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>> Good afternoon. This is the returning to the workforce as a disabled veteran webinar. We will start in two minutes to give folks a chance to log in and get registered. Thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us. I am David Hoopster, national service director at Vets First. As I mentioned we're here for the returning to the workforce, as a disabled veteran. And this webinar is presented by Vets First, which is a program of united spinal association. And our presenter today is Heather Aimsley, she is the vice-president of Veteran's Policy for Vets First. And if you have any question, or if you would like to make a comment during the webinar type it in the question box on the screen. And the floor is now yours.

>> Thank you Mr. Hoopster. Good afternoon to everyone. Thank you for dialing in, and participating in our webinar today. Before we start into the substance of our presentation, we would like to take just a quick poll to get an idea of who is on the line with us today. So you will be asked a question, and we would ask that you would respond. And our question today which will be appearing on the screen, just helps us to get to know you better. So that question is: Which of the following best describes you. And the choices are you a veteran? A family member of a veteran? The care giver of a veteran? A veteran's advocate? Or a service provider. If we could take a moment to do that poll. Do we have the results of the poll on the line for us?

All right. Great. Thank you for joining us today. So we will go on and get started. And just give you a bit of information about who we are and then we will dive right into more about our subject today. First, Vets First. Veterans service organization. We have been in existence for about 60 years, providing services to disabled veterans and their families. We provide representation for veterans, their dependents and survivors as they pursue VA benefits and healthcare.

We also fight to assure that all veterans with disabilities have the ability to live and work in their communities, and of course, achieve greater

independence, which is part of the reason that we are interested in employment today.

As of FY 2011 we had 3.3 million veterans receiving VA disability compensation. That number is higher now. But that's some of the most compiled statistics that VA has that we could use for a comparison. Just in case you are not wear. Disability compensation is available for veterans who have an injury or illness caused or aggravated by their military service, that the Department of Veteran's Affairs has determined they can receive compensation for.

So because we are wanting to correlate that to the workplace participation, it looks like among veterans that have a service connected disability that about three in 10 had a rating of 60 percent or higher. And as of August 2011, 26.6 percent of veterans with that service connected rating were in the labor forces. Many were not participating at all.

So recent research study was conducted by the Koestler Foundation, Army, Northeast Americans with Disability Acts Center, to look at whether disabled veterans were ready to participate in the workforce, as people with disabilities. And specifically although veterans were receiving vocational rehabilitation and other services, it was not clear whether veterans were prepared to deal with the legal, practical and other issues that now result from having a disability. And the research shows that disabled veterans have negative beliefs about disability in the workplace. That nearly half believe that their disability could hurt their ability to get a job. More than half felt that they may not be able to comfortably tell an employer that they needed some sort of accommodation in order to fully perform their job function.

Less than 30 percent of veterans believe that they were ready to -- if they needed to advocate with their employer, to get some type of accommodation, to be able to do that. So although many veterans may know about the Americans with disability act. Many are very unsure about how to tell an employer that they have a disability, and fear that if they do, they may have some type of job related discrimination as a result. And as part of the research study I mentioned, veterans were given an opportunity to take a true or false test to kind of determine what they knew about the Americans with Disabilities Act. And unfortunately nearly half believe that it was true that a veteran with a disability had to tell an employer about their disability when they applied for the job. Nearly half also believed if you did not tell the employer you had a disability that you could be fired if the employer were to find out at some point.

And also, nearly half believe the employer did not have to change anything about the job in order to provide you with a type of accommodation. Of course, all of those statements are false.

So we really want to begin then to look at, you know, what are some of the perceptions, of employers. About disabled veterans in the workplace.

Survey from the society of human resource management, which collaborated with Cornell university, found that 39 percent of human resource professionals surveyed agreed it was easy for employers to find the resources they needed to help accommodate veterans disability in their employment. 41 percent said they did not have any idea. And 61 percent believe that accommodating a worker with post-traumatic stress disorder or brain injury may require more effort on behalf of the employer. I think it is good news to report that 73 percent of employers did believe that hiring a disabled veteran would be a benefit, to their company or organization.

So, I think, although we can see some veterans may have concerns about, you know, telling an employer about their disability, and what that may mean for them in the workplace, that actually many employers, although they may not be certain how to find accommodations, to help that employee succeed, that they do see the value in having disabled veterans be a part of the workforce.

