



ADA Live!

EPISODE 26: TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Event Date: November 4, 2015

Presenters: James Schmeling, Co-founder and Managing Director of Programs, Institute of Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University

Host: Sally Weiss, Director of Knowledge Translation for the Southeast ADA Center

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: (Music) Welcome to WADA ADA Live! Talk radio. Brought to you by Southeast ADA Center, your leader for information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and here's your host.

SALLY WEISS: Good afternoon, and welcome to WADA, ADA Live!. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, The Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA National Network, welcome to the 26th episode of ADA Live! My name is Sally Weiss and I'm Director of Knowledge Translation for the Southeast ADA Center. Our guest today is my Syracuse University colleague James Schmeling, cofounder and Managing Director for Programs for the Institute of Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. ADA Live! listening audience, you can submit your questions about transition from military service to civilian careers or any of our other ADA live programs at any time on ADALive.org. James, welcome to our show.

JAMES SCHMELING: Sally, thanks so much for having me. It's really terrific to work with you again after having been away for a couple of years at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families but it's great to do something with the Southeast ADA Center and the Burton Blatt Institute again.

SALLY WEISS: James, I think we have been colleagues for about 15 years, haven't we?

JAMES SCHMELING: I think it's been right at 15 years. I've gotten to know you and all your colleagues at the ADA Center and I have done work with you for many, many years and it's been really rewarding for me.

SALLY WEISS: James, would you tell us a little bit about the Institute for Veterans and Military Families?

JAMES SCHMELING: Sure. The Institute for Veterans and Military Families is an Institute of Syracuse University. A lot of folks ask us if we're a part of Syracuse University and the answer to that is absolutely yes. We are formally an Institute of Syracuse University. My boss, Dr. Mike Haney, is Vice Chancellor for Military and Veterans Affairs at the University as well as being a faculty member and Executive Director of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families. The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary National Institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education and policy issues impacting veterans and their family members post service. Through our focus on veteran-facing programming, research, policy, employment and business and industry, and our employer support and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.

SALLY WEISS: James, thank you. My next question for you is what are the primary issues veterans have in making the transition from military service to civilian careers?

JAMES SCHMELING: I think probably the most important issue that veterans face is making an informed decision. They don't know what they don't know. In many cases, military service is the only thing they've known. In my case, I went into the military about three hours after I graduated from high school, so the first six years of my career were all in the Air Force. And when we're making the transition out of service, we need to understand what our options are, why we might choose those particular options and what the long term implications of those options are going to be.

The military is doing a lot with this through a program called Transition GPS, which is the transition assistance program that all service members have an opportunity to participate in. And their three focus areas are careers, or what are you going to do for employment; education, or how are you going to get the training and education that you need to pursue the goals that you want to pursue; and entrepreneurship, or small business ownership.

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families actually runs part of the Transition GPS program in collaboration with the SBA for the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor. And the reason that becomes important is that we know an awful lot of about what the transition challenges are and how to help veterans address those challenges. I think also they come to an issue where business and industry employers don't really know enough about military veterans and the skills,

characteristics and traits that they bring from their military service into the civilian workforce. And we've actually done an awful lot of work in this area to help understand what strengths people bring and help business and industry establish their career programs much as they've done with people for disabilities and earlier as they did for women and ethnic minorities in order to understand what are the competitive advantages that veterans bring to their organizations.

I think when you mix those two things--military members needing to understand what's out there and available, and business and industry recruiters and hiring managers not understanding how veterans fit into their organization--it can sometimes present a barrier. But fortunately, it's an easy enough barrier to address because primarily it's an information and attitudinal barrier and that's why we've spent an awful lot of time focused on that.

We developed the Business Case for Hiring of Veterans a few years ago which is a review of over 30 years of academic peer-reviewed literature that focused on what it was about military veterans and military service that contributed to their ability to be advantageous hires for companies. And the ten areas that we focused on were the following:

- Veterans are entrepreneurial, in other words they will take an opportunity and make the most of it.
- They have high levels of trust, both that you can trust them to do what they say they are going to do or what they have been asked to do and that they trust their leadership and their organizations to do well by them and that results in more engaged employees.
- They're very adept at skills transfer across context and tasks, and that's because we ask them to do so many things that are both inside and outside of their expertise and that they develop the ability to take the skills learned in one circumstance and apply them in another.
- They have leveraged advanced technical training. In other words we teach them how to do all kinds of things that we don't necessarily teach civilians how to do, whether that is maintaining equipment or communications or cybersecurity and making sure they learn how to learn.
- They are comfortable with discontinuous environments. If you think about the business environment and think about the change from day-to-day and you compare that to a day-to-day change in military service, it's pretty obvious that military folks are going to have the skills to adapt to changes.

