicated to the assimilation and assistance of military hires.
- Some companies attend to this issue by creating employee councils or networks. Combined Insurance established a military veteran council³ of employees, from all areas of the company. The council helps to mentor new veteran hires, as they undergo the transition from military to civilian professional life.
- An internal network of military veterans⁴ at Amazon offers mentoring and support for new veteran employees.
- GE offers a specialized USERRA Advisor, who helps military employees to understand their eligibility, job entitlements, employer obligations, benefits and the remedies available to them under USERRA. In addition to this, GE, through its Work/Life Connections,⁵ provides its employees and its management with specialized checklists, which prepare them for potential deployments. These



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checklists contain a wealth of information on deployment-related topics and provide assistance with managing daily responsibilities, while one spouse is deployed.

- Employee network and support groups aid in assimilation and the creation of a supportive working environment. Sodexo's military employee network group, Honoring Our Nation's finest with Opportunity and Respect (HONOR),⁶ offers development opportunities, provides a forum to recognize and celebrate contributions made to our country, and establishes partnerships with community groups that support veterans, active duty, National Guard, and military Reserves. Sodexo also offers mentoring programs⁷ that facilitate a smoother transition for veterans into the civilian workplace and support their professional growth.
- Sodexo's⁸ comprehensive Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides support and advocacy for jobs for veterans. This program provides ongoing counseling services to family members of employees who are deployed; the company provides pay differential for up to 12 months, from the date of military assignment; medical and dental benefits continue during active duty, provided employee contributions continue; when an employee's military assignment is completed, the employee returns to the same or like position, per the current military leave policy.
- Additionally, in terms of employee assistance, some companies are aware of and are using the Veterans Health Initiative (VHI) training program within the VA for clinicians. The VA developed the VHI independent study courses, to increase VA providers' knowledge of military service-related diseases and illnesses. The VHI study guides are useful for VA employees, veterans, the public and non-VA providers, as well. The VHI courses are accredited and meet medical licensure requirements.
- A challenge that many companies face is lack of knowledge of federal and state program eligibility for their employees. Companies, like TriWest, recommends



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creating information packages for employees on what eligibilities are, for whom, and what resources exist within and outside of the company.

- Magellan recognized this challenge and through its Hero Health Hire⁹ initiative, provides an employee assistance program for wounded warriors. Their employee assistance program addresses the needs of wounded warriors, who are transitioning into the workplace. Magellan offers this program, free of charge, for any wounded warrior recruited as part of the Hero Health Hire program. Magellan has also created a toolkit, detailing how to create and maintain accommodating work environments (virtual or physical) and programs of employment that capitalize on the skills of veterans, including specific strategies to aid their successful transition. Magellan has developed and willingly shares its work on veteran-specific employment assistance programs. These are great tools for leaders and HR staff who lack a military background, but want to hire, retain, and understand veteran employees.¹⁰ Furthermore, these tools are essential in addressing veteran issues and needs and avoiding doing any harm. For example, there are mental health volunteers who might be trying to do the right thing and help veterans, but without a military background, this can put people at risk of receiving inappropriate care. The challenge is being aware of and using all available resources and services.
- Some veterans will not be able or ready to engage in full-time work all at once. They may need more time to effectively reunite with family, seek treatment for a physical or psychological disability, and otherwise reintegrate into civilian life.¹¹ To meet these needs, employers have offered phase-in programs where veterans begin working part-time and slowly increase their hours as they prepare to shift to full-time, civilian work. Nelson Laboratories has recognized this challenge and allows returning veterans to work part-time, as they readjust to civilian work.
- Many companies recognize the mobility issues that some veterans and military families face. As a result, they offer flexibility, work accommodations, and additional training. The Home Depot allows military associates to transfer to other



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stores and distribution centers throughout the country, in cases of reassignment of duty stations, retirement, or separation, depending on store and job availability. The Home Depot also supports military spouses, as a proud corporate member of the Army Spouse Employment Partnership (ASEP), they strive to help military spouses reach their full potential and realize their career goals by making available meaningful and rewarding employment opportunities and transfer options.¹²

- A number of veterans continue their service through membership in the National Guard and Reserve components. These veterans not only have civilian job responsibilities, but they are also required to attend regular training exercises and may be deployed, again. Employers have already begun inventing processes tailored to supporting employees with ongoing military service, including the provision of assistance with maintaining their skills that are relevant in both civilian and military settings, facilitating easier transitions between military and civilian responsibilities, and offering support with maintaining two careers, along with a personal/family life.
- Relocation is a common requirement for continued advancement in military positions, and veterans with ongoing military responsibilities will benefit if their civilian employers can accommodate multiple workplaces over the course of their employment. Relocation and remote work arrangements can enable such employees to relocate for their military jobs, while still working for the same civilian employer. Streamlined job transfer policies and multi-location employment postings can also enhance veterans' abilities to stay with their civilian employers. Companies, such as Skylla Engineering Ltd., allow veterans to work remotely so they can remain employed, while furthering their military careers.
- In addition, veterans with civilian jobs and ongoing military responsibilities may have civilian salaries that exceed their military wages. This can lead to economic instability if their military wages are not sufficient to cover expenses during deployment. Some employers help employees with ongoing military



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responsibilities remain economically secure by paying the difference between their civilian and military salaries during deployments or training exercises.¹³

Many organizations, like Ryan LLC, AES Alamos, Western National Mutual Insurance Company, and Rio Salado College, offset any difference between military and civilian wages.