So we think it is important to take a moment, to look at, you know, do disabled veterans identify as people be disabilities. And see themselves as part of the broader community, and, therefore, that the Americans with Disabilities Act and other protections apply to them. And, you know, based on research, it is pretty clear that veterans with disabilities related to their service, you know, may not be familiar with the laws or programs that are generally available to people with disabilities. And this is not really that, you know, that mind blowing that would be the case. You know, many people that acquire a disability, if you have not grown up knowing how to navigate those systems, it is a new world that you are now trying to figure out. How do I navigate this? How die get the accommodations I need from the employer? Are there Special Services that I can use to help me return to work? Because it is not something that you have had to deal with before.

But, I think, it is fortunate remember that language does matter. When it comes to understanding what those types of protections might be. And this can include, you know, knowing the different definitions of disability, as they apply under various Federal laws. So then knowing how to access services and resources, in your community is also, you know, critical to your being able to succeed going into the future.

So in an attempt to help to bridge that gap and educate building disabled veterans better about pursuing employment and educational opportunities as a person with a disability. Vets First has developed an employment and education knowledge book for disabled veterans. And it is titled "disabled veterans employment and education gearing up for the future." . And the knowledge book which is what we call our resources or guide books, available for free on our website, will provide you with a great deal of information, that can help disabled veterans, you know, get the information

that they need to be educated and make informed decisions regarding their academic options, career options in the workplace, and it really tries to focus on the basics of disability, both from a veteran's stand point and what it means from a civilian's standpoint.

Including providing ideas and suggestions for creating plans for education and employment. But most importantly, provide links to numerous resources to try to get you directed, where you need to go, so that you can find the resources and support that you need.

What I will do now is walk through some of the knowledge book, to kind of give an idea of what that resource is, that is available. And talk about some of the information that is in the resource to help people that are looking for employment or education opportunities. And we'll have the web link for the -- that will take you right to the knowledge book on our website at the end of the presentation, and we'll leave that up throughout the question and answer session, so you will have plenty of opportunity to jot it down.

So the first thing I would like to do is to just give a quick summary here. Of some of the resources, that are available, in the book. Just going through some of the sections. So the section one, of course, is just an introduction into the book, kind of like what we have done today. And then section two creating your path to employment. Section three, for those that will be using schooling as a path to employment. And section four, helping you to understand and define disability, and what disability means, and some of the various Federal programs that you may be looking to interact with. And then an important concept, self advocacy. Knowing, you know, what your rights are. Knowing what your responsibilities are. There is a lot of material that is available online, for employers, and for human resource professionals, to know how they should interact with people with disabilities, with disabled veterans, with veterans in general. But we wanted something that would teach disabled veterans themselves what they needed to know as they head out to the workplace, or into education or both.

And then lastly, we have a resources section where we capture all of the different websites. That can kind of help you as you walk through the process to figure out what your next steps are going to be.

So just want to take a few moments to talk about the second section.

Creating a path to employment. And the defining your path to employment really requires a disabled veteran to consider, you know, what successful productive employment might look like to you. And this could be returning to the workforce full-time. Part-time work. Or maybe even volume touring. But being connected to the workforce is strongly connected to how we define ourselves, and important part of who we are, which is a reason in addition, of course, to, you know, being able to provide for your family, and have a career and a home and all of those great things.

But just so you have that ability to continue to serve others, just as you did when you were in the military.

So we have defined a six steps to success. And that we think are helpful in making an performed path to employment. I am going to go through the six steps. Step five I will pull out. And spend more time on that one. Because it is more specifically geared toward disabled veterans that may need some type of reasonable accommodation or adjustment or modification in the workplace.

We'll get to that in a few moments. But before we do that. Go it through quickly. Step one, we have, you know, trying the military translator. And disabled veterans, you know, should try a military translator if they are looking to translate military skills, experience, training, into civilian career opportunities. And there are many skill translators online. That are available to people to be able to put in information, and be connected to, you know, what could be a good civilian step for those skills. And knowledge book provides several links to translators that may be of assistance.

Step two. No sense moving forward with the job search if the area in which you are wanting to live, if you want to be in your particular community, your hometown, a part of the country, if the jobs are not in that part of the country. So that's something to kind of help get your job search and what you would like to do, to meet up with what the demand is in your local area.