- They have high levels of resiliency. When something goes wrong, they bounce back. That's important when you think about careers in the civilian sector.
- They have advanced team-building skills. And the reason for that is much of the work, like it is in the business environment today, is focused on project-based short term assignments where you bring together teams, you do the work, and then you disband the teams. In the military they learn how to do that because they are part of units that come together with other units from all over the world to perform a task or a mission and then disband. So they're used to doing that.
- They have strong organizational commitment. If you think about the organizational commitment that they have to the military, that transfers very easily and readily to other organizations, so they become very loyal employees as long as they're treated as loyal employees.
- They have terrific cross-cultural experiences which they leverage. And those cross-cultural experiences give them the strengths that you need in today's varied cultural environments.
- And they have experience and skills in diverse work settings. And if you think about the fact that the military was one of the first places to desegregate, that's fairly intuitive. We're still struggling with that in some areas of the military as you've seen with women being integrated in the combat roles, but I think we're doing that more quickly than a lot of forces have done and a lot of companies have done across the board.

So those are the things that I think business and industry needs to know and if they knew and absorbed that, then there would be less barriers perhaps in making that transition.

SALLY WEISS: James, that's fascinating. ADA Live! listening audience, you can submit your questions about transition from military service to civilian careers or any other ADA Live! programs at any time on ADALive.org. And now a word from our sponsors.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University is the first interdisciplinary national Institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post service. Through our focus on veteran facing programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community,

captures best practices and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families. For more information, please visit our website at www.vets.syr.edu.

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back. We are talking with James Schmeling, Program Director for the Institute for Veterans and Military Families. James, are there differences for veterans with and without disabilities?

JAMES SCHMELING: Sally, that's a great question. There are some differences. There are also more similarities than most people understand. If you look at civilians with disabilities and veterans with disabilities in similar ways, you'll see the similarities as well. Right now the two primary disabilities that most people are concerned with related to veterans in transition are PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder, sometimes called post-traumatic stress without disorder, and traumatic brain injury.

Those are actually two common disabilities experienced very widely in the civilian population as well. Right now, about 30% of all veterans will transition with some diagnosis related to post traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury. Maybe a little bit higher if you include all of the other sorts of disabling injuries, including loss of limbs or other injuries sustained during their service. However, if you compare this to the civilian population, it's very interesting. Roughly 50% of all civilians who have never served will have some experience with post-traumatic stress. And the most common cause of post-traumatic stress is actually car accidents. And the symptoms of dealing with post-traumatic stress that are most common are flashbacks of what happened at sort of inopportune times. However, when you think about that in the context of a car accident, the draw back might be that the individual stops a little bit longer at a stop sign and makes the person behind them a little impatient or when the light turns from red to green, they might hesitate and look an extra time in each direction. Again, the only real detriment is the person behind you has to wait an extra second before you proceed into the intersection. Those are not necessarily bad things to have happen. As a result of being more cautious, the rate of next accidents probably declines.

Similarly for military veterans with post-traumatic stress, they may have memories of what has happened that are triggered by certain aspects of their day-to-day life. For instance, a loud noise may startle a veteran more likely than it will to startle a non-veteran who does not have post-traumatic stress which was caused by exposure to or hearing lots of gun fire or mortar rounds exploding. But again, having an extra pause during a loud noise may not be that big an issue in the workplace.

Others with post-traumatic stress report wanting to work in an office where they can see who's approaching them and that's usually a pretty easy accommodation and

there are terrific accommodation resources from the ADA network and from the Job Accommodation Network that will talk about how to provide accommodations in the workplace. Similarly, for traumatic brain injury, the number one cause of traumatic brain injury in the civilian population is actually organized and unorganized sports. Soccer and football in particular. And that traumatic brain injury is often cumulative in the civilian population because of repeated exposure to those hits during a rough and tumble game. In the military, that traumatic brain injury may be sustained as a result of a nearby IED. The symptoms are going to be very similar. In some cases, it might be memory loss.

In my case, I have no traumatic brain injury, but I certainly feel like I have memory loss and have to rely on Outlook every day for calendar reminders of when I have appointments. Those are the kinds of accommodations that are very commonly used for people with memory loss related to traumatic brain injury. There are other kinds of accommodations again for traumatic brain injury as well. Again, not really an issue.

