

Treat 'Em Right - Tips for Employing Citizen Soldiers

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As we pause this week to remember and thank all those who have, and continue to serve our country in the armed forces, it's a good opportunity to revisit best practices for supporting citizen soldiers in the workplace.

Employees who are members of the Reserve or National Guard will at some point need to take leave from work for military training, mobilization, or deployment, leaves that could last for weeks (or months). These employees often have unique experiences that coworkers who haven't served in the military can't fully relate to, so it's important to proactively and compassionately prepare for military leaves.

Best Practice Tips : C.A.R.E.

- **Communicate.** Develop a plan to communicate with employees on military leave so that they feel connected to the workplace. Examples include sharing company newsletters with the employee; scheduling regular check-ins by phone, skype or other means; encouraging coworkers to write letters, send care packages, etc. Likewise, ask the employee for a copy of their military training schedule for the year - this will enable both you and the employee to be better prepared for leaves as they occur during the year. And when the employee is called for training or service, make sure to ask for a copy of their military orders.
- **Accommodate.** Be mindful of your obligation to reasonably accommodate employees who may be suffering from physical or mental disabilities in connection with their past or current military service. Applicable laws include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and state counterparts. If the employee is having difficulty readjusting to work, consider referring them to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- **Reintegrate.** Develop an individualized reintegration plan for employees returning from military leave, which might include: updating the employee on any policy, people or other changes in the workplace; determining if the employee needs any training or

re-training; asking how the employee would like to be treated in regard to their deployment (*i.e.* do they want to share their experiences or would they prefer not to). Consider a more gradual reentry process and flexible work arrangements for employees that may be having challenges with their return to work.

- **Educate.** Be aware of, and comply with, your obligations as an employer under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), the primary federal law that governs workplace military leaves. Educate the workforce, through policy and guidelines, on their rights as citizen soldiers in the workplace. A helpful resource in this regard is the Employers Support of the Guard and Reserve: <http://www.esgr.mil/>

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Military.