Step three, you want to look at what jobs might be a good fit for you. And this is really important to help you to figure out, you know, the environment of the company. You know, the company culture, personality, temperament. That those things have just as much to do with creating a good job match as being able to have the technical skills, or the qualifications, to be able to succeed in that job.

Step four, you know, structure your resume. So that you can -- and, of course, ace the interview. Now that you have a good idea of what you want to do and how you will target your efforts. Creating a resume that the civilian Human Resources world can understand is your next step. And the resume is the foot in the door and after that the interview can help you to get the job.

Step five, is reasonable accommodations, which we will come back to that in a moment. And then

Six, you know, finding a mentor and other support. Reaching out to others during your job search and other times is a skill that will serve you well as you grow professionally. Through networking opportunities. I know, sometimes we get tired of hearing that word. But connecting with other people is such an important aspect of learning, you know, what jobs are available in your community. And how you can connect with people so that when they hear of jobs or openings that they might think of you, and refer you to that position. Or even once you have a position, and you are

in the work place, to be able to reach out to others, who are going through the same steps that you are, so that you can continue to succeed.

Now as I said, we will talk about this thing, called reasonable accommodations. Term we have thrown around a lot. The reasonable accommodation at the basic level are one way that people with disabilities can be assured a level playing ground when on the job the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against qualified employees or job applicants on the bases of their disability. And the ADA requires that employers make reasonable accommodations, to help you. Disability is not what is accommodated but the functional limitations that result from your disability.

That is going to be accommodated. An employer is not required to make an accommodation, if that might result in an undo hardship what that means is that the accommodation would result in a significant difficulty for you, or for the employer, or expense. Those are considerations, that are available to employers, if they look at whether or not they are going to allow for that type of accommodation.

I think it is important to understand some aspects of those accommodations. And an employer is not required to make an accommodation. And in particular, if they don't know that you need one. And if they don't know you need one, if -- if you don't need an accommodation of any sort you do not have to disclose to your employer that you have a disability. You know, only if you, because of the disability, you have some sort of functional limitation, that requires you to put up your hand and say "I have a disability I need this type of accommodation." If you need it to begin that conversation with your employer. So that they can know what types of accommodations you might need. And I thought it might be helpful to have some examples of what exactly a reasonable accommodation might be. You know, some ideas r you know, flexible scheduling, so that if you have, you know, post-traumatic stress disorder. You have time to attend a counseling session, that could be at various points during the day, or allowing an employee who has tinnitus to play soft background music to block out ringing of the ears. Or veteran that uses a wheelchair. And has, in the morning it takes him awhile to be able to get up and be able to make it into the workplace. You know, allowing that veteran could come in later in the day. You know, all of those veterans are people that are qualified to do the positions, and they have the skills, they just need some type of shift in the way in which the job is laid out. So that it allows them to perform the job, and meet the expectations of their employer, and for them to be successful.

If you need help with accommodations, there is a lot of places that you can go, but one of the best is the job accommodation network. Or Jan. As it is known. And they provide confidential counseling services, and to people be disabilities seeking help with employment related accommodations.

They have services including one-on-one consultations. About, you know, job accommodation ideas. If you are not certain what may help you in your workplace to overcome a challenge, they can help you to figure out how to request it. How you can negotiate if you are employer -- you suggest you would like to work from home because you have trouble maybe blocking out, you know, noise around the office, and instead they may suggest you can use an empty conference room on the first level where you would have fewer distractions. To go through that process. Then to help you to know what your rights are under the Americans with Disabilities Act. And those individuals are available to talk with you by phone, e-mail, web chat. We have the link to Jan on the knowledge book. And also at the end of this slide presentation on the webinar, so you will have a chance to look at that.

And now if you are on active duty or Federal employee or hoping to be a Federal employee at some point, the computer electronics accommodation program or cap program, it is known. Provides assistive technology devices, accommodations and training to help people with disabilities to recover and transition to employment. And it is just fortunate to know that those resources are available, and they are -- they do not cost you to be able to use those. Much of the information is just available online. Just a matter of being able to find it.

So now we would like to hop into the third section of the knowledge book. Which is about creating a path to employment through education. And as we all know veterans of all ages are choosing education as a path to employment. Schools are being more acclimated with the needs of our student veterans. And many are stepping up to the plate to create veteran programs, where they did not previously exist to help veterans to be able to connect in new ways.

