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EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

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First, and foremost, Families and Work Institute (FWI) would like to thank the many employers involved in When Work Works for their candid and compelling examples of support for America's veterans and their families. They are the frontrunners in creating workplaces that fit the needs of the 21st century workforce and the challenges of a changing economy. These employers are changing the norms of the workplace by thinking anew about how, when and where work gets done and about how to structure work to better meet the needs of employees, their families and communities (civilian and military), while also achieving organizational success. We hope that other employers will be inspired by the ideas—and the business impacts—they read about here.

Thanks to Kathleen Christensen and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for providing leadership and support for When Work Works since its inception in 2003. Kathleen and the Sloan Foundation are truly strategic visionaries. They have used research to uncover the misfit between the way work has traditionally been organized and the workforce of today, an insight that is echoed throughout this report. And they have not stopped there. They have blazed a trail forward, translating research into action, showing many the path to improving the way work “works.”

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INTRODUCTION

Military service offers many talented Americans the opportunity to develop a wide range of technical, organizational and management skills. When military members return to civilian life either as full-time civilians or as ongoing members of the National Guard and Reserve components, they bring this wealth of knowledge and experience to bear on the missions they receive from their employers. Even though the battlefield is a very different classroom than a university or business training program, many veterans are confident that their military skills can help their employers succeed. In fact, a recent study of veterans shows that 61% of veterans who served in the military after September 2001 believe that their military experience applied “a lot” or “some” to their most recent civilian job.¹

Despite their skill sets and confidence in their ability to put their military experience to good use in their civilian jobs, many veterans are unemployed. In 2001, only 3.6% of veterans reported that they were unemployed and looking for work. According to Reuters,² unemployment among recent veterans grew to 13.3% by June 2011, more than four percentage points higher than the national average. Estimates of unemployment for specific veteran groups published in October 2010 by the Department of Veterans Affairs, were even bleaker with 18.8% of veterans who served after 2001, 18.2% of Black/African American veterans, 21.3% of veterans separating in 2006 or later and 28.5% of veterans aged 18-30 years old reporting that they were currently unemployed.³ How can it be that so many of the people who risked their lives protecting our country are unemployed? Moreover, how is it that employers have not yet recruited so many capable employees?

Beyond the general downturn of the economy, this employment gap is likely due to a variety of challenges faced by employers and veterans alike. For example, many veterans have been operating outside the civilian job market for years while others never held a civilian job prior to joining the military. These individuals are likely to be disconnected from regular civilian recruiting channels and employers must be creative when attracting and recruiting veterans. A June 2010 SHRM study highlights this challenge as over 70% of responding HR professionals indicated that they want assistance in identifying and reaching out to qualified veterans. In addition, many employers are currently unprepared to help veterans and their families navigate some of the unique work-life challenges raised by military service and thus find it difficult to adequately support and retain veteran employees and their families.

Simultaneously, a number of veterans are unprepared to chart their own course through the civilian job market. A 2010 study of veterans found that only 40.5% of veterans overall felt that they were “very well” or “well” prepared to enter the civilian job market when they left the Service.⁴ This value drops to 34.9% for Black/African American veterans and 34.1% for 18-30 year old veterans.⁵ Though many of their skills are transferrable to a civilian context, some veterans may be unfamiliar with the conventions used to represent these skills in civilian job application materials. Civilian employers also face similar difficulties with reframing military experiences as civilian job qualifications. According to the aforementioned SHRM survey, 60% of responding HR

professionals viewed translating military skills to the civilian job experience as a challenge to employing veterans. Furthermore, newly hired veteran employees may not be familiar enough with civilian hierarchies to identify and access the most effective channels for requesting the specific supports they need to achieve their best performance for their employers and their families.

Faced with this vast employment gap, some employers have rallied around our nation's veterans and begun meeting these challenges head on, by proactively enhancing their efforts to attract, recruit, support and retain veterans. They have also boosted the supports they offer to military families so all can better meet their responsibilities at home and at work.

When Work Works, a joint project of the Families and Work Institute (FWI) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), is addressing this issue as one that we see as critical to America's economic success. Among our efforts, the employer application of the 2011 Sloan Award for Excellence in Workplace Effectiveness and Flexibility included questions about the special efforts employers are making to support veterans and military families. Their responses were simply remarkable.

