Trauma-Caused Issues: How to Recognize and Help Affected Job Seekers

Third Annual Trauma Spectrum Conference

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Office of Disability Employment Policy
U.S. Department of Labor

ODEP
Office of Disability
Employment Policy

Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

- Provides national leadership on disability employment policy by:

  - developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices

  - building collaborative partnerships

  - delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities

Office of Disability Employment Policy

Background

- Authorized by Congress in the Department of Labor's FY 2001 appropriation

- To recognize the need for a national policy that ensured that people with disabilities are fully integrated into the 21st Century workforce

- A sub-cabinet level policy agency in the Department of Labor

Status on Federal Employment Initiatives for Hiring & Retaining Individuals with Disabilities

- **President's Executive Order** - July 26, 2010

  - To hire more people with disabilities into the federal government

  - Every agency must be accountable to create goals and action plans for increasing the number of employees with disabilities and retained in federal jobs

Status Level (continued)

- Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP/DOL)

- Invited responses on how OFCCP can strengthen the affirmative action requirements of the regulations implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- Proposes for the first time that federal contractors, who create 25% of the available jobs in America, would be held to benchmarks for hiring qualified workers with disabilities

DOL Veterans' Initiatives

- Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act—Veterans' Employment & Training Services (VETS)

- One-Stop Career Centers—Employment & Training Admin. Veterans' assistance programs (LVERs & DVOPs)

- Jobs Corps & VETS Partnership Demonstration project opening up slots in several Job Corps Centers specifically for young vets

- Financial literacy and small business education & outreach effort to improve the situation for homeless female vets—Women's Bureau

- Veterans' Employment Initiative www.dol.gov/HiringVets

America's Heroes at Work

ks11491 www.fotosearch.com

- Supporting the Employment Success of Veterans with TBI & PTSD

- Nearly one in five Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has depression and/or stress disorders

- 19% of troops say they might have experienced a TBI, usually as the result of a powerful roadside bomb

Joint Leadership by ODEP & VETS America's Heroes at Work

- Collaboration with other DOL agencies

- DOD's Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program
- Veterans Affairs
- Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury Health Services Administration
- Defense & Veterans' Brain Injury Center
- Employer Support for the Guard & Reserve
- Uniformed Services Branches

- ED
- DOD
- DOT
- NIH
- Social Security Adm.
- Small Business Adm.
- Others

America's Heroes at Work Goals

- To help returning Service Members and Veterans with TBI/PTSD succeed in the workplace

- To increase awareness of TBI/PTSD employment issues among employers, the workforce development system, service branches, key military support systems, VSOs, and One-Stop Career Centers

- To create and raise awareness of resources that assist employers with accommodations for transitioning Service Members and Veterans with TBI/PTSD

America's Heroes at Work Website Features

- **Common employer questions** about returning Service Members with TBI and/or PTSD

- **Fact sheets** and **reference guides** on TBI/PTSD as they relate to employment

- **Web-based training tools** on making workplace accommodations for employees with TBI/PTSD

- **Promising practices** for helping those with TBI/PTSD succeed at work

- Veterans' employment **success stories**

- **Links** to additional TBI, PTSD, and Veterans' employment resources

PTSD & TBI Impact on Employment

- TBI/PTSD symptoms can sometimes cause difficulties as service men and women transition back into civilian life – especially in the workplace

- Simple workplace supports can help wounded and injured Veterans succeed on the job

- **Employment** can play a major role in recovery

Common Employer Misconceptions/Myths

- All TBIs are severe

- Veterans with PTSD will have violent outbursts in the workplace

- Job accommodations are complicated and expensive to implement

- Hiring Veterans comes with complicated legal responsibilities

What Employers Need

- The facts about TBI and PTSD

- Support and education concerning how to assist Veterans with TBI and PTSD in their transition to civilian employment

Dispelling the Myths with Facts

- 80% of TBIs are mild concussions that will heal completely

- Employers needn't fear employees with PTSD

- Job accommodations are usually low cost or no cost

- Incentives and benefits to hiring Veterans are available

- Employment plays a critical role in a wounded warrior's recovery

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

- Meeting the needs of trauma survivors requires that organizations become "trauma-informed"

- A trauma-informed service system is one "whose primary mission is altered by virtue of knowledge about trauma and the impact it has on the lives of consumers receiving services" (Harris, 2004)

What Is Trauma-Informed Care?

- A strength-based service whose overall framework is based on:

  – an understanding of a responsiveness to the impact of trauma

  – emphasis on physical and emotional safety

  – opportunities to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment

Trauma-Informed Care

- Looks at all aspects of programming through a trauma lens, constantly keeping in mind how traumatic experiences impact consumers

- Organizations that are informed by an understanding of trauma respond best to consumer needs and avoid engaging practices that may cause additional harm

Accommodating & Serving Job Seekers & Employees with Mental Health Issues—Practical Approaches

- For many people with mental health issues, the stigma can be worse than the illness
  - Isolation
  - Rejection
  - Fear
  - Dismissive Attitudes
  - Discouragement
  - Discrimination

Stigma

- Can stop people from self-identifying, as they may be afraid of how they will be perceived & treated

- Mental health issues are often revealed in the workplace only when a crisis occurs

- Open communications & informed attitudes—best tools managers can have (e.g., disability awareness training, etc.)

