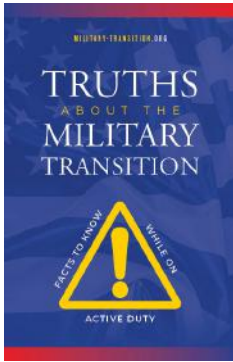


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AFTER THE MILITARY TRANSITION



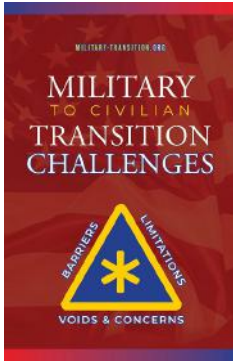
AS A CIVILIAN



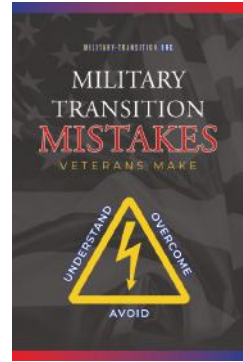
TRUTHS about the Military Transition



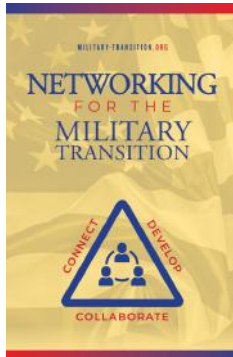
WINNING the Employment Game



CHALLENGES of the Military Transition



MISTAKES Veterans Make in Transition



NETWORKING for the Military Transition



PLANNING for the Military Transition



INTRODUCTION

Returning to civilian life can be stressful, and many veterans describe the process as confusing or share stories of feeling lost along the way. Others describe their transition journey as akin to entering a foreign land with unfamiliar languages, cultures, and customs. If this describes your situation, or if you're not sure how to improve your circumstances, we recommend reading this guidebook and completing the exercises provided. Our objective is to aid in assessing your situation, clarifying your objectives, and developing plans to achieve your post-military goals.



"The military transition is a process, not an event."

42% SAY THEY WOULD LIKE TO GO BACK INTO THE MILITARY

48% SAY THEIR EXPERIENCE WAS MORE DIFFICULT THAN EXPECTED

59% SAY THEIR TRANSITION TOOK MORE TIME THAN EXPECTED

source: www.military-transition.org/dashboard

When lost, we all know our first action should be to determine our current location so we can reorient. During the transition, this requires candid self-assessment. After this, you need to determine a preferred destination, followed by a plan to get there.

This is our approach, and it begins with a clear understanding of where you're currently at.

PART I:

DETERMINE WHERE YOU'RE AT

You made the decision to transition and are somewhere on the path between service and civilian life, but you aren't satisfied. Let's begin with a question:

Why did you decide to get out of the military?

Aside from retirement or medical issues, the primary reasons for most service members are: 1) family related, 2) a desire to do something different, 3) a goal of earning more money, 4) the need for greater long-term career opportunities, and 5) greater stability. As you think about your reasons, also consider the following questions:

- **What assumptions did you make about life after serving?**
- **What preparation did you complete beyond the mandatory transition class?**
- **What more could you have done to prepare?**

You can't change these, but knowing the answers should help as you explore what's next.

Remember: Everyone in uniform will eventually transition, and half of the veterans surveyed tell us their experiences were more difficult than expected.

But what makes the journey to civilian life difficult?

Research shows that veterans and their families endure numerous stressors when returning to civilian life. Each may result in confusion and pain, but the combined impact can be far greater.

TRANSITION STRESSORS

- Employment Concerns
- Loss of Purpose
- Financial Instability
- Identity Rediscovery
- Workplace Integration
- Mental Health Struggles
- Reconnect with Community
- Spousal and Family Adjustments
- Skills and Educational Translation

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS ARE GENERALLY THOSE WHERE THE MEMBER HAS:

1. Identified fulfilling employment.
2. Re-established personal identity outside the military.
3. Identified a community that accepts them.
4. Have a sense of purpose beyond the military.
5. Attained some level of financial security.
6. Are generally happy, and so is their family.