- While veterans with ongoing military responsibilities are deployed, some employers assemble care packages and letters to show their support. When care packages and letters are sent to military members who are known to the senders, the contents can be tailored to meet their specific needs and interests. For example, Bon Secours celebrated Military Appreciation Month with Operation Care Package, collecting toiletries and personal items for active military loved ones of Bon Secours employees who were currently serving overseas. Thanks to donations from employees at Bon Secours, about 75 care packages were sent to deployed U.S. troops, of which about 35 packages went specifically to Bon Secours employees.
- TriWest's CEO sends letters once a month to TriWest's deployed National Guard and Reserve members, and the letters include a telephone card, so that they can stay connected with their loved ones. Some companies, like the MorganFranklin Corporation, report paying to fly military employees back home to deal with critical personal issues.
- The Chamber hosts community events where they invite VA representatives to talk about the benefits available for veterans and businesses. These events help veterans to become aware of the available resources, for which they are eligible. Military service also affects the families of military members and veterans who give up time with their loved ones, manage households, and care for children and elders without the military member's assistance during deployments. After deployments, families must manage the challenges of reunion, care for injured veterans, and prepare for possible future deployments. Employers can help to provide veterans with stable households and families to return to after their service by supporting their families' economic and personal well-being. Supporting military families as



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they navigate complex benefits systems, restructure child and elder care, attend military separation and reunion events, and possibly care for injured veterans helps military members focus on their duties with the knowledge that they have stable homes, to which they may return.

- Employers are making use of workplace flexibility to give military family members more options concerning how they get their work done in the face of increased caregiving demands, support for injured veterans, managing multiple benefits systems, and the emotional and physical stress of meeting these demands. Options like part-time work, flexible schedules, and tele-work all help military families care for their family members, while remaining employed. An employee at SunGard Public Sector temporarily relocated from Florida to Georgia to care for her grandchildren while her son was deployed. She retained her position and remotely managed her team. She notes that, "It was SunGard Public Sector's willingness, understanding, and flexibility, along with their technology, that allowed me to care for my grandchildren in a time of distress for my family and effectively continue in my role as a team leader."
- Military families also benefit from being given time during the workday to communicate with their loved ones. Many military members are deployed in different time zones or have very restricted opportunities to communicate with home. Allowing employees to take calls during work hours can help them stay in touch with deployed family members. Also, allowing families with limited access to telecommunications technology (e.g., no computer or video conferencing technology at home) to use company communications networks during down times is very valuable. McGladrey notes that one of its employees used informal flexibility in order to keep in contact with her husband when he was overseas. Due to the time difference, the only time for them to connect virtually was during normal working hours, and she extended her workday to get her work finished on time. "This flexibility gave her the peace of mind, in knowing her husband was safe, so she could continue to be focused and productive while at work."



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- Military careers often require frequent relocation to assign the best person to each mission and gain necessary experiences for promotion. As a result, military spouses can experience frequent career-disrupting relocations. In addition, injured veterans may not be able to receive the treatment they require in their hometowns and may need to reside elsewhere, to complete medical procedures or therapy. Some employers provide relocation support, so families can attend to their injured family members and keep their own careers on track. Transfers to other offices, extended tele-work, or full-time remote workplace options can give families the flexibility they need to stay together while still contributing to their employer's success. Booz Allen supports employees that have to move by seeking opportunities in new locations for them and by providing the opportunity to tele-work from the new location.
- Military families may find that they cannot easily maintain the same economic status they had before a deployment or developing a disability. As a result, they benefit from employers who provide discounted products or services to their military employees, veterans, or families. Other employers organize gift drives to supply holiday presents to children in military families. For example, KPMG's Montvale, NJ office provides more than 200 children of soldiers, returning from Iraq, with holiday gift packages containing new books and new teddy bears (assembled by their partners and employees).
- Allowing family members to participate in employer-sponsored social events (like company picnics or awards dinners), when the military employee is unable to work (because of deployment or disability), can help keep the family from becoming isolated and provide opportunities for informal support. Nelson Laboratories invites and welcomes the families of their military employees to all company events, even while employees are deployed. While one employee was deployed, Nelson Laboratories purchased and installed a play set in the employee's back yard so his children would have something to play on.
- Other employers provide administrative support to families to help them file necessary paperwork to apply for grants, benefits, or services from other



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organizations. Cornell University's Child Care Center helped a family file a grant application for the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) Military Services Program. NACCRRA then provided the family with a much needed financial award.