In this report, we first review several Federal laws that establish a national baseline of support that most employers are required to offer. We then describe a variety of supports that employers voluntarily provide to veterans that benefit all veterans—including those with ongoing military responsibilities, and veterans with little civilian work experience. We also examine the supports provided to military family members that help them manage the challenges posed by their relatives' military service. Throughout the report we identify specific employers that provide particularly innovative or generous initiatives.

The research findings presented here are drawn from applications for the 2011 Sloan Award, sponsored by FWI and SHRM. Employers applying for the award were asked to reply to questions about the support they provide to veterans and their families:

Does your organization make any special efforts to respond to the needs of employees who have recently returned from service in the military (returning veterans)?

[If yes] Please briefly describe some of the special efforts you have implemented to respond to the needs of returning veterans.

Does your organization make any special efforts to respond to the needs of employees whose family members are in the military and have been deployed?

[If yes] Please briefly describe some of the special efforts you have implemented to respond to the needs of military families.

The responses were analyzed qualitatively to identify the major themes and ideas conveyed across the responses. Findings may be viewed as a general, but not exhaustive, review of some of the efforts that employers are making to support the military community.

BACKGROUND: EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY COMMUNITY REQUIRED BY LAW

Three Federal laws that help establish a baseline of support for members of the military community are the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). The USERRA protects the job rights of past and present members of the uniformed services, applicants to the uniformed services and those who voluntarily or involuntarily leave employment positions to undertake military service or certain types of service in the National Disaster Medical System. USERRA requires that:⁶

- Uniformed service members be reemployed to their civilian jobs or a comparable job with all the benefits they would have attained without the interruption of military service if they:
 - Provided advance written or verbal notice of their service to their employers
 - Have five years or less of cumulative service in the uniformed services with their employer
 - Return to work or apply for reemployment in a timely manner after their service has concluded
 - Have not been separated from service with a disqualifying discharge
- Employers refrain from using a person's status as a past or present uniformed service member, applicant for membership in the uniformed service, or obligation to serve in the uniformed service as a basis to deny them:
 - Initial employment
 - Reemployment
 - Retention in employment
 - Promotion
 - Any other benefit of employment
- Uniformed service members have the right to continue their existing employer-based health plan for themselves and their dependents for up to 24 months while in the military. If they choose not to continue their health benefits, they have the right to be reinstated in the plan when reemployed, generally without any waiting periods or exclusions except for service-connected illnesses and injuries.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Although the ADA is not a military specific law, it does impact many veterans who have experienced a physical or mental disability as a result of their military service. The ADA provides protection against discrimination on the basis of a variety of disabilities and requires covered employers to make reasonable accommodations. “Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an accommodation is considered any modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that enables a qualified person with a disability to apply for or perform a job. The term also encompasses alterations to ensure a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.”⁷

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The FMLA entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. While FMLA is often invoked by civilian employees for childbirth, adoption, or serious personal or family illness, there are two additional provisions to the FMLA that specifically mention military family members:

- **Qualifying exigency leave** grants family members up to 12 weeks within a 12-month period to attend to various issues that arise when a covered military member is deployed. This includes, but is not limited to, attending military-sponsored functions, making appropriate financial and legal arrangements, and arranging for alternative child care.
- **Military caregiver leave** grants family members up to 26 workweeks of leave during a single 12-month period to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness who is the spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin to the employee.⁸

In both cases the time a military member spends away from civilian employment on military duty is included in the employment time necessary to qualify for FMLA leave.

SUPPORT FOR VETERANS PROVIDED BY EMPLOYERS

While legal interventions like the USERRA, ADA, and FMLA are important to supporting the military community (past and present military members and their families), they represent the minimum effort that an employer is required to make and are not designed to respond to every contingency. Fortunately, a number of employers go beyond the legal requirements to develop innovative and responsive ways of supporting the military community. Many of the needs of the military community parallel those civilian employees face (e.g., personal or family illness, financial hardships, or the need for additional skills training or education) and some programs that have been developed to support civilians can readily support the military community as well. Other programs may need small adjustments to encompass the unique issues that face the military community (e.g., secrecy required by classified deployments and interactions between

military and employer policies). Specific military community programs are established by employers when their existing programs are not appropriate to dealing with the needs of veterans and their families. Some employers also undertake special initiatives to take advantage of opportunities to apply veteran skill sets to their businesses.