The final aspect of a successful transition is the most important: these individuals are optimistic about their future.



“My transition wasn’t perfect and I struggled for many years. Everything changed when I discovered my tribe, started a role that leveraged my strengths, and found purpose outside the military.”



FINDING SUCCESS AS A CIVILIAN

Self-assessment requires asking difficult questions with the goal of understanding and improvement.

HERE ARE SEVERAL QUESTIONS TO START THE PROCESS:

Do I know who I am outside the military, or have I simply learned how to function as a civilian?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Have I connected with any groups or teams that give me a sense of belonging after serving?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Have I found a worthy purpose or something that gets me excited most days?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

***Is my work fulfilling and worthy of my time?
If not, does it fund the things that excited me?
Am I willing to make this trade-off?***

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Am I consistently worried about money, or do I have some level of financial stability?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Am I taking care of my personal health and wellness?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Is my family alright?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Do I feel optimistic about my future?

(Yes/No) If no, consider why and what you can do about this.

Be honest, since most veterans don't invest the time to conduct adequate self-reflection. This can become a major cause of stress during and after the transition.



Since you're reading this booklet, we'll assume you answered NO at least once. In this case, you need to consider the reasons why. Many service members are overly confident in their abilities, unaware of the pitfalls associated with transition, and underinformed about civilian life. We also tend to have an inflated sense of control, which can impact our assumptions.

Please put your rank and past experience to the side, and let's focus on the future, not the past.

HERE'S ANOTHER QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

If I do nothing, what will my situation be in 12 to 18 months?

It's difficult to look at our own situation objectively. So, let's assume a friend shares similar answers to the previous questions. What advice would you give them? Your response might include additional questions, such as:

- **What are you doing to change your situation for the better?**
- **What's working and what's not working?**
- **Are your goals clear?**
- **What's your timeline?**
- **Are you focusing on what you control?**
- **What's holding you back?**
- **Is anyone helping you?**
- **How's your mental health?**
- **Are you taking care of yourself?**
- **Is your family alright?**
- **Are you setting boundaries for situations or people that aren't helping?**
- **Are you managing your time wisely?**



"I finally realized that I'd always be a soldier, but learned how to function in the civilian world."

Now, ask yourself these same questions. Many veterans aren't prepared for the lack of structure that accompanies the transition. As a result, they don't establish positive habits to fill these gaps and utilize their new freedoms. Think about how you're managing your time. Are there habits you need to change? Do you need to re-establish positive daily routines? One to consider is keeping a journal. Research shows that journaling promotes self-reflection and helps us think through important issues, like multiple life changes at the same time.

Throughout this book, we'll recommend assignments to help, and here's the first.

ASSIGNMENT #1 :

START A JOURNAL

Journaling is a powerful tool and a safe place to reflect. It allows you to gain clarity, discover patterns, document ideas, and explore solutions. The first step is to find a notebook you can write in. These aren't terribly expensive, so purchase something if necessary.

The next step is to begin making entries. You can write about anything that's on your mind, but try to focus on key events from the day, along with ideas, challenges, goals, and aspirations. Pick a consistent time each day to write (we suggest first thing in the morning or last thing at night). Write as much as needed - a sentence, paragraph, or page. Capture your thoughts, and don't worry about spelling or grammar. After you get into a consistent routine, we'll begin a focused exercise.

ASSIGNMENT #1 : (CONTINUED):

- Write three things each day that make you feel significant or valued. Write a sentence or two for each. Do the same for times you feel insignificant or unappreciated.
- After at least 45 days, review your daily entries and look for themes. Are there consistent events or situations that make you feel significant and valued? Consider how to create an environment that leads to more of these feelings. What about events or situations that make you feel insignificant or unappreciated. How can you avoid or reduce these?

Consider the insights from this exercise. What's working, and what needs to change? How can this help you evaluate your current situation? Continue this exercise, or repeat it every six months to help assess your quality of life.