One of the things that is really important when you are beginning that process, whether you will be using post 9/11 GI bill benefits, or if you are looking at other benefits that are available to you, is to do some research about the school that you are choosing. And one of those is to create your own definition of what is a veteran friendly school? The definition of veteran friendly is as diverse today as higher education community. Whether it is community college, or the Ivy League, you know, factors like campus culture and academic environment, student body size, composition, where it is located, all play a role in what programs and services might mean that school is veteran friendly.

Something else you should do is examine the school's website. Check out the school's website to see if they provide additional assistance to student veterans. Particularly if you are a veteran that acquired a disability, you may need some type of assistance, in being able to negotiate your classes to negotiate the campus. And, you know, you may need to check to see whether or not your school has those opportunities. Also you will want to

find out how your military transcript translates to on course work. Many times when you have credit to transfer, to the college level, that can affect admissions, decision, class status, and more. So something that is helpful to know as you are going through this process. And then finally, to review the school's policies. There are a number of policy issues that relate specifically to student veterans. And these include but not limited to, you know, entrance exams, transcript review, do they have deferral and readmission. This may be particularly important for people in the National Guard. Or who are in the reserve. People that, you know, what are their transfer policies? How do you establish residency for true wigs purposes? Allowing early registration. Or if you need to withdraw from a class, what is that process look like? We all know that the benefits that are available for that course work, are very valuable benefits. So we want to make sure that they are used to the greatest benefit to give you the best opportunities in the career field.

Of course, one thing we want to look at is, most schools are going to offer support and services to students. Some will be better than others. And you know, you want to look at, you know, student veteran with a disability, you know, what are the academic tutoring options? Many schools across the country are developing tutoring programs that are specifically for student veterans. You know, even if you are not sure, you know, whether or not you will need those types of services, it is good to check to see if they exist in case those things arise.

Another opportunity is does the school have veteran only courses? Many schools are beginning to offer these types of courses and programs that are specifically designed for veterans. And a veteran only class can help a student become, you know, well acclimated into college life and to have an opportunity to meet up with other veterans. People that are in the same -- have gone through the same type of experiences and can be helpful. Particularly as you look at making connections out in the work field.

And accommodations, again, we have the accommodation. If you are returning to or entering college for the first time, and have a newly acquired injuries, you may have no idea what is your ability to learn now that you have this type of challenge. And this could be especially true if you did not have any type of learning disabilities before you went into your military service. So to be eligible for an academic accommodation, you have to have proof of disability, and then to make that formal request. Examples of some common accommodations, provided to student veterans, could be priority course enrollment. Or preferential seating in a particular class. Or the disability to take a exam in reduced distraction environment. So those can all be very important to know about, as you are going through a course and particularly if you are seeing that you are needing that type of help.

What type of health and mental health services be available? Well

colleges and universities typically have a wide variety of services available for students. Many are also partnering with their local V.A. Medical centers. And, you know, to try to provide additional veteran focus, medical and mental health. The VA, there is also a program called VA vets success on campus. Which is on a little over 30 campuses right now around the country. Small amount but they are trying to hit campuses that have a high student veteran population, and the services available as to vet's success on campus program are available to all student veterans regardless of whether or not they have the disability, you know, if they are on -- using the post 9/11 GI bill. But even if you are using some of the other types of programs, they may be able to assist you and hook you up with services that can help. Particularly through VA.

And then lastly, career services. The reason that you attend schools, to be able to get out and get that job, and, you know, while it is not responsibility of the university career center to give you job placement services, or to make promises of jobs, it is generally understood that they will have those networking opportunities, or internship possibilities, that could really help you to get out there and make connections, that would be helpful, once you are looking for employment full-time.

You know, so it is always good to know what those services are offered. And to be able to take advantage of those services.

>> So then we have the next section of the knowledge book that gets into understanding and defining what disability means. And I think, it is important to know that the term disability has different meaning and different types of contexts. And historically disability in the Department of Defense, has been viewed as the end of an active duty career. Although, we all know that this is certainly changing, particularly because of the last wars. And that people are staying in now who have disabilities, who before would have left military service.

