



Communicating the Value of Inclusion of Veterans with Disabilities

Defining and selling the value proposition for including veterans with disabilities in the workforce is necessary in order to gain leadership support. It is an organizational myth-busting, core value–building process.

Millions of veterans with service-related disabilities need jobs that pay a living wage. Many disabled veterans have children, disabilities that employers can easily accommodate, and a desire to work. The challenge is convincing business leaders that disabled veterans can contribute to organizational success as much as the non-disabled employees.

Too often, the value proposition for hiring disabled veterans has not been adequately conveyed, so senior leaders and the managers reporting to them continue to buy into the myth that hiring people with disabilities will drive up labor costs without getting full productivity or benefits.

Selling the value proposition to business leaders is a critical first step in making Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) programs more inclusive of disabled veterans.

By the Numbers

Disability claims are rising in the U.S., revealing a group of people who have dealt with their disabilities with little or no financial help from the government. Today there is better recognition that veterans have a variety of physical and emotional disabilities, but unfortunately there is still a stigma attached to all people with disabilities.

It is a catch-22 situation because a veteran may have a 30 percent disability due to something like hearing loss and be able to get disability payments, but once in the disabled category, employers are more reluctant to hire them. It is easy to get deceived by statistics, when in reality disabled veterans are still not fully included in the workforce.

As of August 2016, there are almost 21 million veterans in the U.S., and 4.6 million have a service-connected disability. Of those, 37 percent had a rating of 60 percent or higher. It is true that some of the veterans are over the traditional retirement age of 65, but there are millions who are younger, have children, are getting significantly less than full disability, and need a job that enables them to support their families. The labor force participation rate for veterans with a service-connected disability is 46.4 percent, meaning over half are not



employed or not looking for work. The unemployment rate for disabled veterans is 4.8 percent.

It is important to understand the labor force participation rate is a better indicator of the status of veterans with service-connected disabilities than the unemployment rate because it gives an idea of the percentage of people who are not employed, not looking for work, or have given up searching for employment, which these numbers show is 53.6 percent.

Building the Value Proposition

Building the value proposition for hiring veterans with disabilities is actually a process of dispelling myths with facts communicated to top leaders to gain their support and then effectively communicating the advantages disabled veterans offer to the organization.

Myths are obstacles to employment. Some people believe the disabled veterans are too dangerous to hire and present a risk to workplace safety. Another myth is that PTSD prevents veterans from being able to manage workplace stress. Other myths include believing veterans do not have skills that can be transferred to the workplace and that hiring any people with disabilities will cost more than the benefits received. Like any myth, they are not true.

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) regularly gathers statistics on the value proposition of employers engaging people with disabilities, including veterans. An ongoing survey has found that the customers of organizations that are inclusive of people with disabilities accrue significant direct and indirect benefits. They include a 72 percent increase in employee productivity, 60 percent reduction in workforce training costs for new employees, 38 percent reduction in workers' compensation or other insurance costs, and 45 percent increase in workplace safety. Also of enormous importance is a reported 28 percent increase in profitability and a 17 percent increase in the customer base.

These are the kinds of numbers that top leaders need to know. Veterans with disabilities bring even more benefits that are specific to their past experience in the military. These must be communicated to top leadership to get them on board as advocates. Top-down leadership is critical to the success of any D&I program.

Veterans with disabilities are team players. No one probably understands the importance of effective teams than someone who has put his or her life on the line to support team members. Disabled veterans have also proven they can work under pressure so they are able to manage high levels of stress in the workplace.

Just the fact a disabled veteran wants employment demonstrates remarkable endurance and perseverance. These are desirable qualities for any employee. It has also been proven through numerous studies that diverse workforces are more innovative because people with a variety of perspectives and experiences are contributing. Veterans with disabilities bring new



perspectives concerning product and services development, underserved markets, and potential customers.

Strengthening the Core Value

Northrup Grumman is a standard bearer for making a commitment to the employment of disabled veterans. The Operation IMPACT program is designed for veterans who have a physical disability rating of 30 percent or greater. The program assists severely wounded service members with their transition from the military to a career in the private sector. If the veteran is not employable, the program offers the same support to the person in the immediate family who will be the primary wage earner.

The company employs thousands of veterans because they bring a unique set of skills to the company, have a firsthand appreciation for the products and services, and have valuable training and leadership development that was obtained during military service. Northrup Grumman also developed resources like a military skills translator tool that matches job openings to common military skills.

Once the business case is built and top leaders are on board, it is important to develop managers down the line. Communicating the benefits of employing disabled veterans on an organization-wide basis strengthens the core value of D&I. Northrup Grumman, Starbucks, AT&T and other companies are already appreciative of the skills, knowledge and perspectives disabled veterans offer. Hopefully, many more companies will follow their lead.

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