Quality of life is determined by the choices and trade-offs we make. These shape our lives and can be deliberate and purposeful choices or unintentional.

Think about the individual who sacrifices family time to advance their personal interests. How about the individual who's more interested in making a difference versus a higher salary. They're intentionally making short- and long-term trade-offs.

Another trade-off might be the location you select after serving. You prefer a specific region because of career opportunities, and your spouse is committed to moving back home to reconnect with family. Both are acceptable solutions and represent trade-offs.

The next exercise addresses past decisions and how balancing competing priorities impacts our quality of life.



ASSIGNMENT #2 :**QUALITY OF LIFE**

Think about the trade-offs you're currently making. These might include family, career, health, location, identity, purpose, comfort, social expectations, and financial stability.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN YOUR JOURNAL:

- **What sacrifices are you making and what benefits are you gaining?**
- **Were these made intentionally or unintentionally?**
- **Are you and your family willing to continue making these trade-offs?**
- **Are you sacrificing long-term happiness? If so, how do you plan to resolve it?**

Please continue thinking about your situation while answering the following questions that apply your responses to the previous assignments.

Please write responses in your journal and take as much time as needed.

- **What three things bring the greatest joy, sense of purpose, and overall wellbeing into your life?**
- **What three things bring the greatest stress, concern, and frustration into your life?**

Can you envision a future that maximizes your joy, purpose, and wellbeing while minimizing stress, concern, and frustration?

Let's explore this in the next section!



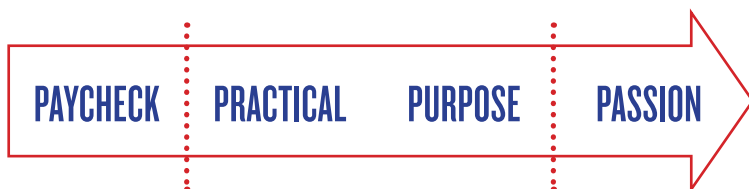
PART II: DETERMINE WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

In the rush to get out of the military, some veterans don't invest the time to stop and think about what they want next. Research highlights that fulfilling employment is one of the most important aspects of transition. Why? Because military service isn't just a job, it's a way of life that provides identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging for members and families. And let's not forget that it's also our source of financial stability.

Filling the void created when taking off the uniform begins with identifying fulfilling employment.

Employment is the starting point for financial stability, which is essential for survival. It's hard to search for purpose when you can't pay the bills. Because of this, our emphasis will be on the issue of employment, followed by identity, purpose, and sense of belonging.

We encourage you to speak with experts who can assist with family, marital, medical, spiritual, and mental health issues. These are critical to long-term wellbeing; however, we'll focus on employment since it's foundational to post-military success. Let's begin our discussion using a diagram of the employment continuum, which ranges from paycheck to passion.



Many veterans begin their transition on the right side of this continuum, from roles that give purpose and beyond. However, as they leave behind the well-known military environment that provides identity, purpose, and security, they often find themselves unprepared for the changes ahead, leading to uncertainty and doubt.

Where were you on this continuum before the transition? Where are you now?

You can't change the past, but you can grow from it as you shape your new identity and fill the gaps that come with transition. Here's a helpful exercise to guide you through the process.

ASSIGNMENT #3 :

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Starting today, find at least 15 minutes each day to fill in the voids of transition. It's important to have something in your life that gives you purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging. For many, this is their work. Invest the time to think about what types of work are fulfilling. Talk with someone else about their career. Read about different industries. Listen to relevant podcasts. Get outside your comfort zone and learn the language, culture, and customs of this foreign world. Write down what you learn in your journal, along with questions to discuss with mentors.

As you think about what's next, it's important to understand that careers evolve. Depending on the length of your military service, you could be looking for different experiences in your next career. You might have served four years and are still in the entry-career stage, or more than 20 years and are in the mid- or late-career stage. Let's use the following broad categories to think about where you're at in your career.



STAGE 1:

Entry-career (Ages: ~20-30)

Discover interests, obtain education/training, develop skills, and establish beneficial relationships that can be leveraged throughout a career.