The following sections outline some of the creative initiatives employers use to support veterans in general, veterans with ongoing military service, and veterans with little civilian work experience. While each of these efforts may have particular advantages for one segment of the military community, many can also benefit other members of both the military and civilian communities.

Support for All Veterans

While every veteran has his or her own unique circumstances, some employer programs can provide valued assistance to a broad range of veterans. Employers can establish or enhance programs to provide generalized emotional support, individualized counseling, career development opportunities, and the information or flexibility to tailor solutions to a variety of situations.

- Some employers **enhance their Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)** to include specialized supports for problems unique to veterans such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). EAP programs are also enhanced with supports for managing stress around caring for a veteran after an injury or psychological trauma, reunion and subsequent deployments.

Cornell University (education services; 10,460 employees in Ithaca, New York) is currently restructuring its Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (an EAP) to include a counselor who will have special training in issues facing veterans, including PTSD.

- Employer **newsletters, social events and other organizational communications** are used to educate civilian employees about their veteran coworkers, commemorate special events and share information about employer policies and benefits that are useful to veterans and their families. Some employers feature announcements of veteran returns to work or opportunities to support veterans in the organization or the local community.

Bon Secours (medical services; 12,000 employees in the U.S.) featured a deployed employee on the covers of the August/September 2009 and the January 2010 employee newsletter. The cover stories not only described the personal experiences of one military employee but also listed all of the benefits available for employees who are also military personnel.

- Some employers provide benefits to enhance employee's **financial well-being**. These supports include pay advances, no interest loans and financial advice/planning. Such supports help both veterans and their families adapt to changing circumstances.

Capital One (financial products and services; 27,000 employees in the U.S.) maintains a Disaster Recovery Grant that can help employees deal with sudden misfortune. After employees file an application describing their needs, Capital One usually responds and provides any awarded funds within 72 hours. The granted funds are *not* a loan so recipients do not need to worry about paying the money back to their employer.

- Many **workplace flexibility programs** are well-suited to enhancing the work experience of veterans as these programs are designed to give any employee more options about when, where, and how they work to better manage their professional and personal responsibilities. Veterans confronting complex military benefits processes, seeking treatment for injuries or psychological trauma, or readjusting to child care responsibilities will benefit from these programs as much as other employees. Some workplace flexibility options cited by Sloan Award applicants include job-sharing, flexible scheduling, part-time employment and telework.

Booz Allen Hamilton (business strategy and technology consulting; 25,000 employees globally) offers job-sharing, flexible scheduling, part-time employment and child care services to veterans returning from deployment so they can better manage their responsibilities.

- Some veterans need involved medical treatment or therapy for injuries and psychological trauma suffered during their deployments that goes beyond the limits of regular workplace flexibility and FMLA leave. In response, some employers grant these veterans **additional sick or vacation leave** to pursue the care that their conditions require. Additional leave can also be used for separation and reunion events so military members, veterans and their families can take the time to say goodbye or reconnect without having to miss work.

Homefront Health Care (long-term home health care; 117 employees in Providence, Rhode Island) offered an employee, whose son was injured during military service, an extended leave and other employees were allowed to donate their own accrued time off to further extend the employee's paid time away from work.

- Some employers allow employees and/or their families to **continue accessing benefits and services**, like health insurance or child care, even after the period covered by law has expired.

Scottsdale Healthcare (medical services; 6,300 employees in Scottsdale, Arizona) allows all military family members to have free access to the counselors in their Employee Assistance Program for as long as needed.

- **Employer-supported child care** (i.e., regular, sick and back-up care) is an important benefit for civilian employees that helps them manage their work and family care responsibilities. Employers noted that their child care supports were also of great use to military families.

Scottsdale Healthcare subsidizes sick-child care and back-up child care assistance as a low-cost benefit for working parents when a child is ill or when regular child care options are unavailable. *Scottsdale Healthcare* also has an on-site child care center for children up to age five and provides free child care referral services.

- Employers with large numbers of veteran employees have started **veteran resource groups** to provide forums for veteran employees to help one another. Some employers have instructed their veteran groups to:
 - identify priorities for veterans in the organization and develop plans for addressing them;
 - develop resource guides to help veterans as well as their coworkers understand the policies and benefits that apply to employees with military experience; and
 - develop business relationships and strategies that capitalize on their veterans' military experiences.