- Military family resource groups can also be used to help military families pool resources and experiences to support one another, both at work and at home. These groups can also be used to help employers better understand and meet the needs of military families, both as employees and potential clients or consumers. The Aurora Mental Health Center Viewpoint Building maintains support groups for military family members.
- Companies recommend the creation of comprehensive employee assistance programs, for those who are members of the National Guard and Reserves. This will provide them with adequate support during times of deployment, which affects the company as well as the family of the deployed employee.
- Many companies have been using Magellan's toolkit, which details how to create and maintain an accommodating work environment and programs for the employment and successful transition of veterans. These companies have successfully leveraged these tools and recommend that others do the same.
- Finally, companies encourage others to be creative within their employee assistance programs and to include family members in the services offered. The underlying message is to be involved in the veteran community, to understand the issues that veterans and military families are facing, and to customize assistance for those issues. For example:
 - Provide phase-in employment for veterans transitioning from the military, which eases their transition into civilian life by having them start working part-time and increase their hours slowly to full-time employment.
 - Provide job flexibility, allowing veterans or family members to work remotely.



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- Several companies have created internal network opportunities to help veterans and military families. For example, Merck established its Veterans Leadership Network,¹⁴ an employee affinity group whose mission is to serve as a company resource on all veteran-related issues. The group works to recruit, retain and mentor veterans, to educate hiring managers on the benefits of selecting candidates with military service, and to partner with external organizations that assist military members and their families.
- Other companies with similar efforts include Bank of America, AT&T, Booz Allen, Prudential, U.S. Bank, Johnson Controls, Intuit,¹⁵ GE,¹⁶ CSX Corporation,¹⁷ and many more.
- Bank of America offers the Military Support Affinity Group,¹⁸ an employee resource network that creates opportunities for advancement and leadership development through networking, mentoring, and information forums.
- AT&T's Veterans Employee Resource Group¹⁹ and Booz Allen's Armed Services Forum²⁰ provide support, camaraderie, and resources for employees formerly or currently serving our nation.
- At Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG), the veteran employee resource group²¹ works to raise awareness, offer support, and serve as an information resource to all PSEG veterans, active, Guard and Reserve military professionals, as well as their families and friends.
- The military business resource group at Prudential, VETnet,²² provides a vehicle for communication and for sharing common issues and offers an important channel of communication between Prudential and the veterans' community at large.
- The Proud to Serve community²³ at U.S. Bank is a resource for veterans, offering the opportunity to join a talent community that will provide them with news, events, and outreach activities dedicated to veterans.



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- At Johnson Controls, the military outreach panel offers employees the opportunity to support one another.²⁴
- The Associate Military Network²⁵ is in place at the Sears Holdings Corporation to welcome aboard new veteran hires, provide additional transition assistance, enable them to stay involved in the veteran communities, and allow them to maintain the camaraderie through their military experiences.
- BAE provides career pathways for wounded warriors through its Warrior Integration Program (WIP), which is specifically designed to identify, hire and develop qualified wounded warriors into valuable employees. The availability of mentors through the program helps recruits and their families to navigate the transition from military to civilian life.²⁶
- According to GE, in order to be successful, the company needs a “veteran-loving culture,” and the veteran initiative needs to come from their leadership. For example, during Veterans Day, GE invites Vietnam veterans to a social event with their top management. Furthermore, the company places service flags and an appreciation letter on each veteran’s desk, which reinforces positive recognition of veterans in the workplace and motivates other veterans to self-identify. This small act identified that the non-veterans were appreciative of the company for doing it, and they became more supportive of veterans.
- Assign the firm’s human resources team to stay up-to-date and informed as to state-specific policies, programs, and initiatives focused on licensing and certification programs impacting veterans—particularly as those initiatives relate to work-roles in demand at your organization.
- Leverage internships, job shadowing, and similar initiatives as an opportunity for veterans lacking the experience dimension of a licensing/certification requirement, to acquire the require experience. Additionally, if possible, provide these opportunities by putting existing veteran employees in the trainer capacity.



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- Pay attention to employees' personal needs and offer more flexibility where possible. Consider offering telecommuting, compressed schedules or onsite or back-up daycare when required. Offer benefits coordination to ensure transparent coordination between military, veteran, and civilian programs, particularly health and mental health care.
- JPMC provides ongoing support for veterans before, during and after the hiring process as a means to effectively assimilate veterans into the corporate culture.
- To the extent possible, GE leverages existing veteran employees in a mentorship role. These individuals represent exemplars, and uniquely understand the socialization challenges facing new veteran hires.
- AT&T offers 12 leadership programs, although the company believes that it can do more, and has been exploring opportunities to develop a Junior Officer Training Program, to better and more effectively train and hire veterans.
- The Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) launched a new site in Dec. 2011 dedicated to hiring veterans and active duty personnel as part of a national campaign aligned with the Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes program. The website details HCA's hiring initiative to help military veterans transition back into civilian employment. To help get the initiative under way, HCA held several hiring fairs in 20 states from Dec. 2011 through May 2012. To learn more, visit <http://www.veteransathca.com/Events.aspx>.

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