YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment

Facilitator Guide

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Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 (computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;
✋ (hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.

*Essential class content is noted in **bold**.*

All class handouts are available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified as online only in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class covers the importance of understanding the various feelings a Service member may have when he or she returns to a civilian job after deployment and discusses useful tips to help the Service member anticipate difficulties, address certain situations, and reintegrate into the office environment.

Stage:

Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Projector
- Laptop

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment
  2. Objectives
  3. Work Adjustment
  4. Feelings About Returning to Work
  5. Issues to Consider for Workforce Reintegration
  6. Maintaining Positive Workplace Relationships
  7. You- vs. I-Statements
  8. Complaints vs. Criticisms
  9. Remember…
  10. Review of Objectives
  11. Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment
- Handouts
  1. None

Exercises:

1. Feelings About Returning to Work

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify expectations and feelings about returning to the workplace.
2. Identify useful tips to ease reintegration into a civilian job.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

The Service member is not the only person who changes because of deployment. New family roles may challenge children; spouses may feel stretched with regard to time, energy, and tasks; and coworkers may have had to undertake additional responsibilities.

As the returning Service member, you may be concerned about fitting back into the workplace. **You may have questions such as, "Who performed my job during my active duty? Was the job done the way I wanted it to be? Do I just take over again now? Who are these new hires? Will I fit in?"**

In this class, we will discuss your feelings about returning to a civilian job after deployment. What you did while deployed may have been very different from your civilian job, and you may not even notice all the differences until you return. Together, we will explore useful tips to help you anticipate difficulties and to help you reintegrate into your office environment.

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

Let's look at our objectives. After completing this class, you will be able to do the following:

1. **Identify expectations and feelings about returning to the workplace.**
2. **Identify useful tips to ease reintegration into a civilian job.**

Returning to Work

SHOW Slide 3: Work Adjustment

Returning to work after deployment takes some readjustment. It is OK to be worried about how you will fit back into the workplace. It could take time to adjust. You may have mixed emotions about returning to work. **Here are some challenges you may experience**:

- **Feeling isolated or out of place. You may miss the trust and bond you had with members in your unit.**
- **Experiencing difficulty following the rules. You are used to the military way of doing things. The orders to follow at work may be difficult to adjust to** (Adler et al., 2011).
- **Facing boredom or lack of interest. Your work may be less exciting than your deployment experience** (Bull Schaefer et al., 2013).
- **Having trouble staying focused. At first, you may be *on guard,* and you may lack focus** (Bull Schaefer et al., 2013; Vasterling et al., 2006).
- **Undergoing heightened anxiety, stress, and other unpleasant feelings associated with the transition when shifting from military to civilian culture** (Rausch, 2014).

SHOW Slide 4: Feelings About Returning to Work

EXERCISE 1: Feelings About Returning to Work

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to think about how they feel about returning to work after deployment. This should take approximately 5 minutes.

There have probably been some changes to your workplace during your absence. When you return, you may notice differences in personnel and/or processes. Someone else may have assumed your role or at least some of your responsibilities in your absence. Decisions may have been made by whomever fulfilled your role, and you may not agree with all of the decisions. It is likely that you will also notice a difference in pace and activity in your workday in comparison to the pace and activity during deployment. In addition, you may be expected to shift from your deployment schedule to your civilian job schedule and activities without much time to adjust.

How are you feeling about going back to work? Excited, anxious, nervous? Let's discuss some of those feelings. Write down the positive and negative feelings you have about going back to your job.

STOP this portion of the exercise after 2 minutes.

Now, turn to someone beside you, and share your responses. You will have 2 minutes.

STOP the discussion after 2 minutes. Then, FACILITATE a discussion on the emotions that were identified.

ASK the following questions of the larger group related to their discussion.

PAUSE for responses after each question.

Would anyone like to share the positive feelings that he or she identified?

Was it helpful to discuss your positive feelings about going back to work? Why?

What did you discover about yourself and your feelings?

SHOW Slide 5: Issues to Consider for Workforce Reintegration

Now, let's turn our discussion to our negative feelings and discuss potential issues to consider regarding reintegration at work.

Consider that your work environment may now include unfamiliar colleagues. Building a relationship with new coworkers and reestablishing connections with preexisting coworkers may help ease your transition back into the workplace and foster a productive work team (Bull Schaefer et al., 2013).

Talk with colleagues and supervisors to learn about changes such as new duties, responsibilities, or processes (Bull Schaefer et al., 2013; U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Ask about the rationale for the specified changes. **Do not be overly critical of the events that happened in your absence**. Just as you are encouraged to avoid criticizing a spouse's judgment in the decisions she or he reached, do not be overly critical of your fellow coworkers and your supervisory chain. **Inquire about ways in which you can effectively integrate into existing modes of operation**. Remember, since you were not there when changes occurred, you may not know the context and circumstances that influenced the decision-making process. For instance, your colleagues may have been functioning with reduced personnel during your absence, and your team probably did the best they could under the circumstances (U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). **If you have concerns with the changes that occurred in your absence, express those concerns in a way that avoids making others feel defensive and maintains positive methods of communication** (Keyton et al., 2013; Kubany et al., 1992; Kubany et al., 1995; Rogers et al., 2018). We will talk in a few minutes about strategies that could be used to do this.