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC provides computer service and research) implemented a **Veteran's Resource Group** that enables veterans to get together periodically and discuss issues. OCLC considers the time members spend attending meetings and other related events to be work time and financially supports the group's designated events (e.g. Memorial Day flag ceremony, 9/11 ceremony, Toys for Tots, etc.).

Cornell established the **Veterans Colleague Network Group for Faculty and Staff** on campus in November 2010, led by the commanding officers of ROTC, to provide an opportunity for veterans and former military personnel from across the campus to connect and support the University's student veterans. This important group identified some of the challenges experienced by veterans in *Cornell's* workforce and begun working on addressing five key priorities:

1. Outreach to organizations that support veterans
2. Creating a list of resources for veterans

3. Issues facing re-acclimation to the workforce after military duty
4. Cornell recognized as a leader in recruiting/retaining veterans
5. Have an office of veterans on campus, VA rep on campus

Cornell's Veterans Colleague Network has fully implemented the first three priorities, and the other two priorities will continue to unfold over the fall of 2011.

- Other employers with large veteran populations have established **veteran affairs liaisons and coordinators** who provide assistance with filing military benefits forms and accessing other services.

Columbia University (education services; 7,738 employees in New York City, New York) employs a Veterans Affairs Officer to provide support and resources to Columbia's veteran populations: both students and staff.

- 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. 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 (a microbiology testing lab; 385 employees in Salt Lake City, Utah) allows returning veterans to work part time as they readjust to civilian work.

- Employers with organized **volunteer networks** can choose to make supporting veterans and their families a volunteer activity. Some examples of volunteer events include assisting with household chores or repairs, assembling care packages for deployed troops and donating employee skills and expertise in things like tax preparation and resume writing.

The state agency *Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration* (MIOSHA; 202 employees in Lansing, Michigan) hired a recent veteran and active member of the National Guard. Shortly after beginning his new position with MIOSHA, his wife was unable to work and one of their young children was diagnosed with cancer. MIOSHA's Fun Committee now holds fundraisers for the family and donates part of the money from other collections to help cover some of the family's expenses.

- Some employer supports cannot be centralized and require that civilian employees be aware of the issues facing the military community, especially when implementation of the

support is left to supervisor or team discretion. In such cases, employers **educate staff about military issues** through regular trainings, presentations and meetings.

Columbia University makes use of arts programs like Theater of War, presented by the theater group Outside the Wire, to enhance awareness and understanding of veteran issues. Theater of War consists of readings of Sophocles' Ajax and Philocletes to military and civilian communities to depict the psychological and physical wounds inflicted upon warriors by war. By presenting these plays to military and civilian audiences, Outside the Wire hopes to de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, disseminate information regarding available resources, and foster greater family, community and troop resilience.⁹

- **Partnerships with veteran support organizations** offer employers the opportunity to participate in programs and ceremonies that recognize the contributions of veterans and their families without being responsible for organizing them. Employers can help collect funds from their employees, encourage employees to volunteer with these organizations, and/or sponsor events or awards for veterans.

The Hyatt Regency (hospitality services; 1,100 employees in Chicago, Illinois) partners with the local Veteran's Affairs office to attend job fairs and do community service.

Support for Veterans with Ongoing Military Service

Not all veterans end their military service upon starting or renewing their civilian careers. 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 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 assistance with maintaining their skills that are relevant in both civilian and military settings, easier transitions between military and civilian responsibilities and 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.

Skylla Engineering Ltd. (engineering consulting; 17 employees in Houston, Texas) allows veterans to work remotely so they can remain employed while furthering their military careers.

- There are a number of things that need to be managed when an employee is deployed including benefits paperwork, redistribution of job tasks and plans for their return. In addition veterans may not have the time or information to complete all the necessary paperwork on their own. Employers can provide support for completing these tasks in a timely and more efficient manner.

Ernst & Young (accounting and financial services; 24,600 employees in the U.S.) employs a *leave management team* to guide veterans with ongoing military responsibilities through their separation and reunion processes.