STAGE 2:

Mid-career (Ages ~30-45)

Increase skills while building depth and breadth of experience, and develop relationships while making strong contributions to the organization.

STAGE 3:

Late-career (Ages: ~45-60)

Apply skills and experience, lead and/or develop others, and expand relationships while contributing strategically to the organization.

STAGE 4:

Legacy-career (Ages: +60)

Pursue interests and fulfillment, take on new challenges, enjoy surroundings, leverage skills/experience/relationships, lead and/or develop others, and contribute anyway necessary.

Civilian employment provides financial stability, and this is the foundation upon which purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging are established.

Advancing to higher stages on the employment continuum is the goal, so let's get a sense of what this includes in our next assignment.

ASSIGNMENT #4 :

YOUR MAGIC WAND

Pretend you have a magic wand and can define a career with greater purpose and passion. Assume you're financially stable, so money isn't the driving factor in selecting your ideal career. Close your eyes and see the future. Feel a genuine sense of purpose and belonging with the organization, the people, and your community.

- **What are you doing specifically?**
- **Why is this worth your valuable time?**
- **Who are you working with?**
- **Why do you feel connected with them?**
- **Where are you located?**
- **How are you contributing to your community?**

Do this multiple times over the course of several weeks at different times of the day, specifically just before going to sleep and first thing after getting up.

Write what you learn in your journal, along with questions you can ask mentors. Close your eyes again and think about the future you just described. What additional education, skills, experience, or connections do you need to make this a reality?

Write these down along with ways to fill gaps in the following areas: skills, education/training, experience, relationships, or other items relevant to your situation.

“*I had to work a job that I didn't enjoy for six years to build the connections and funding to start my own venture. It was painful but absolutely worth it.*”



Maybe there's something outside of work that gives you purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging (examples: family, children, relationships, volunteer work, church, social groups, sports, fitness, travel, or civic activities).

Purpose, identity, and belonging don't have to come solely from work; however, it generally provides the financial stability for you to pursue these aspects of life.

The ability to have purpose, identity, and belonging at work and outside represents the ideal situation. If you're making a trade-off and simply working to fund those aspects of life that excite you and provide meaning, consider whether you can have both.

In the next exercise, we'll focus on the attributes of a role you'd be excited to perform every day.



“Taking off the uniform was harder than putting it on. I had to discover who I was, find my purpose, move, and start a new career at the same time. It was overwhelming.”

ASSIGNMENT #5 :

ATTRIBUTES OF AN IDEAL POSITION

In this assignment, we'd like you to determine the level of importance for attributes that describe an ideal position.

Please read the entire list first, and then go back and score each from 1-10 based on the level of importance.

For this task, a score of 1 means this attribute is not important, and a score of 10 means this attribute is very important.

AFTER THE MILITARY TRANSITION

ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION	VALUE (1-10)
Duties	Do you prefer a role that leverages strengths or that develops weaknesses. What about a role that offers both? What about repetitive tasks or dynamic assignments?	
Schedule	Do you want to control your schedule? Do you need a fixed and predictable schedule or one that changes? How many hours and days do you prefer to work each week?	
Autonomy	Do you want to be watched constantly, occasionally, or never?	
Environment	Where are you more productive and comfortable? In open office spaces, cubicles, or private offices? Quiet or loud spaces? What about an unfinished space or outside?	
Work/Life Balance	Is a healthy work/life balance a priority, or are you willing to invest more time in your career at the expense of personal time? Do you want to control the level of balance?	
Management	Do you prefer frequent oversight and involvement from your employer? Do you want to be part of the decision-making processes? Do you want immediate feedback?	
Growth	Do you want a role that offers training, skill development, and frequent mentoring?	
Advancement	Do you want to climb the ladder or prefer a stable position that doesn't necessarily come with frequent promotions? Are you willing to make trade-offs to get promoted?	
Recognition	How important is being acknowledged for your contributions and achievements?	
Stress Level	How well do you handle stress? Are you comfortable working in high-pressure environments, or do you seek roles with less pressure and fewer deadlines?	
Travel	Are you open to frequent travel, or prefer roles that keep you close to home?	
Collaboration	Do you prefer team or group projects, or independent roles and assignments?	
Creativity	Do you want to be creative at work, or conform to existing methods and processes?	
Challenges	Do you enjoy solving unexpected problems and addressing complex challenges, or do you prefer an environment with consistency and predictable issues to address?	
Organizational Ethics	Is working for an organization with strong ethical standards and values important? Are an employer's ethical practices more or less important than other benefits?	



