



**Remarks by Jeff Pon, Ph.D.  
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Thank you Brigadier General Bishop.

The Society for Human Resource Management – or SHRM – is proud to be here today with the Army Warrior Transition Command to raise awareness about a serious and urgent issue: the need to help our men and women in uniform – our nation’s heroes -- transition from the military workforce to the civilian workforce.

We often hear talk about forward-thinking employers making special efforts to encourage and support the transition of service members and their spouses back into the civilian workforce. But aside from the C-suite, when you get closer to the level of “boots on the ground,” it’s members of SHRM – HR professionals – who actually get the job done.

SHRM is the world’s largest organization devoted to human resource management. We have more than 260,000 members from organizations large and small from across the nation and around the world working on the front lines to balance the needs of employers and employees alike.

I’ll admit that our members are telling us there are challenges when it comes to recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans. But let me talk about some good news first. And the good news is this: employers want to hire veterans. They are actively interested in hiring veterans.

Two-thirds of employers surveyed by SHRM said they have hired veterans within the past 36 months. This is a significant jump from 2010, when just over half of organizations said they had done so.

Why do employers want to hire veterans? Because they recognized the value and unique skill set that veterans learn in the military — such as leadership, sense of responsibility, and the ability to work under pressure. These are very appealing to civilian employers.

Yet we're being told that one of the biggest challenges is that employers and veterans are having difficulty connecting. They don't know where to find each other. Only 13% of employers SHRM surveyed were very familiar with resources on where to find veteran job candidates. That's not acceptable.

When they do find each other, our members are telling us they're having a difficult time translating military skills to civilian skills and job experience. Half of the employers we surveyed who had hired veterans in the past 36 months said that this was the biggest challenge they faced when hiring veterans.

And finally, there is the stigma of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder associated with veterans. And this is a unique challenge to overcome – the lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding PTSD by employers.

The news is mixed. Forty-six percent of SHRM survey respondents said PTSD or other mental health issue is a challenge when hiring veterans. And 61 percent believe that accommodating workers with disabilities such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury (TBI) required more effort on the employer...

... but 83 percent said it's worth it!

Let me say that again: 83 percent said it's worth it. That's important because it signifies that awareness and education can help demystify PTSD.

Let me talk a little about this. Part of what SHRM is doing is helping employers understand that not every veteran suffers from PTSD. Like many mental disabilities, you can't easily see or recognize PTSD so it's misunderstood. More needs to be done in general to demystify mental disabilities, whether it is PTSD, autism, or depression. That's the first step.

Second, we're drawing on the lessons learned from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and how to accommodate those who have special needs. The same can be done with PTSD and other mental disabilities. So the first step is to help employers to understand that not all veterans need accommodations ... and when they do – for PTSD or other disabilities – many of those accommodations can easily be made.

Third, SHRM is including educational sessions on PTSD in all of our conferences, and this past June held two stand-alone, day-long sessions at our annual conference in Atlanta attended by 15,000 HR professionals. We've also published a toolkit that points HR professionals to government resources that can be most helpful, including information that dispels the misperceptions of PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

And of course, we're actively taking part in public initiatives and engaging in partnerships with organizations like the Army Warrior Transition Command.

Finally, last year our CEO and President challenged all 575 SHRM chapters and state councils to show their commitment to support the concept of military-ready employers by signing a pledge.

By June of this year, 100 percent of our chapters and state councils signed the statement to support members of the military returning home and seeking to re-enter civilian life and the workforce.

SHRM and our 260,000 members believe this is an urgent issue, and that it's fundamentally important to address this issue now, while public attention is on veterans. We can't wait one, two, three or four years from now. We don't want a lost generation of veterans.

We are proud to be here today with the Army Warrior Transition Command and to continue our profession's efforts to serve those who have served us.

Thank you.