- 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 their expenses while deployed. Some employers help employees with ongoing military responsibilities remain economically secure by **paying the difference between their civilian and military salaries** during deployments or training exercises.

A variety of organizations including *Ryan LLC* (accounting and financial services; 750 employees in the U.S.), *AES Alamitos* (power plant; 72 employees in Long Beach, California), *Western National Mutual Insurance Company* (295 employees in Edina, Minnesota), and *Rio Salado College* (education services; 686 employees in Tempe, Arizona) all make-up any difference in military 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.

In July 2010, *Bon Secours* celebrated Military Appreciation Month with Operation Care Package to collect 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.

- Some employers are willing to go to extraordinary efforts to support their military employees, taking on challenges for which no standardized program would be appropriate.

The MorganFranklin Corporation (business and technology solutions; 347 employees in McLean, Virginia) reports paying to fly military employees back home to deal with critical personal issues.

Support for Veterans with Little or No Civilian Work Experience

Though many employers are eager to employ veterans, establishing a connection to this community can be challenging. Veterans may not be their best advocates when it comes to job applications and interviews. Some may come into the civilian job market with a higher level of experience and skill than they know how to present to civilian recruiters. Without resumes and interview tactics that positively feature their skills, they may settle for jobs beneath their capabilities. Other veterans may find that civilian work has changed since they joined the military (e.g., growth of the internet and social networking in job searches) and their previous job search tactics are no longer applicable to the current job market.

A variety of employers who wish to take advantage of this pool of talented men and women have been proactive and invested in creating bridges between military service and civilian employment. These employers develop advanced outreach efforts to mentor and/or train new veterans in more effective ways to navigate the job market. Additionally, some employers go further still and offer guidance on other complex civilian life experiences, like buying homes and managing personal finances.

- Employers can engage in **mentoring activities** that help veterans:
 - identify marketable job skills they have developed in the military;
 - conduct a search for civilian jobs that require their most advanced skills;
 - write resumes that feature their marketable skills in terms that match civilian job descriptions; and
 - develop dynamic interview skills that can be used in a variety of workplace cultures.

KPMG (accounting and financial services; 23,000 employees in the U.S.) recruiters go beyond identifying veterans to hire for KPMG positions and assist veterans in their general job search efforts by providing resume-writing and interview guidance.

- In addition to a civilian job search, some veterans may benefit from advice on other civilian life management skills like financial planning or purchasing a home.

Technology Transfer Services (maintenance and operations services; 144 employees in Tampa, Florida) provides its veteran employees with financial planning assistance.

- Some veterans may need additional **skills training** to round out their skill set or to refresh existing skills that weakened through inactivity while in the military. Many employers already offer skills training programs to other employees and can and do extend such programs to encompass veterans as well. These initiatives can be addressed to new hires or to help prepare veterans for a job search. As with most training programs, offering them in a variety of media (e.g., live, written, recorded, internet) and at multiple times may be necessary to provide the most effective support for veterans who have to fit these developmental efforts into their other reintegration activities.

SunGard Public Sector (software solutions and consulting services; 358 employees in Lake Mary, Florida) provides live and on-request skills refreshers for veterans returning from a deployment.

- Though veterans with little civilian work experience would benefit from any mentors who can help orient them to the civilian job market and workplace, civilian mentors may not be familiar enough with military experiences to identify how they can be of the most assistance. **Interactions with veterans who have already successfully reintegrated** with civilian life can help bridge this communication gap. Veteran resource groups and other educational initiatives that either directly mentor recent veterans or provide civilian mentors with a fuller understanding of the veterans they are mentoring can improve the advice that veteran mentees receive.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (accounting and financial services; 34,000 employees in the U.S.) recently launched a Veterans' Network that creates a strong community of support and opportunities to connect with other veterans and mentors throughout the firm.

- In addition to empowering veterans with the knowledge of how to find a good civilian job, employers can also develop recruitment initiatives that help them find veterans whose skills are already a good match for their organizations. There are a variety of methods that employers reported using to reach out to veterans and their families:
 - **Online advertising:**
 - **Job sites:** There are several job search sites that either specialize in jobs for veterans or include a section directed toward veterans.

Three examples offered by employers are: Jobs for Disabled American Veterans (JOFDAV.com), HireVeterans.com, and Caljobs.ca.gov (veterans section).