Staff turnover can be inevitable in the workplace. Some people may have left the workplace while you were absent, and others may have joined. This can be a challenge, and adjusting to the changes in personnel may take time. **When opportunities arise, establish credibility and work to create positive relationships with new coworkers to ease the transition and enhance your connection to the familiar, yet changed, work environment.** You will also need to learn to work together effectively as a new team (U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

Some Service members who return to civilian jobs have reported their absence negatively affected their coworkers (Riviere et al., 2011). In such cases, **coworkers may react negatively, or, at least, not positively, to your return as they are experiencing resentment or mixed feelings**. Why? Colleagues at work may expect that you will be just the same as before. This may or may not be true. Coworkers may also have mixed feelings about any added workload they may have assumed in your absence. Putting aside whether these attitudes are fair or not, keep in mind that, ultimately, arguing about or dwelling on *who had it worse* is unlikely to be productive (Sahlstein et al., 2009). **Keep your focus on moving forward, and identify coworkers with whom you can build a positive and supportive network** (Bull Schaefer et al., 2013).

Encountering resentment from coworkers may be frustrating, but keep your feelings and responses under control. You may, for instance, want to consider the **Verbal Response Model, which allows you to construct an assertive statement by focusing on three elements: an empathy statement, a conflict statement, and an action statement. The empathy statement enables you to take the perspective of the other person. The conflict statement allows you to communicate the reason you feel conflict. The action statement lets you ask for what you want** (Winship & Kelley, 1976). For example, if someone is feeling resentful that you were reinstated into a position he or she held while you were gone, you could say the following, “I realize that you are upset about the fact that I am back in the position you had filled during my absence, but this was my position up until I was compelled to leave through the terms of my service. I would like to figure out a way to work through your concerns, so we can get to a better place.” Acknowledge that his or her perceptions and experiences regarding deployment are likely different than your own, and show him or her your appreciation for all he or she did in your absence.

Your colleagues will likely be interested in hearing about your experiences. Understand, however, that different **coworkers may have different levels of interest in or receptivity towards hearing ongoing stories about deployment or war**. Their reasons may or may not be stated or apparent.

One way to manage this is to inquire as to the reason the person may be interested in hearing this information. If you able and willing to discuss your service, you can offer an opportunity to discuss your deployment. For example, you could say, “I would be happy

to discuss my military service at a time that does not interfere with work if you are interested." It is entirely up to you if you are willing share aspects of your deployment service. Remember, your goal is to reintegrate into your workplace and reconnect with coworkers in a positive way so make sure you are interested in hearing about what they have been doing during your absence.

You may have difficulty leaving behind habits that were useful during the deployment but are not as applicable after reintegration. You may have found certain processes or styles of communication to be useful, and even necessary, to meet the demands of deployment. These processes and communication styles may not be useful upon return (U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). If you have concerns with the current approach, express them in a way that avoids making others feel defensive (Kubany et al., 1992; Kubany et al., 1995; Rogers et al., 2018). Remember, both relational and task-focused communication is common within the workplace (Keyton et al., 2013).

You may feel that you do not fit in to the organization upon your return or that you are not valued. These types of transitions can take time as it is an adjustment for everyone. Take confidence in your past and present contributions and accomplishments. If your feelings of not fitting in persist, consider reaching out to a supervisor for a collaborative, positive discussion of your concerns and potential solutions for easing your transition back onto the team.

If you experience workplace issues or conflicts when transitioning back into your civilian job, the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is available to help. More information is available on the ESGR website at www.esgr.mil, and various methods for contacting ESGR are listed on the Contact Us page.

Let's look at any other feelings that we have not discussed.

PAUSE for responses after each question:

Were there any other negative feelings you identified that were not discussed?

Was it helpful to discuss your issues or negative feelings about going back to work? Why?

What did you discover about yourself and your feelings?

Are you feeling a little less concerned about going back to work?

What steps are you going to take to get yourself ready between now and when you start work again?

SHOW Slide 6: Maintaining Positive Workplace Relationships

Most people want a satisfying and successful job in which their values and abilities are fully appreciated. This kind of success and satisfaction at work does not happen by accident. Some personal attributes that help to foster positive workplace relationships include the following:

- **Positive attitude**
- **Reliability and dependability**
- **Caring about others and showing it**
- **Admitting mistakes without getting defensive**
- **Communicating well**
- **Putting your best foot forward**

PAUSE for responses after each question.

Do any of these attributes stand out to you?

Which ones do you think would be most helpful for you in your work environment?

Communication Skills

SHOW Slide 7: You- vs. I-Statements

In order for communication to be effective, we must choose our words and nonverbal cues carefully. In creating an environment conducive to effective communication**, you should avoid language or mannerisms that can be perceived as harsh or attacking**. This is true for many types of relationships, so we'll look at many different types of examples as we move through the rest of this class.

By using I-statements instead of you-statements, choosing words wisely, and paying attention to nonverbal cues, we can avoid making those with whom we are communicating feel defensive (Kubany et al., 1992; Kubany et al., 1995; Rogers et al., 2018).