Then, of course, we have the Department of Veteran's Affairs. And they correlate disability as a way to determine your eligibility for benefits and compensation. And then in the civilian and education and employment field. Disability is considered a legal term. And it is used to determine your eligible for getting those academic or workplace accommodations. It may also help with special hiring initiatives. Or to know that you are protected against some type of discrimination, based on your disability. So in defining disability, disability is often misunderstood. And living with a disability, means that you have a condition that was caused by an accident, trauma, genetics, or disease that is going to have some sort of -- cause some sort of limitation for you. Maybe mobility or a hearing loss, vision loss, speech. Or a mental function. And anyone can experience a disability. In fact, most people if they live long enough probably will experience a disability, at some point in their lifetime.

And looking at disability in various contexts, we touched briefly on how it is

different between, you know, some programs and in some contexts. So we will dive into that a bit more. As we said, you know, Department of Veteran's Affairs assigns disability as a percentage. Between zero and 100. And to qualify for that compensation, you have to have a disability. Most basic point, you have to have a disability that is related to your military service.

Some of you are also familiar with social security administration. And which is for civilians, of course, also for people who have served in the military, you pay into social security and you are eligible for those benefits. But social security looked at things differently. And they don't use a percentage of how, you know, if you are 50 percent disabled or 100 percent disabled. You know, they just determine if you are disabled. And if you are to be found disabled, then you must be unable to perform substantial work, because of your medical condition, and it must have lasted or be expected to last, at least, one year, or to result in death.

So you can see that those are different ways in which two different agencies look at the category of disability.

Then disability in employment and education, is defined under the law to assure that you have equal protection, and non-discrimination. So you will not be discriminated against in employment or education, because you have a disability.

It is defined by type. Or category. Such as like if you have a cognitive ability to learn, or a emotional or physical. Or by diagnosis, you know, if you have a learning disability, or if you have quadraplegia. And they are defined by a personal experience. To make matters more complicated, being considered a person with a disability in one workforce or academic context does not necessarily mean that you will be considered to be a person with a disability in another. So it is good to always know what the different programs and laws are you are looking at.

We want to look at disability in the eyes of the law. And what that really means. And the first is equal protection and anti-discrimination. And since disability is a protected class under the law it is important to be aware of these laws so that you know both your rights and your responsibilities.

Of the place where you are going to school, or in your workplace. And there are three main laws that offer anti-discrimination protection, for service connected disabled veterans. For veterans with disabilities.

People with disabilities. Of course the Americans with Disabilities Act, that we have talked about. And we'll talk about it more. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and then the Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. USERRA. Many of you may be familiar with. And we have veterans preference and other affirmative action regulation. There are a few additional employment related regulations that exist to give disabled veterans and people with disabilities a preference in the employment process. And these laws do not equal entitlement to a

particular job. But entitlement to a preference in hiring. So they are applicable to employment in the Federal Government, some state government. And many government contracts. So, for example, the veterans preference act, Vietnam era veterans readjustment act, that looks at assistance for veterans that in working with the Federal -- contract who is a Federal contract that you would get preference from them. Or the equivalent for people with disabilities, is under a different section of the Rehabilitation Act. And then, of course, Federal Government hiring, there is something called schedule A hiring authority. Which allows Federal hiring authority to hire people with disabilities outside of their normal competitive process, that they use.

And then lastly the family medical leave act. And as many of you may know that grants qualified employees, total of 12 weeks of unpaid leave. In which you can be off for ongoing medical treatments or doctor's appointments. And there are other uses of that as well.

So equal protection and anti-discrimination. Want to quickly go through some of those laws, and I know this is a lot of information, but it is available in the knowledge book. That we have on our website. And is laid out very easily. And you will be able to go through and have the ability to look at this at your leisure. And the webinar is being recorded today, so you would have a chance to go back if you need to.

I want to go quickly through. First Americans with Disabilities Act. And something that a lot of people are familiar with, civil rights law that prohibits discrimination, against people with disabilities. To give them the same opportunities that basically everyone else has. To be in the main stream of American lines. And this law was amended in 2008 to assure that we had full protections for people with disabilities. And according to the Americans with Disabilities Act. A disability is defined as a person who has a physical or mental impairment, that substantially limits your one or more of your major life activities, as a person. Or if you have a record of having a disability, let's say at some point you had cancer, but you no longer have it. Or you are regarded as having a disability. And the best example in this context would be if somebody is assumed because you are a veteran and you were in combat that you must have post-traumatic stress disorder. And therefore they decide they want you in the workplace. That's against the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To be considered a person with a disability, and a member of the protected class, you have to be qualified for the job. You have to be able to do the job. And it is not a hiring preference law. So it does not entitle you to employment. It just tries to make the playing fields level. So a person with a disability has the same opportunity to that job as somebody that doesn't have a disability.