- **Social media:** Social media websites include pages to discuss military and veteran experiences.

Some examples cited by employers are maintained on the LinkedIn social networking site including the: Disabled Veterans, Iran and Afghanistan Veterans and Disabled American Veterans groups.

- **Recruitment events:** Job fairs sponsored by the employer, the military or other local and national organizations can help veterans and recruiters establish connections that lead to jobs.

Barco, Inc. (technology products; 53 employees in Xenia, Ohio) attends veteran career fairs twice a year. They believe this helps them to bring in new staff whom they can train on their products and grow within the company.

- **Word of mouth advertising:** In addition to large-scale programs, employers also make use of employee referrals, networking among their employees, and communications with veteran groups and other organizations to identify good veteran candidates.

Ernst & Young made use of word of mouth efforts to promote their Veterans Network. The network, which started as a grassroots effort in one of the practice areas, has already grown to include participants from other geographies and offices, provides networking and professional development opportunities, supports the firm's veteran recruiting and on-boarding efforts, and supports veterans in the community.

- **Military programs:** The military maintains programs that help service members who are separating, retiring or moving from active duty to the National Guard or Reserve components find civilian jobs. Other programs focus on placing Reservists in civilian jobs where they can continue to practice their mission critical skills.

Frankfort Regional Medical Center (medical services; 655 employees in Frankfort, Kentucky) works with the military program Army PaYS to recruit employees with critical skills. In exchange they provide these employees with the flexibility needed to maintain both their military and civilian responsibilities.

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES PROVIDED BY EMPLOYERS

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 members' 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 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 about 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 telework all help military families care for their family members while still doing a good job.

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 managed her team remotely. 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 (accounting and financial services; 123 employees in Bloomington, Minnesota) 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."

- Military careers often require frequent relocation to assign the best person to each mission and gain the 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 home towns 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 telework 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 Hamilton supports employees that have to move by seeking opportunities in new locations for them or by providing the opportunity to telework 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.

University of Phoenix – Houston, Texas Campus (education services; 187 employees) organizes the collection and distribution of cellphones to military families.

KPMG's Montvale, NJ, office provided 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 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 experience 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 (community mental health organization; 85 employees in Aurora, Colorado) maintains support groups for military family members.

- Some employers have made extensive commitments to supporting military family members including funding in-depth training efforts to enhance their economic prospects.

Ernst & Young provides funding, curriculum support and instructors to an entrepreneurial skills program for the family members of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Families, established by the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University, is an all-expense-paid program designed to teach family members of veterans who have been killed or disabled in Iraq or Afghanistan the fundamentals of starting and running a small business.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL MILITARY COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In addition to discussing what they do to support the military community, employer applicants for the Sloan Awards also discussed some of the procedural aspects of managing an effective support program. The following are some insights gathered from employers about how to get the most out of a support program as well as some surprises that employers should be prepared to handle.

- Veterans with ongoing military responsibilities may receive orders to deploy with very short notice. This means little time to prepare their employers, coworkers and families for their departure. Proactively establishing streamlined deployment procedures can avoid delays in filing for benefits or reassigning work so deploying military members can complete any transition activities before they leave on assignment.
- Some military assignments are classified, limiting the amount of information the member may know or be allowed to share with others. Employers should be prepared for less than

complete descriptions of the assignments that their National Guard and Reserve component employees receive when a mission is classified. Employers should focus less on what the members are going to be doing while they are gone and more on how to ensure their work gets done in their absence, how their families stay connected to the company's benefits and how to prepare for the veteran's return to work.

One employee at *Cobb EMC* (electric membership cooperative; 546 employees in Marietta, Georgia) departed from work within 30 minutes of his activation with very little explanation to management, on a classified mission. His supervisor took care of all necessary paperwork, and his work team picked up his responsibilities to continue their project during his 13-month absence.