When we look at the other factor that people are concerned with post-traumatic stress, there is a concern related to workplace violence. And one of the most searched terms on one of our sites related to veterans and disability and workplace is post-traumatic stress and workplace violence. And I think that's a manufactured concern and it's manufactured by the media. The number one occupation in the country where there's workplace violence is actually construction workers. But you'll never see a headline in a newspaper or news cast that says construction worker committed violent act on the job site, because it doesn't sell newspapers. On the other hand, if you see a headline related to a veteran, even if there's no connection what so ever to the military service, the fact that they ever served is always the lead in the story. And again, it's because it sells media, it's not because it's a real concern. Workplace violence is a very, very, very minimal part of experience with veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder and is much likelier to be in other populations in the civilian populations at much higher rates comparatively.

I think another component of the differences for veterans with and without disabilities are the supports that they have as a result of their disability. When a person has a disability as a result of an injury in military service, the military takes responsibility for those long term care components and accommodations. The vocational rehabilitation system within the Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and the Department of Veterans Affairs broadly provides for accommodations and job training where those are necessary. There are also a variety of accommodation programs within the Department of Defense that provide training for electronic accommodations which then can be taken by the military member into their civilian role when they transition.

The healthcare component is interesting. For a person who has a service connected disability, the VA will always be the principle provider of care. But for any veteran who's transitioning, they have five years of care from the Department of Veterans affairs for their medical concerns and needs.

The other component that I think is really interesting is there is some protection within the law under USERRA for veterans with disabilities who are returning to their civilian role and this is particularly important when we talk about guard and reserve members who have been activated multiple times and then who come back to their civilian roles with an injury. USERRA provides more protection than the ADA does for the veteran who needs to have an accommodation when they return to work. Not only are they entitled to the opportunity for an equivalent job when they come back to the one that they left behind, if they have a disability, they're entitled to accommodations which rise above the standard in the ADA. Finally, they're also entitled to training and retraining for equivalent or even promoted positions under USERRA, to overcome any barriers related to the injury that they sustained while they are in service.

On top of that, VEVRA, the Vietnam Era Veterans Reemployment Adjustment Act provides for a goal of having 7% of the workforce be veterans. And when you combine that with the other components of the Workforce Act and you look at the Rehabilitation Act, you have Section 503 and its enforcement guidance which has a 7% goal for people with disabilities. If you hire a veteran with a disability, you get to count them in both pools. So hiring veterans who have service-connected disabilities will help you meet VEVRA's outreach goals and the inclusiveness of people with disabilities into the workplace goals for federal contractors.

I think finally the last thing to say about veterans with and without disabilities is that they're the same in terms of being people who have characteristics, skills and traits which are valuable in the workforce. And it's the same as civilians who have never served. Disability is only one part of who someone is, whether they're a veteran or not.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, James. What do you see as policy issues to be addressed in order to support veterans with and without disabilities?

JAMES SCHMELING: I think perhaps the primary policy issue to be addressed relates to certifications and licensure. I think that's one being addressed by many of the states. Right now, we train and educate veterans in a military education and training system that doesn't take into account any of the national or state level licenses, for the most part. There is an opportunity for military members to obtain civilian licensure or certifications while they're doing training and education in some cases, but it's not, as a matter of policy, the case. So for somebody who's a truck driver, for instance, in the military, or heavy equipment operator, getting a commercial driver's license in the

civilian side used to be very difficult. It was a policy issue that had to be resolved by the Department of Transportation at the national level and by the individual states in order to allow them to get a commercial driver's license without having to go back through extra training and education, which they probably didn't need. In some cases, it's with a road test or verification of knowledge test. In other cases, it's simply an exchange one to one of your military driver's license for your civilian driver's license. Those kinds of things happen across the board, whether that's in medical areas, nursing, med techs, pharmacy techs, and as we already said transportation and logistics. It also can happen related to civilian certifications which are not policy issues per se, but if we allowed for payment of those civilian certification exams as part of the training and education that military members receive, they could go out with a Microsoft certification or CISCO certification or project management or human resource related certification that related directly to their jobs, duties and roles. Doing those kinds of things levels the playing field very quickly and easily for most military members.