Understanding Mental Health Issues

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) defines a mental health impairment as:

- A medical condition that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. *Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life*

Mental Health Statistics

- Approximately 58 million Americans, one in four adults, experience a mental health impairment in a given year (NAMI, 2007)

- One in seventeen individuals lives with a serious mental health impairment, such as schizophrenia, major depression, or bipolar disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2008)

- One in ten children have a serious mental or emotional disorder (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999)

Common Psychiatric Conditions

- Bipolar Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
- Major Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

"An anxiety disorder that can occur after someone experiences a traumatic event that caused intense fear, helplessness, or horror. While it is common to experience a brief state of anxiety or depression after such occurrences, people with this impairment continually re-experience the traumatic event; avoid individuals, thoughts, or situations associated with the event; and have symptoms of excessive emotions."

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Can be exhibited via any or all of the common psychiatric conditions or other behavior disorders, e.g., ADD, ADHD, etc.

- Estimates indicate that 2-9% of American adults have PTSD; this includes 15-30% of veterans

- Symptoms last for longer than one month, can appear within three months, and sometimes many months and even years after the traumatic experience

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Individuals must experience at least four of the following symptoms:

- Sweating
- Hot/cold flashes
- Choking/smothering
- Racing heart
- Labored breathing
- Trembling

- Nausea
- Disorientation
- Feelings of dying
- Chest pains
- Faintness
- Numbness

Accommodating Individuals

Work Limitations:

- Attendance
- Concentration
- Emotions
- Fatigue
- Memory
- Organization

- Panic Attacks
- Sleep Disorders
- Stress
- Co-worker Interaction
- Working effectively

Attendance:

- Allow flexible work environment:

  – Scheduling
  – Modified break schedule
  – Leave for counseling
  – Work from home/flexi-place
  – Flexibility around job tasks

Concentration

Reduce distractions in the work area:

- Provide space enclosures, sound absorption panels, or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the worker to play soothing music using an ear bud and computer or music player
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Purchase organizers to reduce clutter

Concentration

- Increase natural lighting or provide fu[ll] spectrum lighting.
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks & goals.
- Use auditory or written cues as appropriate.
- Restructure job to include only essential functions.
- Provide memory aids such as schedulers, organizers, or email applications.

Emotions

- Encourage the use of stress management techniques to deal with frustration
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow flexible breaks
- Refer to EAP

Memory

- Allow use of job coach/Provide mentor
- Provide minutes of meetings & trainings
- Use auditory or written cues as appropriate
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists
- Use a color coding scheme to prioritize tasks
- Use notebooks, planners, or sticky notes to record information
- Provide labels/bulletin board to assist in locating items

JAN Job Accommodation Network

Lock-up Checklist

On first floor:

☐ Check all coffee pots and space heaters to make sure turned off and un plugged.

☐ Check the downstairs side door to make sure it's locked from the outside.

☐ Walk through hall and make sure individual office lights are turned off.

☐ Make sure no one is still in their offices on that floor.

☐ When sure, make sure doors entering downstairs are latched and locked.

☐ In downstairs hallway, check and make sure front door is locked.

On second floor:

☐ Check all coffee pots and space heaters to make sure turned off and un plugged.

☐ Check the upstairs side door to make sure it's locked from the outside.

☐ In kitchen, make sure the office copier is turned off.

☐ Walk through hall and make sure individual office lights are turned off.

☐ Make sure no one is still in their offices on that floor.

☐ Make sure main hall lights are turned off before going downstairs.

Final lock-up:

☐ Check to make sure everyone is in downstairs hall and ready to leave.

☐ Determine who will do the final alarm procedures.

☐ Have everyone else leave the building through the side door.

☐ Once everyone has left, set alarm, turn off last lights, and leave the building.

☐ Check front door one more time from the outside to make sure it's locked.

Stress

- Refer to counseling and EAP
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal

Coworker Interaction:

- Encourage the employee to walk away from frustrating situations and confrontations
- Provide partitions or closed doors to allow for privacy
- Provide disability awareness training to coworkers and supervisors

How Employers Can Work Effectively

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Develop clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Schedule consistent meetings with employee to set goals and review progress
- Establish written long-term and short-term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with conflict
- Educate all employees on their right to accommodations
- Do not mandate that employees attend social functions

One-Stop Career Centers' Veterans' Assistance

- **Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP)** representatives (1,127 reps nationwide)

  -- Sponsored by DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS), the DVOP provides intensive services to individual veterans with barriers to employment

- **Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs)** (963 reps nationwide)

  -- Facilitates the delivery of employment and training opportunities and services for veterans and conducts employers outreach on behalf of all veterans

Located in more than 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers

ODEP Resources

- **America's Heroes at Work**
  www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov

- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**
  http://askjan.org/
  JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.

- **Employer Assistance Resource Network (EARN)**
  www.earnworks.com

  Provides employers with confidential, no-cost consultation, customized technical assistance and resources to support their diversity and inclusion efforts by integrating employees and veterans with disabilities into the workplace.

ODEP Resources (cont.)

- **START-UP/USA (Self-Employment)**

  www.start-up-usa.biz/

  Provides technical assistance and disseminates resources nationally to individuals interested in pursuing self-employment. This includes the live web cast series with successful entrepreneurs who share their secrets for success

- **National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth**

  www.ncwd-youth.info/

  Assists state and local workforce development systems to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and other disconnected youth.

- **Campaign for Disability Employment**

  www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/

  PSA, Outreach Toolkit, Drop-in Articles, and much more

Questions?