The next law is section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. And section 504 is what the shorthand term for that particular bill. And it prohibits

discrimination, if you are looking at employment with the Federal Government. You know, working with, you know, the Department of Veteran's Affairs for instance. And employment by most Federal Government contractors. Or if somebody gets a Federal subsidy or grant, then they are also on the hook for not Discriminating. So think of, you know, if there is an education higher institute -- higher institution of learning, and they get Federal funding then they would not be able to do that discrimination.

And then, the third bullet, is, of course, USERRA. I want to highlight some protections under USERRA that applies to disability. And to note that although both the AD and USERRA require employees -- employers to make reasonable accommodations for disabled veterans, USERRA goes further. Because it also compels employers to make a reasonable effort to as a veteran in returning to the workforce. To become qualified for a job. And those efforts could include training or retraining for a position. So that's something that is fortunate know.

Then lastly, remedies for disability based discrimination. So if you are unsure if you have experienced discrimination, or if you have questions about the process, that you might go through, if you feel like this has happened to you. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission which is part of the U.S. government, you may file a complaint with them. You may contact them. Or you can seek legal advice. And I want to highlight that we have a link in our knowledge book, to recently updated document from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that specifically is addressed for disability veterans to talk about these issues. Because they are really wanting to make sure that disability veterans know about the Americans with disability act and how it benefits them.

And then our last major section is on self advocacy. Knowing what your rights and responsibilities are under all the laws, all the preferences. And how do you use them. To be able to help you succeed in the workplace, or in school. So it is important to, you know, first you have to develop the self advocacy skills, and self advocacy is a concept that deals with making decisions about your own life. And to be successful in school, and in the workplace. Will it be important to learn and practice some of the basics of self advocacy. And This, of course, will include the need to proactively develop and understand what you need to be successful. How to effectively communicate the needs and for help along the way. I know for many of us that is very difficult thing to do. And also to educate yourself about what your rights and responsibilities are. So that if your workplace or your school isn't meeting what they are required to under the law, you know, that and you know what to tell them, and you know where to go to get help. Those are all good ways to enforce your ability to use those benefits.

So then looking at self advocacy in the school context. We have post

secondary schools that include universities, community colleges, technical schools. You know, they do not have a duty to find a veteran student with a disability. You know, the student needs to let the school know, that you have a disability. And that you may require an academic adjustment or some type of reasonable accommodation. And requesting those accommodations, you know, does not mean that you are requesting a different type of standard but just that it allows you to demonstrate what you know in a way that best fits your needs. And there are no one list of reasonable accommodations that can serve the needs of all students who have a disability. But here some examples, we have talked about this before, you know, may include extending time to take an examination. Or providing a note taker. Or allowing you to take notes on a device that maybe they do not allow in the classroom normally. Most places allow computers. But if for some reason they don't that is an option. Or an ability to take an exam in a setting where you don't have others around you. Or take it orally instead of taking it written. Maybe a better way for you. Then to be able to actively work between, you know, active conversation between you and your school, so that you can get the resources that you need. Is just something that is important to remember. And now self advocacy. Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to provide you with reasonable accommodation, if you need that. Due to disability. And you know, unless you let your employer know that you have a disability, and you need an accommodation, however, there is no obligation obligated to consider them. But important to remember if you don't need an accommodation you do not have to tell your employer you have a disability.

You also, you know, some people might think how do I, you know, let people know that I need an accommodation. And you know, just to use what we call "plain English" is sufficient. So you do not need to use the phrase reasonable accommodation. And you know, an example in the workplace may be an employee telling his boss that he needs to change the way his office is set up. Because his wheelchair won't go into the cubicle area maybe the desk is not high enough for him to scoot under. You know, those are things that people can raise desks and make changes. And it is important to note quickly, that most accommodations either cost nothing, or little. So it is not something that is necessarily going to cost a lot of money for the employer.