Importantly, it's also family members, not just the veterans but family members who have also served by giving up their time, by making multiple changes and careers, by sometimes restarting careers at junior levels as they transition from one location to another, or changing careers entirely. And I think that the policy issues if we really think about them, are about ease of moving in and out of service and of recognizing all of the things that you did in service and getting the appropriate recognition of those in order for business and industry to be assured that you're a good hire that's equivalent to somebody who's never served but has received other training and education, Bachelor's degrees, Associates degrees and so on. I think many companies are also beginning to understand the value of veterans. Some companies have said to veterans, we don't need you to have an undergraduate degree, we know that you had the training and education and success that the Bachelor's degree or its equivalent would otherwise measure for us with a person who has never served.. I think those are the interesting areas right now.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, James. We are going to pause now for a word from our sponsors.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: The Southeast ADA Center is your leader in providing information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability access tailored to the needs of business, government and individuals at local, state and regional levels. The Southeast ADA Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia is a member of the ADA National Network and serves eight states in the Southeast region. For answers to your ADA questions, contact the ADA National Network at 1 800 949 4232.

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back, we're talking with James Schmeling, Program Director for the Institute of Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. James, please tell us more about the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities and its success.

JAMES SCHMELING: I'm going to back up and tell you about our overall Entrepreneurship and small business programs and specifically about the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities. We started the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities back in 2006, and 2007 was our first class. 17 folks went through that program. They've had amazing success since then. That's given us the opportunity to expand that program to ten universities, to create a new program for veteran women and transitioning women service members and spouses called the Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-Wise). And from there, to expand out into Boots to Business, which is part of the transition assistance program and in which we've trained with the SBA and our partners over 33,000 folks in. And Boots to Business Reboot which is for veterans for all service areas and which is cosponsored with the Marcus Foundation, First Data, and the Small Business Administration.

These programs have provided education and training opportunities for veterans. We know the amazing success we've had with the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities and I'll tell you a little bit about that in a moment. But broadly, what we found from our research before we started these programs is that veterans, just like people with disabilities, start businesses at rates higher than the civilian population who's never served, they're successful at higher rates, and we know a little bit about why the success and we know a little bit about why some of the reasons. Just like people with disabilities, veterans at one point had fewer career options and so they started businesses more often and they were successful because they needed to be successful. That's a characteristic that we thought would carryover very well for veterans who have disabilities. You have got two of the primary factors that predict business ownership: disability and veteran status together in one person.

So we started the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities back in 2007 with 17 folks. In 2008, we expanded that to include Florida State University, Texas A&M University, and UCLA's Anderson School of Management. And then after that, we've expanded since to University of Connecticut, Purdue University, Louisiana State University, Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, the University of Missouri at Columbia, and Cornell University. Cornell is our first specialty school and it's focused on hospitality management. The others are all general business education and focus on the wide variety of businesses that veterans start. And those ten universities now collaboratively have educated about 1800 folks in those Entrepreneurship Boot Camps

for Veterans with Disabilities. That's 1800 folks who came out of service with service connected disabilities who started their businesses.

65% of the folks who went through our programs actually start their businesses. And about 95% of them are still in business. Those are phenomenal statistics. And the reasons they're so high are really two-fold. One, we build a very strong component of education and training, so we expose everybody to business ownership concepts, opportunity recognition, validation of the opportunity, understanding business planning, access to capital, human resources and so on. And then we connect them to a year of follow up supports to help get the barriers out of the way if there are barriers. Things like business incorporation, web site or logo design, other things like that they need so they can focus on their business and the operation of the business. Of the 65% of people who started their businesses, interestingly, 45% of those businesses are employer firms. And that's really significant because in the national economy, only 20% of small businesses are employer firms- so it's over double the rate. And we know they're hiring on average out of our EBV program alumni, 4.72 people per business. And of those, 42% are in turn veterans or spouses. So not only are they forming their own businesses, they're hiring and they're hiring including veterans and when you consider that the national goals with the OCCP goal implemented under VEVRA is 7%, the fact that 42% of their employees are veterans or spouses is pretty stunning.