- Employers and recruiters who are well-versed in military hierarchy and the requirements for military promotions will have a better understanding of the skills and experiences of veterans and the terminology veterans are most familiar with when describing those qualities. This will help recruiters to better match veterans to a wide variety of jobs in their organization rather than restricting them to a few positions with obvious similarities to what civilian recruiters believe a military career is like. To further expand the opportunities for veterans, employers should determine which desired skills may not be easy to develop in a military setting but which can be easily and/or cheaply taught to an otherwise qualified veteran hire.
- Employers should consider integrating the protections and supports they offer (legally mandated and voluntary) into their benefits policies and employee handbooks. This creates a single, coherent explanation of the options available to the military community at each workplace and avoids the confusion of trying to integrate multiple documents, laws and precedents during a stressful event. It also helps civilian coworkers and managers to better understand the system their military peers are working with to avoid miscommunication and enhance their support for their military coworkers.
- Many of the more robust policies we identified are at larger employers with sizable populations of employees or customers in the military community. Smaller employers may not have the resources or enough of a demonstrated need to develop comprehensive procedures. If so, being flexible and providing managers with the freedom to rapidly create arrangements that work for all parties and make use of community-provided resources may be more efficient.
- Employers don't have to do it all on their own. Many of their civilian employees would be happy to help their military coworkers if they knew how. Employers mentioned some of the ways their civilian employees can ease the burden on their military peers. For example, simply being willing to trade shifts or cover assignments on occasion can be very helpful to military members and their families who are struggling to meet all their responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Military members make deep sacrifices in order to protect their fellow citizens. They undergo rigorous training, experience frequent relocation, and spend long periods of time far from home and family. Many will witness and/or experience significant physical injury, emotionally traumatic events, and/or death as part of their service. Yet they rise to meet these extreme challenges in the belief that their efforts will make America, its citizens and allies safer.

When military members return to the civilian workforce, they typically bring the same dedication to their work and are eager to contribute their skills and experience to their employers. Yet many veterans are unable to reach their full potential as civilian employees without support. When employers take a proactive approach to attracting, recruiting, supporting and retaining veterans and their families, they make it easier for these individuals to perform well at work, in the service and at home.

Several of the applicants for the Sloan Award quoted employees who had benefited from the support their employers provided. One employee at Cobb EMC spoke to his employer of the “profound importance of knowing his family was financially and emotionally cared for by Cobb EMC and its employees during his absence, especially in light of other soldiers he worked with who lost their jobs during their absence.” This employee’s life was made much easier by food packages sent by Cobb EMC at times during his service. The employee also told his employer about the emotional strength he derived from letters and photographs sent by coworkers. Cobb EMC continued its support of [this employee’s] service when he was again called for additional deployments or for continuing military education/training. “[This employee] states plainly that he could not have done what he did in the military without Cobb EMC’s support.”

As this example shows, the more employers continue to actively support the employment of our veteran population and their families, the more these highly skilled individuals will be able to contribute to America’s well-being, both on the battlefield and in the marketplace.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Westat. (2010). *National survey of veterans, active duty service members, demobilized national guard and reserve members, family members and surviving spouses*, (Task Order 101-G87089). Washington, D.C. Department of Veterans Affairs, pp. 157.
- ² Alper, A. (2011, August 4). *U.S. Soldiers Return Home To Labor Market With Few Opportunities*. Reuters article published on Huffington Post. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/04/thousands-of-soldiers-returning-home-with-no-jobs_n_918528.html
- ³ Westat. (2010). *National survey of veterans, active duty service members, demobilized national guard and reserve members, family members and surviving spouses*, (Task Order 101-G87089). Washington, D.C. Department of Veterans Affairs, pp. 157.
- ⁴ Veterans serving after 2001 were slightly higher with 45.4% indicating that they were “Very well” or “Well” prepared to enter the civilian job market when they left the Service.
- ⁵ Westat. (2010). *National survey of veterans, active duty service members, demobilized national guard and reserve members, family members and surviving spouses*, (Task Order 101-G87089). Washington, D.C. Department of Veterans Affairs, pp. 157.
- ⁶ VETS. (2008). *Your Rights Under USERRA* Employee Notice. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/poster.htm>
- ⁷ “Data collected by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) reveal that more than half of accommodations cost employers nothing, and of those that do cost, the typical one-time expenditure is \$600 — an outlay that most employers report pays for itself multiple-fold in the form of reduced insurance and training costs and increased productivity.”
United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. (n.d.) *Accommodations*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Accommodations.htm>
- ⁸ United States Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. (n.d.) *Family and Medical Leave Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/index.htm>
- ⁹ A full description of the *Theater of War* project is available on the *Outside the Wire* website at <http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview>.

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