And then, self advocacy in your community. In addition to, you know, knowing how -- your advocate in education or the workplace, you know, you need to know about services in your community. And you know, you may find yourself needing assistance with, you know, housing, or transportation, or other needs that maybe are not met by the VA or by other organizations, that you are working with. And so we just want to remind disabled veterans they have access to those community services and

that the organizations can provide a lot of those services. I want to highlight that the centers for Independent living, which are private non-profit organizations found all across the country, and in every state, many states have multiple he centers in them. And they provide services to all people with disabilities. They can help with advocacy. Information and referrals, if you need them. Help to refer you to housing options. They have peer counseling to talk about disability issues. And in many places, the centers for Independent living have connected with their local VA's, to try to assist disabled veterans in their area. And just some tips and strategies for self advocacy. You know, in order to be a good self advocate, you know, you must know, of course, your own strengths, needs, and interests. And you know, one of the things that we can look at, you know, some ideas of how you can start to develop a solid sense of what it will take to hone those skills. Learning how to talk about your military work experiences in a way that conveys your skills. Without a lot of jargon. Finding out more about your disability and how it may impact you at work or school. Educating yourself about different reasonable accommodations. Then, of course, knowing where to find the resources that you need to be successful.

I also wanted to mention quickly, the importance of reaching out to veteran service organizations. They are organizations that can provide you with free services including advocacy, career counseling, mentoring, some provide temporary financial assistance. And information about how to connect with those different veteran service organizations is available in the knowledge book.

Then the last section, that we have, of the knowledge book I want to highlight. Is the resources and guiding he questions section. And the resources section is a grouping of the major online resources that are scattered throughout the knowledge book. And, of course, these are not fully inclusive but they are resources that have been vetted and many that address many of the issues and impact disabled veterans looking for work in employment. Or educational opportunities. Also wanted to note that at the end of that section, we developed some questions that you can use along with each section of the book. And that can really help you to help it be a more interactive process. If that is something that you think would be of benefit to you. So that is a very quick overview of the wonderful resource that is fully available, at no charge, on our website. And to help you understand disability and veterans. And in different contexts. I believe now we have time for some questions and answers.

>> As we mentioned if you want to make a question or comment, type it in the box on the screen and we did have a couple of questions come in. This first one came in while discussing accommodations and you may or may not have answered it but the question is: If companies are required to

accommodate customers why aren't employees accepted?

>> Your employer is required to provide some type of accommodation, unless, of course, as I said there is an undo hardship or financial burden. So in many cases, an employer is required to provide some type of accommodation. But there may be other factors that limit a particular type of accommodation. So while you may request one particular type of accommodation, let's say, to have a work at home school, your employer, because of the nature of your work, is may be important for you to actually be in the workplace.

And so instead they may be able to help you to find a space in that -- in your office, like I said, maybe a conference room that no one is using. That you could have the opportunity work in there, and you would, you know, not have the distractions, but would still be available on-site.

I know a issue that a lot of people have, that, you know, is important, is the ability to have your service animal in the workplace. While they are required to provide that type of accommodation, it is something that can be weighed on an employee basis because it is a different type of need. So, you know, the long and short of it, is that they are required to provide an accommodation but there are some factors that will be weighed throughout the process. As to what type of accommodation that might be.

>> We have another question. Which came in. And that question is: How does PTSD disability effect obtaining a security clearance or maintaining a security clearance?

>> I know that is also an issue that many people have, and it is really something that will be on a more case-by-case basis. And so I really can't, you know, get into a specific situation, other than to say I know that can be an issue for people. And I can say in general, that, you know, that we have advocated, that, you know, that to the fullest extent possible, people be able to, you know, have their employment, stay in their employment, get the services, that they may need, but that is an area where there is still some friction.

>> And how old a veteran determine if they are denied a job, because of a mental illness?

>> That is a tough one. The people say, you know, I didn't get this job but how do I know I didn't get it because I had a particular type of disability. And that's where we would encourage people, if you feel that you did have some type of employment, discrimination because of a disability, would be to talk to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, to see about the possibility of filing a complaint. They have a lot of information on their website. And you can talk to someone, who may be able to help you work through the process. As we said, it could be difficult to pinpoint sometimes what exactly was the reason, you know, for a particular employment action. So I do know that that is very difficult. But I also know that the -- that they are very interested in making sure that disabled

veterans do have the resource that is they need, and they are carefully watching those situations.

