Understanding the Needs of a Military Veteran Workforce
In 2001, the United States initiated a global war on terror that continues to this day. Seven years later, in 2008, the American economy experienced its worst recession since the 1930s and has not yet made a full recovery. These events, while appearing distinct, impact a key common audience: the country’s military veterans.

Consider this: while the overall unemployment rate in the U.S. was almost 7 percent in February of 2014, veteran unemployment for the Gulf War-era II demographic alone was over 9 percent.¹ This means that more than 599,900 veterans were unemployed and looking for work.

Notable efforts have been made by the Federal Government to assuage joblessness in veteran populations, including First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden’s Joining Forces veteran issues initiative and President Obama’s offering of tax credits to those businesses that hire veterans.

Corporate America, too, has taken charge of assisting veterans. Prudential Financial, Inc. is one such company. Their effort to connect new veteran employees with tenured veteran employees through their VETnet Business Resource Group is a laudable example of how a company can create a veteran-friendly workplace environment. They also support continued veteran education through a partnership with VETalent and give to veteran services organizations.

Yet some businesses are wary of hiring veterans. Concern about the potential of redeployment for reserve members, fear of introducing mental health issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) into the workplace, and the potential costs of accommodating veterans are only a handful of issues employers cite as reasons for avoiding military hires. In addition, only a small percentage of employers are familiar with veteran resources.

This white paper will provide an overview of issues that veterans face in a civilian, post-military service world so as to educate employers on this important and valuable talent pool, as well as highlight the importance of Employee Assistance Programs when working with veteran populations.

¹ http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t05.htm
Veterans and the Transition to Civilian Life

It can be easy for those unfamiliar with the military to overlook or stereotype the stressors of a veteran’s transition to civilian life. Even veterans themselves often believe the transition from a warzone to the relative peace of a civilian existence will be simple. While most veterans exhibit resilience when reintegrating into civilian life, some have more difficulty. It is important for employers to be aware of issues all veterans face in both their personal lives and in the workplace.

When polled, veterans cite navigating assistance services, a lack of education and/or training, physical disabilities and mental health issues as barriers to a successful transition back into civilian life.2 The following are some brief explanations of veteran issues with which employers should be familiar:

- **Education and Training:** Veterans face a job market in which job postings regularly express a required minimum of a bachelor’s degree and at least three years’ employment experience while competing with applicants who do have these qualifications. A veteran may have difficulty translating their military experience into skills needed for civilian jobs. If they are not able to explain their military experience in civilian terms, employers will not understand the veteran’s qualifications.

- **Physical Disabilities:** It is not uncommon for returning veterans to have physical disabilities ranging from partial deafness to lost limbs, any of which may require a workplace accommodation. Although employers are required by law not to discriminate against those with disabilities, veterans might perceive their impairment as a barrier to gainful employment or a successful civilian life.

- **PTSD and Mental Health:** Veterans may experience a wide range of mental and emotional injuries, including PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). In fact, up to 20% of military personnel who served in Afghanistan and Iraq experience symptoms of PTSD.3 Veterans also have a suicide rate almost twice that of the general public.4 Whether or not they experience mental issues, veterans may be subject to stereotyping and stigmatization.

- **Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse by veterans and members of the military has been on the rise for the past ten years and is a health issue present at a higher rate than for the general public.

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Alcohol and prescription drug abuse can lead to dependency and may cause health problems, strain relationships, negatively impact work or lead to altercations with the law.

- **Access to Services:** Despite the amount of assistance available through the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), many veterans express frustration with an inability to both access and maneuver the current system.

There are numerous resources available to employers who are faced with veteran issues. The following are some beneficial services for assisting veterans in the workforce:

- **Veteran Services:** Even though navigating community resources or services available through the VA can feel overwhelming, employers need to emphasize—as well as understand—the benefits of such services. Employers can begin by familiarizing themselves with community resources, VA offices, and online resources while also providing information on opportunities and offering flexibility to veteran employees who require or need assistance.

Employers should have a clear understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act and be able to determine effective accommodations and apply them to veterans’ disabilities. The employer also should be familiar with the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) when hiring and working with physically disabled veterans. Allowing a flexible work schedule for a disabled veteran to address health concerns or attend physical therapy may be appropriate accommodations. Also, it is important that the Human Resources department is communicating disability benefits to all employees.

- **Professional Development:** The employer who understands military culture, the needs of veterans, and how military skills are transferable to the civilian workplace is in a position to benefit from hiring the veteran. The manager knows that a platoon leader could be a potential project manager, or a military technology specialist might be perfect for the IT department. Veterans are valued for their leadership, loyalty, task-oriented point of view, and hardworking demeanor, as well as formidable analytical, organizational, and technical skills. They also have a strong penchant for understanding global trends in business and new technology.5

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Employers should take the time to promote and offer professional development opportunities to their veteran workforce that capitalize on these strengths and help employees develop additional competencies, as well as consider assisting with continuing education.

