



AMERICA'S HEROES AT WORK

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF
RETURNING SERVICE MEMBERS WITH TBI & PTSD

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Customized Employment

A Promising Practice for Supporting Employees with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

When it comes to employment, several promising practices exist to help transitioning service members with TBI, PTSD and many other disabilities and/or combat-related injuries succeed in the workplace. One such practice is customized employment.

Customized Employment is the voluntary negotiation of a personalized employment relationship between a specific individual and an employer that fulfills the business needs of the employer while also accommodating the specific needs of the individual. The negotiation process addresses a variety of areas, including job duties, terms of employment, services and supports necessary to carry out the job duties, and employer expectations.

At its core, Customized Employment is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, requirements, and interests of a person with valuable skills but potentially complex workplace needs. The process is designed to meet the workplace needs of the employer and the employee.

WHY CONSIDER THE CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT APPROACH FOR EMPLOYEES WITH TBI AND/OR PTSD?

Employees with TBI and/or PTSD can experience a range of physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms that interfere with everyday activities, including work. Customized Employment can provide an advantage for these job seekers who may struggle in the competitive job market.

EVERYONE CUSTOMIZES

Job seekers routinely consider the work environment, employer characteristics and other conditions they prefer when assessing a specific employment opportunity. And soon after landing a job, most employees begin to customize their jobs based on personal preferences, contributions, or strengths. Customized Employment starts this process with up-front negotiations between job seekers and employers so that opportunities can be created that benefit both parties. The customized job seeker uniquely fits the position and the employer gains an employee well-suited for the job.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

The Customized Employment process is not a single strategy, service or support but rather a flexible plan designed to increase employment options for job seekers with complex needs through voluntary negotiation of the employment relationship. Customized Employment can be useful for all job seekers, including those without disabilities, who have unique circumstances affecting employment. It builds on proven principles—such as supported employment—that result in success for job seekers with complex needs. The Customized Employment process is appropriate for both job seekers and existing employees whose changing circumstances require negotiation to customize employment tasks, expectations or working conditions.

EXAMPLES OF CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES WITH TBI AND/OR PTSD

Certain work environments support the needs of employees with TBI and/or PTSD better than others. Customized Employment plans for these individuals may include offering alternative schedules or job

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sharing; limiting the verbal demands of a job (such as telephone duties); allowing them to work in a quiet area when they are feeling overwhelmed; and dividing large assignments into smaller tasks. They may also include physical accommodations such as memory aids, electronic organizers and special lighting.

For guidance on potential workplace accommodations for people with TBI and/or PTSD, visit the America's Heroes at Work Web site (www.americasheroesatwork.gov).

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT PRINCIPLES

The following principles are fundamental to Customized Employment:

- The employer voluntarily negotiates specific job duties and discusses the employee's expectations.
- The negotiated employment relationship meets the needs of the employer and employee.
- Customized Employment results in jobs that fit the individual and therefore have the potential for advancement for job seekers who have been chronically unemployed or underemployed.

The following fundamental principles are shared by Customized Employment and other employment processes:

- Work occurs in an integrated, individualized work situation in the community or in a personal business alongside people who do not have disabilities.
- Employment results in pay at the prevailing wage or "going rate."
- Employment outcomes may include creating a job through self-employment.
- The process is facilitated through a blend of services, supports and resources that include the workforce system and other public and private partners such as disability service providers. These resources are coordinated to meet the job seeker's needs.
- Customized Employment can be used either prior to or after employment as a strategy to modify job duties and/or other employer expectations for an individual who has complex needs.

To learn more about Customized Employment, visit www.dol.gov/odep/categories/workforce/cust_emp.htm.

Information about other promising employer practices—including mentoring and job coaching—can be found on the America's Heroes at Work Web site: www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov.

This fact sheet was developed in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Job Accommodation Network, the Veterans' Employment and Training Service, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center.