>> We have an excellent question here. It is the, is it wise to discuss one's disability during the interview for a job?

>> That's always a tough question, that I know a lot of people have. When do you self identify and should you self identify? And you know, if you need some sort of accommodation through the interview process, you know, then that's a time when you would want to make sure that you are identifying. Another time is to look at, you know, is the employer offering some type of, you know, are they specifically trying to recruit people with disabilities. It would be an advantage to be able to be identify as a person with a disability. Because it may get some sort of preference. You know, those are also factors for people, in trying to consider that. And that is really a large debate for a lot of people, is trying to figure out, you know, do I want to be able to try to take advantage of those types of accommodations or, you know, opportunities, and take the risk that maybe I might have an adverse employment reaction, or, you know, do I want to self identify. So it really is a person-by-person basis. But if you do need -- I can say if you need some type of accommodation in the interview process, or if you are wanting to benefit from, you know, from some type of affirmative action, maybe they are a Federal contractor, or a Federal employer, you know, then it may be a different situation. So you will want to think about that each time.

>> While discussing accommodations did you discuss what exactly a covered entity is for title one of the ADA?

>> Covered entities? So different types of employers -- I don't believe that we specifically got into that note. One thing I did -- I do want, before I leave the last point. I want to mention really quickly. That on the job accommodation network, website, they do have information, that may be of assistance to veterans that have particular types of disabilities. And if you are trying to determine, you know, what type of accommodation you might need, they actually have broken it out by each of the different types of disabilities. So they have, you know, if you have, you know, post traumatic stress disorder, or if you have epilepsy, or some type of disability, you can go in and look and see what some of the recommended accommodations would be, that would be of assistance to you, and in helping you to be able to succeed in that job. So if you think, to yourself, you know, I am not really certain, you know, what that type of, you know, what exactly I might need to be successful. Then that gives you the opportunity to know what that may be, so you can make a recommendation to your employer. It would be helpful if you could provide me with things in writing, because I have trouble, you know, taking directions sometimes verbally. And if you could provide them to me in writing, then that would be, you know, help me to succeed.

So now, going to that current question: You know title one of the ADA, which is -- which does address employment, and the ante discrimination is enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as I stated. And it looks at private employers, state employers, and local government employers with 15 or more employees. Prohibiting discrimination against individuals on the basis of disability. So it is important to remember that the Americans with Disabilities Act, itself, does not apply to the Federal Government, instead the Federal Government is subject to the Rehabilitation Act, that we discovered. But a trick, is that the Rehabilitation Act, and the title one of the ADA, are enforced the same way. So while the ADA does not apply to the Federal Government, the protections that are part of it, do. By way of the way it is interpreted through another law.

>> I think we have time for one last question. While you talk about the Federal Government. This is time g are there special resources for veterans interested in working for the Federal Government?

>> There are. The Federal Government has taken the opportunity to go to develop some resources that are specifically targeted at veterans. And, of course, if you are looking for Federal employment, USA jobs.gov website is where all the Federal jobs, and government are housed. And one thing that the office of personnel management has done, is created a veteran employment website. And it is called feds hire vets. And it is feds hire vets.gov. And it specifically looking at and targeted at veteran job seekers. And provides a agency directory that gives you the names and contact information for 27 different veteran employment program representatives at different Federal agencies.

So if for instance you are interested in employment, you know, working for the department of agriculture, you would have the opportunity to see who the veterans employment program person is at department of agriculture. You can, you know, contact that person. So it is a good opportunity, for veterans to learn more about employment. And if you use social media, if you are on Facebook, Twitter, those types of things, the feds hire vets has a Facebook page and they do put announcements on it. If they are looking -- if the Federal Government had the need for a particular type of employee, they might put announcements on there that said we are looking for people that can do the following. So it is another way to help veterans get a leg up on finding out where opportunities are through the Federal Government site.

So one thing that -- I am sorry, go on.

>> Go ahead.

>> I wanted to point out quickly that the slide has been up. That provides the information about where the knowledge book is located. On the front page of Vets First.org, in the middle talking about disabled Americans and employment. And direct URL is Vets First.org forward/hyphen employment.

And also to remind everyone that this webinar is archived and that the site that is available there on the website as well.

>> If you have nothing else to add, that concludes the webinar for today.

[concluded]

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