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and Counseling**: An EAP can be an invaluable tool when addressing the needs of veterans in the workplace. Counseling can help manage mental health conditions or substance abuse, and an EAP representative will be able to assist employers with connecting veterans to pertinent services that are available locally.

According to the VA’s 2013 Veterans in the Workplace study⁶, a veteran-friendly EAP will exhibit the following characteristics:

- An intake, assessment and referral process in which confidentiality is emphasized. EAP counselors are trained in knowledge of military culture and know how and when to assess for PTSD, suicide, substance abuse, depression and anxiety. Counselors are trained to recognize when to refer to another provider or connect the veteran with other treatment resources.
- The ability to provide education on VA resources for veterans and their families.
- Management and supervisor consultation regarding military transition issues, accommodations for behavioral health issues, appropriate responses to employees who exhibit behavior issues, and how to encourage and de-stigmatize the use of EAP services by veteran employees.
- Training programs for employees, supervisors, managers and EAP providers.

**Civilian Employees Impacted by Veterans**

Negotiating the change from war to home takes time and effort. The survival mode mentality that was necessary in war can present problems at home and in the community. This instinct or “battle mind” mentality can include narrowed attention and focus, a heightened sense of awareness, an inability to trust, emotional unavailability, a hostile appraisal of events, and reacting quickly while asking questions later.⁷

These difficulties in transition and reintegration can impact a different employee population: the family and co-workers of veterans.

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⁶ [http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_EAP_practices.html](http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_EAP_practices.html)

As with many of the problems faced by employees outside of working hours, the stress a worker is under in his or her personal life may or may not be readily apparent to employers. Yet the impact of a veteran presence in an employee’s life can affect performance, interoffice relationships and absenteeism. For example, even though employees may be physically present at work, their thoughts could be elsewhere as they worry about the wellbeing or employment status of a veteran spouse, offspring, parent or family friend.

It is important for employers to know how best to assist those facing veteran issues who are not themselves veterans. The EAP resources outlined above are also available to address the concerns of family members, co-workers, and friends of veterans, as well as their managers and supervisors.

The adoption and execution of an EAP is shown to net a positive ROI to the employer, but must respond to emerging needs in the workplace in order to continue to do so.

**The FEI Difference**

With a strong national presence and 35 years of experience in EAP, FEI Behavioral Health is in a unique position to assist workforces in coping with the variety of concerns associated with veteran issues. The following are some of the ways FEI endeavors to establish workforce resiliency among veteran workers:

- **Employee Assistance Program**: FEI has a long and respected reputation for providing effective intake, assessment and referral to the employees of its client companies. FEI counselors use a screening process to target and assess issues directly related to veterans during intake. Calls related to an employee impacted by veteran issues are also provided expert guidance, information and intervention. Referrals to a provider credentialed as a military and veteran specialist are made with easy accessibility to in-person counseling within a 20 mile radius of the veteran’s worksite or home. Same-day appointments are scheduled in urgent situations.

- **Legal/Financial Consultation**: Returning home after military service is a transition that requires time and effort, and legal or financial troubles can compound the stressors of reentering civilian life. Some challenges include purchasing a home, separation or divorce, adoption, child custody/visitation issues, managing expenses and debt, and financial planning for the future. FEI’s legal and financial consultation services provide veteran employees with a free and confidential intake, referral and consultation process with a local attorney or financial advisor.
• **Management Consultation:** The success of an organization depends on the capabilities of a manager to know his or her workforce, and that includes understanding veteran employees. FEI's Account Managers provide unlimited consultations to assess such veteran concerns as personal problems that interfere with work performance, behavior or attendance; concern for employee suicide, violence, or other workplace risks; or drugs and alcohol in the workplace including management of positive drug screens.

FEI strives to ensure that its network of counseling providers understands veterans in the context of the current social climate and are connecting veterans to the proper resources. To meet this end, FEI has identified those providers in our network who have the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for working with military/veteran individuals, families, and organizations.

Prudential, a client of FEI, can attest to both the need for impactful solutions to veteran issues as well as the benefit a strong EAP can be for veterans and those employees affected by a veteran presence.

“Veterans bring determination, resourcefulness and commitment to their work, valuable attributes for business success,” said Stephen Robinson, Vice President of External Veteran Affairs at Prudential. “They have an important contribution to make, and it makes sense to provide them, like all employees, with services that support their best efforts.

“Prudential sees the value in hiring veterans and providing all employees, including veterans, with highly effective health programs and resources. FEI Behavioral Health is one such resource.”

FEI continues to expand its already robust network of providers and is actively recruiting more counselors trained to assist those with veteran issues. The road to improving the lives of veterans and the lives of their families and friends begins with a foundation of trust and confidentiality. FEI is here to help.

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**FEI partners with you to protect and enhance your workforce effectiveness and organizational resiliency.** We offer flexible solutions for the full spectrum of your workforce resilience goals, from EAP and wellness to crisis preparedness and management. We leverage our proven resources, compassionate experts and robust network to improve your employees’ focus, empower your managers and prepare you to handle the unthinkable crisis, so that you can maintain a healthy, resilient organization.