



HELPING VETERANS TRANSITION TO JOBS AND KEEP THEM

Getting the Job

When assessing a veteran in employment services, it is critical to look at many factors, such as employment experience (including work they did in the military), preferences, hard and soft skills, socioeconomic barriers (including housing, physical and mental health issues), ability to function in the modern workplace, technological skills, and more. A comprehensive assessment not only looks at the barriers a veteran is facing when entering employment, but also at the strengths the veteran has. This can include the soft skills associated with military service (e.g., leadership, teamwork, adaptability, ability to learn). By helping veterans focus on their strengths, it helps case manager engage them and create a positive framework; this allows veterans to feel better about themselves and have a more positive experience transitioning into work.

Sometimes, veterans are reluctant to work. Techniques such as motivational interviewing (MI) can help engage them. MI involves facilitating and engaging the intrinsic motivation that lies within the client to get them to think differently about employment. The trick is to listen to the client and to hone in on some of the non-employment goals and activities in which the veteran wants to engage. Then help translate those goals and activities into employment goals that the veteran can get behind. There is a wealth of MI techniques and trainings available in many different formats.

Living Wage and Sustainable Wages

Striving to place veterans into competitive employment at a living wage should always be the goal. When veterans are placed into sustainable-wage jobs, they tend to keep them longer. Read through the research section of this best practice for a better picture of how wages affect job retention. Often, veterans will take a “survival job” to get them through the short-term while they look for a better job. This is completely

acceptable if the long-term goal is to place the veteran into a sustainable job. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has developed a [living wage calculator](#). This tool allows case managers to understand what living rate wage is for a single veteran, a veteran with dependents, a veteran with a spouse and dependents, etc. The living wage takes into consideration what a person must make to afford housing, food, utilities, and have a basic standard of living. Striving for this level of employment is challenging, but ultimately it will help the veteran be successful and have good retention outcomes.

Keeping the Job

Part of the key to ensuring that veterans not only get employment but keep employment, is finding the right fit. We must listen to what the veteran says and translate what they are saying into an understanding of the type of work and work environment for which they are best suited and prefer.

For example, if the veteran suffers from PTSD or other anxiety disorders, and is bothered by sudden loud noises, it would be unwise for a case manager to place this veteran into a warehouse job or shop environment that had a lot of loud noises. As another example, veterans who tend to be socially isolated and have difficulties interacting with others shouldn't be pushed into employment in the retail sector where they must interact with people continuously on a day-to-day basis.

Those are just two examples; the point is that we must be cognizant of the veteran's limitations and preferences. Of course work is work, and there will always be some unpleasant tasks associated with most jobs. That said, we should strive to find the best possible fit for our veterans.

Programs that are successful with retention often utilize follow-along supports and incentives. As a veteran transitions into employment, the case manager can act as a liaison between the veteran and the employer. When there are minor issues that need to be addressed, the case manager may be able to intervene before the situation leads to termination by the employer, or the veteran simply quitting the job.

Here is an example of an intervention. Consider a situation where the veteran continually shows up late for his shift. When the case manager investigates, she finds out the start time of the shift does not line up with public transportation the veteran uses. In this situation, the case manager could engage the veteran and employer to find a compromise; perhaps negotiating an earlier or later start time until the veteran can obtain his own vehicle or other means of transportation. Small issues can often be alleviated in this fashion. When employers know the case manager is in contact and supporting the veteran, they will be more willing to engage and come up with novel solutions to workplace problems.

Another way case managers can provide support is by listening to the veteran's issues in the workplace. If there is, for example, a supervisor or coworker that the veteran is having difficulties with, the case manager can provide some tools or other techniques to help the veteran better work through the disputes or to disconnect from the situation.

Follow-along supports also can take the form of tangible support services (e.g., bus pass, tools, other transportation assistance, taxi vouchers, ridesharing services, bicycle share services), certifications, and other value-added services that help make veterans more successful and more likely to keep their jobs.

Incentives can take the form of gift cards, awards, and other services that encourage veterans to not only keep their jobs but to stay in contact with program. For example, giving a veteran a \$50 gift card after 6 months, 9 months, and 1 year of employment has helped several grantees bolster their retention numbers. Many times veterans are dutifully employed but have fallen out of contact with the program for a variety of reasons. Some veterans are simply too busy engage because they are working full-time (or more), or are successful and do not want to be associated with the homeless program.

Coming up with creative ways to help veterans stay engaged is part of good retention outcomes. We have seen that when responsibility is given to veterans to help new veterans who will be coming into the program, they are more likely to stay in contact—not because they need the services necessarily, and not as a favor to the case manager, but to ensure that future veterans seeking services will have the program in place. Giving this responsibility to veterans helps them understand the critical nature of staying in touch with the program once they are permanently employed.