

LR's Transition from American Service Veteran to Successful Job Applicant

By the time LR left the service he didn't think much of himself. He was experiencing low self-esteem, and most of his energies were devoted towards extreme feelings of depression. He became anti-social and faced a difficult adjustment to the civilian workplace. He appeared argumentative and uncooperative. His problems were driving him closer to homelessness, unemployment, isolation, and a life out-of-control. And that was on a "good day".

LR reached out to the Department of Veteran Affairs/Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Division (**VR&E**) to help him assimilate back into the community. The VA has developed a number of pathways for their veterans to assimilate into back into civilian life.

Reemployment is the preferred option, considered the "fast track. If a former employer wants to rehire a veteran the rate of success is high due to the familiarity with the work environment and the career path offered. LR's service time changed him, he did not want to go back to his old job.

Rapid Access to Employment is another option. This occurs when VR&E helps the VET who is ready to enter the workforce, find, apply for, and secure a suitable job. The VET is provided with professional job placement assistance, job accommodations, and other specialized support. But again, the VET must be "ready" for that challenge. LR was not ready.

The Self-Employment option can be fulfilling and offers the flexibility a Veteran with a disability needs. This is a complex endeavor requiring a mindset and focus that LR didn't have.

In certain circumstances where important "building blocks" are missing the VET may require longer term assistance. This may mean entering college; or maybe a work study arrangement; or other longer term job preparation programs. This would be the "Employment through Long Term Services" approach. It takes time and tenacity. Neither of which were LR's strong suits.

Some Veterans may be unable to return to work at all. In such cases, the VA helps them with access to community-based support services, the use of assistive technologies; accommodations, and Independent Living Skills Training. LR did not fit this scenario, he still had a lot to offer to the "right" employer.

On November 5, 2012, VR&E initiated a Veterans Extended Evaluation process for LR and brought KAT on board to assist. The purpose of the Extended Evaluation plan is to provide evaluative and rehabilitative services to identify employment barriers for individual veterans like LR. The goal is to overcome barriers and find the right path for each individual to succeed. The KAT Veterans Education and Skills Training (V.E.S.T.) program trains each veteran to improve while acclimating to the "work world". This step by step process continues until the Vet is ready to take advantage of appropriate opportunities.

LR's baseline data revealed significant barriers to employment and community reintegration. Reorienting his perception of his self-worth was an obvious starting point. Readjusting his

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awareness of civilian work expectations was another. A plan was developed to promote his self-worth by placing him in a production line with a team of individuals geared toward achievement. It soon came to pass – part due to peer-pressure and part due to group-expectation – LR not only survived but soon excelled in his new environment. It took a lot of peer-based training, plenty of individualized instruction, a lot of praise and a bit of good humor, but in the end the V.E.S.T. program paid off.

LR's emotional focus became positive and forward-looking. He became an integral part of the processing chain and KAT's entire team began looking up to him. He became focused on meeting production deadlines within the strict quality standards required by KAT's primary client, Boeing Aerospace Company. The thrill he gained from supporting in the aerospace industry filled him with an enthusiasm few could miss. He worked hard. He attained self-assurance and leadership skills. He soon became self-directed and required minimal supervision. LR's personal growth and hard work overcame the all barriers to reentering the workforce.

Through a flexible work schedule allowing for continuing education, LR entered Olympic College and concentrated on a field of study in an emerging market relating to fiber-reinforced composite materials. LR was learning the latest in advanced composite technology – the highly resilient and light-weight materials used in building modern aircraft. He was learning how to manufacture composites that possess high tensile strength, temperature and chemical resistance, along with low weight and low thermal expansion. He was learning to create incredibly strong and lightweight composite structures.

LR now had a resume that included, American Military Service Veteran, successful completion of the technically challenging Olympic College programs, and a letter of recommendation from KAT describing his outstanding growth and job performance. LR focused his attention on a company known as Hexcel, a global leader in advanced composites technology and a major supplier of aerospace parts. It is a company that thrives on the contributions each person brings to the Company by valuing diversity, developing talent, fostering teamwork, and rewarding success. The proof of LR's growth is best illustrated by his success in securing the right opportunity at Hexcel.

LR's personal accomplishment is also a proof of team support concepts. The Department of Veteran Affairs/Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Division, Kitsap Applied Technologies and Olympic College's vocational technology training can each check one up to a job well done. LR is a powerful success story to be emulated by other Veterans facing the challenges of getting back into the civilian work force.