

# From the Battlefield to the Workplace: Welcoming Back Military Personnel

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**I**magine leaving your family, friends and job to go to war. Not only would you say goodbye to familiar people and places, but you also would leave a familiar way of life where you can trust that your neighbors and people on the street don't intend you harm.

In order to survive in a war environment, you would need to develop a set of "battlefield skills": You would learn to be on constant alert for danger, to seal off your emotions and to trust no one. You would be trained to react to people and events instantaneously, and to ask questions later.

Such is the situation our military personnel face. Upon returning to civilian life, many have a hard time shutting off skills they learned on the battlefield.

## What is a manager's role?

As an employer, you have an important role in planning, supporting and acting on "coachable moments" to help these individuals integrate back into their civilian jobs. Here are some tips to help ease the transition:

- **Plan for the return:** Meet with colleagues of returning employees before they return, and discuss the transition, its impact on the team and how everyone can help these individuals succeed.
- **Discuss the changes:** Inform returning employees about changes that occurred in their absence, the reasons and how they will be affected.
- **Schedule regular meetings:** Let returning employees know that you are available to talk and want to help. Scheduled meetings provide an opportunity to ask how the transition is going, about their current career objectives and about what professional development assistance they need.
- **Prepare for an adjustment:** Be alert for and prepared to discuss common reactions of returning military members. These can include feeling like their career has stalled while co-workers have advanced or feeling less important or less needed. The job now may feel less motivating after the intensity of a war zone, and they may attempt to employ battlefield

skills. Be sensitive to co-workers' attitudes toward the returning employee. Ask how you can help make the changes go as smoothly as possible, but be clear about what you expect in terms of job performance.

Remember, the adjustment can take several months, so allow time for returning employees to gradually get back up to speed in their work.

## How can an employee assistance program help?

Managers are limited in helping an employee who is struggling with personal problems. Managers must be concerned with productivity and job performance. A manager's role does not include providing therapy. An employee assistance program can offer a number of helpful options.

Managers may call their EAP for an employee consultation, and receive information and advice. Signs that may warrant a referral to the EAP include difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, social withdrawal, headaches, sadness, frequent absences, anger, impatience, irritability, and signs of alcohol or drug abuse on the job.

If a referral is warranted, the manager can either offer the EAP number to the employee to make the call or make a formal management referral. In a formal referral, the manager provides the EAP with details about the problem in advance, and the employee is asked to sign a release allowing the EAP to report the status of appointments with the EAP as well as any recommendations resulting from the assessment to the manager.

To get the most out of your EAP, it is key that senior management communicates the benefit to all managers and supervisors, and that these individuals in turn inform their employees about what services are available and how to access them.

Remember there are also resources available through the military and veterans administration services. Some employees feel more comfortable seeking help from non-work-related sources. Visit [www.ncptsd.va.gov/topics/war.html](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/topics/war.html), [deploymentlink.osd.mil/deploy/post\\_deploy/post\\_deploy\\_intro.shtml](http://deploymentlink.osd.mil/deploy/post_deploy/post_deploy_intro.shtml) and [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com).

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