

May 2008 (Vol. 7, No. 5)

A Letter on Hiring Disabled Veterans from a Recruiter to His Supervisor

The following is an excerpt from an email written by Mr. Daniel Stewart, a recruiter for the Department of State, to his supervisor regarding a visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center for an Operation Warfighter hiring event.

Dear Ann,

I felt compelled to write something following my participation this morning at the Operation Warfighter event at the Walter Reed Karen Wagner Gymnasium. It is hard to put my feelings and impressions into words. If I had to sum them up in one word, I would say the event was "Humbling." I was humbled to participate in this event, and would encourage everyone who has not done so, to take the opportunity to get involved.

I arrived about 10 minutes before the other recruiter and watched the men and women in uniform filter into the gym. I was immediately struck by the fact that what I was about to undertake was far different from our normal outreach activities. This was far from the normal collection of well-dressed, fresh-faced, eager and enthusiastic college students we normally recruit. I saw people negotiating far more than the simple question of "what to do after college." I saw men and women negotiating using wheel chairs and canes. I saw scars, some visible, some not, and some visible in other ways. I saw them adjusting to not-always-apparent prosthetics and sometimes all-too-apparent psychological trauma. And there were many of them. Several hundred at least. But beyond their disabilities, I saw faces full of both uncertainty and determination. The uncertainty of trying to move forward with a life that one way or another is now radically different. And the determination to not be defined or deterred by their new conditions.

At 8:00 a.m., after some brief announcements, the soldiers were encouraged to speak with the agencies and organizations represented under Operation Warfighter. One by one, they filed past our table. I have never seen both so much strength and so much fragility in one collection of people in such quick succession. One young man, with visible scarring to his face from shrapnel, mentioned that he and his young wife would like to move back to Charleston, South Carolina after he is medically discharged in August. His dream has always been to be in protection, like the Secret Service. However, his injury has left him with no vision in his right eye, and now he is "hoping to adjust his career goals" to his new condition. Another, with a Masters in International Relations, spoke passionately about his desire to work abroad. He had also received shrapnel to the head which left the left side of his face temporarily paralyzed. One man came accompanied by his wife. He said, with a laugh and not a little bit of irony, "I'm perfect for a secure position. My injury has left me with no short term memory!" His wife, lovingly and mockingly, agreed!

Some of them looked just barely out of their teens. Some of them had limps

DID YOU KNOW...?

The National Network of ADA Centers will present *Accommodating Employees with Psychiatric Disabilities in the Workplace* on June 17, as part of their audio conference series. Psychiatric conditions are the leading charge category for complaints filed with the EEOC. Data gathered by the National Institute of Mental Health indicate that more than 1 in 5 American adults experience some diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Employers are often concerned that accommodating individuals with psychiatric disabilities is more difficult and costly than accommodating those with physical disabilities. The session will address the realities of accommodating individuals with disabilities in the workplace and offer practical solutions for employers. [Register for the conference.](#)

Save the date for the 2009 Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) Leadership Forum on Accessibility on January 29 and 30 in Orlando, FL. [Visit ATIA's website](#) for more information about the upcoming forum, as well as a recap of the 2008 event.

that were just barely perceptible. None of them seemed to be ashamed of their conditions. Nor should they. All seemed a little apprehensive about their futures. And despite my commentary above, many of them just seemed excited and prepared to start a new chapter in their lives after the military, with all the enthusiasm and excitement of the college students we normally deal with. They were happy to have the information about employment with the federal government. And I felt honored to provide it to them.

I guess my purpose in writing this is to say that I cannot overstate the importance of this work. I truly believe in what we do in the recruiting office, working to increase diversity at our agency. I think it makes good business sense, and it is just the right thing to do. And working to provide opportunities to women and men that have willingly sacrificed their bodies and sanity for our safety and security is more than just the right thing to do – it is a moral imperative. They don't need hand outs. The military is a marvelous institution, and many have developed a range of skills, both hard and soft, across several different areas. In almost all cases, the Department of State can use those skills. These women and men just need a chance to continue their already profound service.

Operation Warfighter is a temporary assignment/internship program open to Federal agencies in the National Capital Region. [Read the Operation Warfighter brochure](#) for more information. For more information on similar programs for commercial and non-profit companies, contact Billy Wright, Director, EARN Veteran Initiatives at bwright@earnworks.com or 1.866.327.6669 X 244.

Dealing with Disabilities and Discipline at Work

The following is an excerpt from an article by Steve Saunders published in May 2008 in the Siouxland Business Journal.

Every now and then, one of our clients asks about how to impose disciplinary action when the employee in question has a disability. The tendency is to let various performance issues slide for fear of becoming involved in an employment discrimination claim. For all the right reasons, employers want to comply with the provisions of the American's with Disabilities Act. Naturally, we want to comply with the law. More important, we want employers to treat employees with dignity and respect. We need to remember that dignity and respect apply to all employees not just those with actual or perceived disabilities. For that reason, we usually recommend addressing the poor performance or bad conduct even when the employee in question has some sort of disability. Problems left unaddressed mean that we have an employee who is allowed to "get away" with sub-par work or behavior. They just happen to have some kind of ADA related impairment. Having said that, let's examine the steps an employer should take to stay on the right side of the moral and legal argument.

[Read the full article](#) for more advice.

GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK

IF YOU HAVE AN EARN SUCCESS STORY, TELL US ABOUT IT. WE WOULD LIKE TO FEATURE YOUR STORY IN THIS NEWSLETTER AND ON OUR WEB SITE.

E-MAIL YOUR STORY TO:
EARN@EARNWORKS.COM

EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

- [DisabilityInfo.gov](#)
- [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#)
- [Ticket to Work](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [National Organization on Disability](#)

INFORMATION YOU CAN USE

The National Telecommuting Institute can help you connect with advanced communications technology and vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to hire people with disabilities for your work-from-home positions. [Visit their website](#) for more information.

EARN SUPPORT

EARN is funded by the [U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy](#).

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