FINDING SUCCESS AS A CIVILIAN

ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION	VALUE (1-10)
Organizational Values	Do you align with the core values of the organization, or are you willing to compromise on values for other benefits such as career advancement?	
Organizational Reputation	How important is the reputation of the company? Are you willing to work for a lesser-known organization if the role aligns with your goals, but has other benefits?	
Geographic Location	How important are the geographical region and city? Are you open to relocation, or do you prefer staying in a specific region? What about your commute distance?	
Job Security	How much emphasis do you place on job security? Is a certain level of uncertainty acceptable? Do you prioritize job security? Are you willing to make any trade-offs?	
Remote Work	Do you want to work remotely on a full-time, temporary, or as needed basis?	
Impact	Are you motivated by the direct impact your work has on the organization, local community, or society in general? Is this more important than other benefits?	
Family-Oriented	Does the workplace need to be family-oriented with appropriate policies and benefits? Should families be part of all social activities? Is family-friendly acceptable?	
Social Functions	Do you prefer workplaces with a strong emphasis on socializing and team-building, or are you comfortable with a more reserved atmosphere?	
Diversity	Do you prioritize diverse and inclusive environments?	
Wellness	Do you need a comprehensive wellness program or can you manage independently?	
Job Satisfaction	How important is feeling satisfied with your work?	
Co-workers	How important is having positive relationships with your co-workers?	
Workload Distribution	Are you comfortable with a heavy workload and tight deadlines, or do you prefer roles that offer a more balanced and manageable workload?	
Compensation*	How crucial is compensation? Are you willing to make trade-offs for other benefits?	
Culture**	Do you prefer a flexible startup mentality, a corporate culture, or a non-profit ethos?	

After completing this assignment, please group your responses into three categories:

GROUP 1 **RESPONSES BETWEEN 1 - 4** Not Important

GROUP 2 **RESPONSES BETWEEN 5-7** Important

GROUP 3 **RESPONSES BETWEEN 8-10** Very Important

Please review each of these groups and validate your responses. What are the attributes of your ideal position? How does this compare to the role you're currently performing? What can you learn from this assignment, and how can you apply these learnings to your current situation?

** We'd like to explain the final two attributes, compensation and culture. These attributes are generally in the very important or important categories, yet they are often misunderstood. Let's take a minute to discuss both.

COMPENSATION*

In the civilian workforce, compensation extends beyond the paycheck and includes health benefits (medical, dental, vision), paid time off (vacation, holidays, sick leave), retirement plans, bonuses, stock options, and more. In the military, pay is based on rank and time. In the private sector, compensation is generally aligned with contribution or value-added to the organization. Private sector compensation can change quickly, up or down, based upon contribution, value-added, or market conditions.

If you like your current position but are unhappy with your compensation, our advice is to have a conversation with your employer. Simply ask if there's any flexibility now that you've been in the role and are contributing at a higher level. Some organizations may adjust pay once you've successfully onboarded and are making a positive impact. Don't suffer in silence if this is the major cause of your frustration.



CULTURE**

Another important factor veterans don't fully understand is culture. The best way to describe culture is the personality of a workplace. It's a combination of organizational values, policy, leadership, communication styles, people, and relationships.

At a minimum, you must be able to tolerate the organization's culture. To be highly successful, you must embrace it.

