

# Supporting Soldiers Returning To Work

Citizen soldiers returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere are no doubt relieved to find their civilian jobs waiting for them. The transition from battlefield to workplace can be fraught with difficulties not addressed in any policy manual.

US Department of Defense officials say that overall, employers are doing their part during these difficult times. But experts still have concerns over some issues veterans returning to the workplace face, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Washington says that issue could affect more than 30 percent of combat veterans.

It's hard for those who have never served to understand the mind-set. With modern travel, a reservist can be in Baghdad Friday and back in his hometown by Sunday.

## How to Help

The most important thing for employers to remember is that returning to work is a radical shift, experts say. Some soldiers have spent months at war, encountering life-and-death situations on a daily basis. Some have seen their close friends and comrades killed or seriously injured. When they return to civilian work, it's a big adjustment. The best thing to do? Don't rush them back into the workplace.

## Other tips:

- Welcome veterans back with open arms and make them feel like valuable members of the workforce.
- Get the veteran back in the swing of things immediately and bring him/her up to date with any changes made during his/her absence and give the opportunity to contribute to the team right away.
- Give them time to reestablish family relationships.
- Be careful about comments and questions about their military experiences, especially if they were involved in combat. Respect privacy. If soldiers wish to discuss their experiences, let them; if they don't, don't pursue it.
- Familiarize yourself with the USERRA\*. It's clear that an increasing number of employers will need to be up to speed on USERRA-related issues. After more than three years of extended deployments and uncertain futures for Reserve and Guard troops, the Pentagon is now considering even longer tours of duty.

*\*USERRA is the [Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act](#) . It was passed by Congress in 1994 to provide reemployment protection and other benefits to those engaged in military service. These provide reemployment rights to veterans and reservists returning from active duty and require that all the benefits of employment be given as if they had been continuously employed.*

## Resources for Employer Support:

- Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), (800) 336-4590. This agency is eager to work with employers and help answer questions about USERRA.
- The Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-userra.htm>. (866) 487-WAGE. This site includes a thorough explanation of USERRA, as well as a help section to address questions and concerns.
- Military One source. [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com) or (800) 342-9647. 24/7 information hotline. Get help for any problem including free confidential counseling.

**Please contact Cascade EAP for information and resources.  
800-433-2320 or 503-639-3009**