COURAGE TO CARE

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# Helping National Guard and Reserve Reenter the Workplace

This fact sheet explains the emotional and psychological issues that reservists may experience transitioning from active duty into their former job or workplace. It is written for both the military and civilian community. Military health providers and educators can use this in their reintegration outreach, as well as mail it to employers in their communities. Professionals in human resources and employee health and wellness can use this and the attached fact sheet for managers and supervisors to facilitate the reentry of reservists into their workplace.

The veteran's return to work is an employment transition. It often brings new skills of leadership, teamwork and a broadened perspective that can be invaluable to your organization. We hope the following information can help your company welcome home our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

## BACKGROUND

Approximately one million Reserve and National Guard troops are serving in the US military today. Of the American troops currently in Iraq, 40% are from Guard and Reserve units. Reservists may be activated for up to 2 years, a significant time away from one's family, workplace and community.

## FACILITATING WORKPLACE REENTRY

**The following tips may be helpful in preparing your workplace:**

### Dispel Myths

- ❑ There are numerous myths about returning soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines — that they will be changed, unable to adjust or troubled. In preparing your workforce for return of military members, it is important to set a climate of positive expectations for all employees emphasizing productive, supportive and effective work relationships and performance.

### Foster Respect and Reintegration

- ❑ Meet beforehand with colleagues of the returning service member to discuss the transition, its impact on your team and related concerns. Planning a welcoming event such as a breakfast, lunch or office party is an appropriate gesture that can foster cohesion and a sense of community.

### Prepare the Transition

- ❑ The transition back to work involves realignment and renegotiation of roles and responsibilities — old tasks return to the employee and new ones are added. Prepare the returning soldier for any significant changes, as he/she will be alert to whether or not "the things I used to do" are still in place.
- ❑ Prepare the person who may have occupied the position during the military member's service. Understand that they too have a process of readjustment. Acknowledging this and expressing appreciation for their work will further assist in setting a climate of respect, trust and acceptance.
- ❑ The transition can take time. Job-related training and education in areas such as new software programs or administrative management can help the returning military member feel confident in his or her skills and knowledge.
- ❑ Plan for special accommodations for those who have been injured. One's self esteem is greatly tied to being

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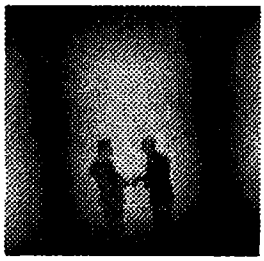
able to work. Thoughtful and timely planning to accommodate injury will send a positive message to the entire workforce.

- This transition will go very well for the vast majority of returning individuals. A small number such as those exposed to the most intense combat/threat to life or those who have additional issues (divorce, financial problems) may experience ongoing stress. Persistent sadness, withdrawal, sleep problems, family or work place conflict as well as any alcohol or other substance abuse require early attention and referral for medical support. *It may be helpful to reinforce the confidentiality of your employee assistance program and how to access services for evaluation and treatment.*

# Workplace Reintegration Roadmap for Managers

The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress has prepared the information below to help managers and supervisors understand and facilitate the workplace reentry of individuals returning from active duty. It is helpful to view the return and reentry as a process in which some or all of the following phases and issues may unfold:



**ANTICIPATION:** There is always anticipation in returning to one's family and workplace. The transition back to work is as important for many as returning to one's family, and for some even more meaningful. Providing information through thoughtful and supportive communication is important in reducing anxiety and welcoming back the returning service member. *Supervisors and managers need to share information about workload, policy and personnel issues and changes that have taken place during the individual's absence.*

**HOMECOMING:** Celebrating is important. Let the service members know how proud you are of their sacrifice, their commitment to our country and their job. In many ways the return is a "honeymoon" of sorts. Sooner or later the reality of homecoming is contrasted to the hopes and expectations of what life would be like after the war. *It is normal for the service member to experience some disappointment or let down in the process of returning home and to the workplace.*

**COPING WITH CHANGE:** Some people take deployment and the return home in stride, "without missing a beat," while for others it becomes a defining point in their lives. It is only natural to experience a sense of change after returning from a deployment. Individuals re-connect with their past life and attempt to integrate their experiences of deployment. Training and education can aid this transition by providing structure, growth and a concrete sense of accomplishment during this period. *Supervisors and managers should recognize the acquisition of new skills — leadership, teamwork and problem-solving— that have taken place during deployment and seek avenues for their expression and recognition in the returning soldier's job and workplace.*

**A RANGE OF REACTIONS:** Coming home represents a return to safety but the routines of home and work are markedly different from regimented life in a war zone. Upon return, service members may miss the focus and intensity of missions during war. There may be ambivalence about these feelings or reluctance to discuss them for fear of offending those who awaited their return. *It may be helpful to reinforce the confidentiality of your employee assistance program, its array of services and how to access help using it.*

**SUCCESSFUL READJUSTMENT:** Work provides meaning and gratification in one's life, and is one of the most important components of successful readjustment to civilian life. *The returning service member will appreciate the efforts of management, colleagues and your organization.*

On behalf of Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, we thank you for supporting the health and well being of our troops.

***The following websites have additional information:***

**Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve**

http://www.esgr.org

Facts sheets and resources for employers and Guard and Reserve on all aspects of workplace reentry: its implications for employers and employees

**The National Mental Health Association**

http://www.nmha.org/reassurance/cominghome/returningtowork.cfm

Fact sheets and information for Reservists and Guard and their employers

**Ameriforce Deployment Guide 2004**

http://www.deploymentguide.com

Fact sheets and information for service members and families on post-deployment

*Visit the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at: http://www.usuhs.mil/csts*