I-statements are messages presented as "declarative sentences that describe a thought, feeling, or other experience in a singular first-person manner" (Burr, 1990, p. 266). **I-statements focus on the speaker's feelings about a specified behavior without attacking or blaming others**. These statements "locate the feelings or concerns inside the person who is making the statement" (Burr, 1990, p. 266).

Here are **some examples of I-statements**.

- **"I feel frustrated."**

- **"I'm disappointed when my plans don't go according to schedule."**
- **"I feel sad when others let me down."**
- **"I'm anxious when I can't get in touch with you."**

In all of these examples, the point of view of the speaker is shared without placing blame on others.

How do you feel when someone says to you, "You are not listening to what I'm saying"?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: attacked; defensive; upset)

I-statements can be especially helpful when there is a need to discuss a problem (Burr, 1990; Rogers et al., 2018). **You-statements can suggest blame and may encourage the recipient to deny wrongdoing or to blame in return** (Biesen et al., 2016; Gottman, 1994). For example, "You broke your promise" may elicit a likely answer of "No, I didn't." This sets you up for a lengthy argument. "You broke your promise" could also elicit a response of, "Well, you did too." This also continues the conflict.

I-statements simply state a problem without blaming someone for it. This can make the other person feel less defensive, and he or she may be more willing to help solve the problem.

Here are a few tips when using I-statements. **Make sure I-statements are specific. Do not use words like ought or should because they usually refer to the other person and place blame or guilt. One model for an I-statement follows:**

I feel _____ when _____.

I-statements take a little practice but may help improve your communication success. They are a good technique to help us choose our words wisely. Keep in mind that I-statements don't have to follow the "I feel ____ when ____" model. The goal with I-statements is to acknowledge feelings and communicate a point without placing blame.

Incorporating positive aspects and components into the conversation can further reduce defensiveness from the receiver of the message. For example, **you may want to find a way to also express appreciation for the person** (e.g., "I really appreciate that you want to talk with me, but I need to finish my work first.") In addition, **you may want to acknowledge the feelings of the receiver, which may help him or her feel heard** (e.g., "I understand you want to talk, but I feel annoyed that you continue to stop by my desk after I've said I can't right now") (Hollandsworth & Cooley, 1978; Winship & Kelley, 1976; Zachary & Fischler, 2017).

SHOW Slide 8: Complaints vs. Criticisms

Another related skill pertaining to communication involves understanding the difference between complaints and criticisms. According to researchers, **"A complaint focuses on a specific behavior, while a criticism attacks the character of the person"** (Honeycutt, 2015, p. 169).

Here is an example of the difference between a complaint and a criticism.

Complaint: "You told me yesterday that you would finish putting the report together. I'm disappointed because I thought that you and I had an understanding that we would communicate if we got off our timelines."

Criticism: "Why are you late in sending me the report? It's selfish of you because now I have less time to finish it. If you didn't have it ready, you should have told me earlier. You always do this!"

Did you notice a difference in how these two interactions were handled?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the compliant seemed like a more respectful approach to the situation; the complaint did not place blame on the other person; the criticism states "you always do this," which is not focused on the specific situation and may lead to an overly defensive response)

How might you **change the following criticism into a complaint**?

"You never get to work on time! You are so unreliable!"

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: ***I've noticed that you've been late getting into work recently; is everything OK?; I was disappointed when you were late to work because I felt like it made us look unorganized in front of our customers****; next time you are going to be late to work, please let me know so that we can make adjustments if needed)*

How do you think that using complaints instead of criticisms would benefit your communication with your coworkers?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: the receiver of the message may not get as defensive; the sender of the message may not come across as attacking the character of the receiver of the message; this technique can help communication during conflict be more productive)

When using I-statements, be sure to focus on complaints rather than criticisms. In addition, it is important, as the sender of the I-statement, that you also actively listen

to the person receiving the message and try to understand the message that he or she relays back to you.

Summary

SHOW Slide 9: Remember…

We have talked a lot today about reintegrating into the civilian workforce and what that means to you personally and how you can cope with the various feelings associated with going back to your civilian job. Remember, you may have mixed emotions about returning to work, and that is OK. Ask about changes, try to understand why changes were made, and adapt to the changes as well as you can. Look for ways to reconnect with your coworkers, and keep the lines of communication open with your coworkers and boss. Also, look for coworkers who seem to be effective at communicating with colleagues, and make note of the manner in which they interact. You do not need to do exactly as they do, but you can learn from their examples of managing communication within the workplace.

Do you have any questions about what we have discussed today?

PAUSE for responses.

SHOW Slide 10: Review of Objectives

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What are some expectations and feelings about returning to the workplace?** *PAUSE for responses*.
   (Possible answers: excitement; anxiousness; worry; expect adjustment to take some time; anticipate changes that may have been made in your absence)

2. **What are some useful tips to ease reintegration into a civilian job?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: adapt to changes; communicate; have a positive attitude; be reliable and dependable; talk to colleagues and supervisor)

SHOW Slide 11: Returning to a Civilian Job After Deployment

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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