We've had similar success with our veteran's women program. We started that with the SBA and the focus of that is on women. And we knew women were an underserved population related to business ownership and entrepreneurship. And so we created this conference style training very much like the EBV program. There's an online component before they come together. There's a three day component instead of nine day component of education and training. And then again, there's a year of follow up supports. A little bit varied from what we do in the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp but overall connecting the mentors, having continuing education programs and other things like that. And we wanted to make sure that we were giving them every advantage to start their business. So we bring in amazing women speakers as firsts and we honor them because of their accomplishment as a first woman to do something. Might have been the first woman general, the first woman four star general, the first woman who commanded a tank platoon, the first woman who was able to be the senior most person in the Navy or the Coast Guard. The first woman who had a particular business. The first woman pilot from the Air Force who by the way was also was the first woman Latina pilot in a commercial airplane. And we give them that inspiration of people who can do it. We bring in business owners with experience. We bring in women mentors. We bring in women faculty members. I have the privilege additionally of teaching in that and it's one of my favorite programs to

teach in because we get to see the amazing enthusiasm of women who have essentially walked away from the veteran status other than this and this is the first veteran event that they have ever attended. And they open their eyes to the community that is around them and the support they have from other women veteran colleagues and what that means for business success. Very similarly, to the program I mentioned earlier, we have about 63% success rate of the women who go through that program who start their own business. You don't have to be a woman with a disability to go through this program. But we know that women veterans often have disabilities. We know that spouses often have disabilities. And so absolutely a welcoming environment. All of our facilities are accessible, we do them in accessible hotels, and we make sure that we provide appropriate accommodations for everyone who needs an accommodation to learn and participate in these.

As I said, the women have about a 63% business startup rate, 95% stay in business, the same as for the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp for Veterans with Disabilities. They hire slightly less, instead of 4.72 per business, it's 4.27. But again, interestingly, it's about the same number, 45% of these businesses are employer businesses and they're hiring other women veterans and women family members. So they're taking care of their own community, which we know also happens in the disability community. Disabled business owners tend to hire people with disabilities because they know that the disability isn't a barrier. It's the same thing related with veteran business ownership. They know that veterans have strong likelihood of success. If you remember the ten factors that I told you about earlier related to the skills, characteristics and traits that military members bring into employment, they bring those same characteristics and traits. And I think of those perhaps most important is persistence towards a goal, that they are determined to succeed for a variety of reasons.

In addition to the programs that I just talked about, the EBV program and V-WISE program, there's another one called Boots to Business Reboot. And Boots to Business Reboot is a two day training program. During Veterans Small Business Week in about ten days, we'll actually do 32 of those around the country. And if you search for SBA Boots to Business Reboot, you'll find the calendar of events for all of those. And those are two day trainings in the same format, the same information we provided in all of the other trainings and then you have the opportunity to go through the same 8 week program we offer online with our faculty members from our Whitman School of Business and from other business colleges and from our partners and entrepreneurs. And with while we don't yet know what the success rate is for those programs because we are not yet collecting data, very soon to be collecting data, we anticipate that they will be similar in terms of business success rates, although they might have a little bit lower job creation rate and a little bit lower business creation rate simply because of

where people are in their lives when they come and take those programs – Boots to Business and Boots to Business Reboot.

SALLY WEISS: James, thank you. All of this has been absolutely fascinating. We're almost out of time. What are the two most important things you would like our listeners to walk away from this program with?

JAMES SCHMELING: I think the first most important thing is to get to know a veteran and to understand that like everybody else, they're an individual who has dreams about what they are going to do with their careers or with their small businesses. And if you get to know them, you might just find out how they fit into your world and you fit into theirs. And I think the second thing is to recognize that some veterans will have challenges in transition and helping those veterans with whatever those challenges are will ultimately pay a dividend to your business, to your community, to your region, to your state and to our national economy as they come back into the workforce, as they make a transition, and as they apply all the skills and experiences that they earned while they were in service to whatever it is they're doing next.

SALLY WEISS: At this time, I would like to thank James Schmeling Program Director for the Institute for Veterans and Military Families for joining us today on WADA, ADA Live!. And thank you also to the ADA Live! audience. The Southeast ADA Center is grateful for your support and participation in this series of WADA ADA Live! broadcasts. Remember you may submit questions about any of our ADA Live topics by going to ADALive.org. If you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact your regional ADA Center at 1 800 949 4232. That's 1 800 949 4232. All calls are free and confidential. Join us again next month on December 2, 2015 for Part 2 of this program, employment of veterans and veterans with disabilities.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: (Music) Thank you for listening to ADA Live! Talk radio. Brought to you by the Southeast ADA Center. Remember to join us the first Wednesday of each month for another ADA topic, and you can call 1-800-949-4232 for answers to your ADA questions.

REMOTE CART PROVIDED BY:
ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SERVICES, LLC
P.O. BOX 278
LOMBARD, IL 60148

Remote CART, Communication Access Realtime Translation, is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be an exact record of the proceedings.