Here are some broad examples of culture for different organization types:

Larger Company (Public)

Work culture is often characterized by a structured hierarchy, corporate policies, and a focus on efficiency. Emphasis is on performance metrics and accountability across a diverse workforce and large-scale projects. Development programs and benefit packages contribute to a competitive and dynamic work environment. Job stability depends on performance and market conditions. Layoffs and restructuring may occur; however, there's also a broader range of career opportunities.

Small Company (Private)

Work culture tends to be flexible, adaptive, and collaborative. Employees may perform multiple roles, fostering a sense of ownership and innovation. Decision-making processes may be more direct, and there's often a close-knit atmosphere where individuals have influence over the company's direction. Job stability depends on individual performance and market dynamics. Volatility can be higher when the organization has fewer resources and sources of revenue.

Defense Contractor

Work culture is generally influenced by the challenges of supporting national defense with an emphasis on precision, security, and adherence to regulations. Collaboration is crucial, prioritizing innovation in defense technologies with a commitment to meeting stringent standards. Coworkers may share a sense of duty towards national security. Job stability depends on contract continuation or the ability to change employer affiliations as contractual relationships evolve.

Federal Government

Work culture is based on adherence to regulations, bureaucracy, and a commitment to public service. Collaboration across departments and adherence to established procedures are crucial, contributing to a structured and methodical work environment. Job stability is strong, and employees might be willing to sacrifice increased pay for job security.

State or Local Government

Work culture combines elements of public service with the localized and diverse needs of individual states/municipalities. Bureaucratic structures exist, but the atmosphere may be influenced by regional or local priorities and policies. Culture may emphasize community impact, and employees may find themselves engaging with a range of public services, from education to healthcare. Job stability is good, and some employees are willing to sacrifice higher pay for job security.

Self-employed (Entrepreneur)

Work culture is generally defined by the principal owner(s) and tends to be dynamic and adaptive with significant autonomy, creativity, and risk-taking. The entrepreneurial work culture values innovation, resilience, and a willingness to embrace challenges. Collaboration with like-minded individuals and a focus on achieving long-term goals contribute to the unique dynamics of an entrepreneurial environment. Job stability may depend on organizational and individual performance, combined with market dynamics and revenue sources.



Self-employed (Franchise Owner)

Work culture is a blend of entrepreneurship with established brand guidelines. Franchise owners operate within a structured framework, adhering to the brand's values, standards, and processes. Collaboration with the franchise network is key, as is a focus on delivering consistent customer experiences. Job stability depends on the industry, market dynamics, adherence to guidelines, and the ability to develop the overarching brand within the local market.

Non-Profit

Work culture is characterized by a passion for a particular cause or mission. Employees often feel a deep sense of purpose, contributing to a collaborative and mission-driven environment. The culture values community impact, social responsibility, and teamwork. These organizations foster a strong connection between employees and the communities they serve, emphasizing the importance of making a positive difference in society. Job stability is normally good and is driven by contributions or donations, followed by performance.

- **What organizational cultures are most appealing?**
- **Who can you talk with about the culture at their organization? Can they help validate your thoughts?**
- **What more can you learn to help you navigate important culture related decisions?**

Understanding your preferred culture will help when developing a plan to move forward.

PART III:

DEVELOP A PLAN TO GET THERE

Now that you have a sense for what you want, let's start developing a plan to achieve your desired future.

PHASE I: ASSESS

Change begins with an assessment of your situation and a commitment to improve. This could mean a positive adjustment to your current role, moving to a different role with the same organization, or starting a new role with a different organization.

Self-awareness is the foundation of long-term success and the first step in this journey.

We included exercises in this booklet to help assess your situation. Please make use of these exercises, but also recognize that some veterans experience discomfort when transitioning from being high-performers in uniform to becoming average or below-average civilian employees.

The reason behind the decline is a change in responsibilities, expectations, and environment, not because of their abilities. For many, this is the first time they've not been elite in their careers.

As a result, they question previous decisions or take actions to restore feelings of competence and self-worth. If not successful, this may lead to numbing actions or negative behaviors.

If this describes your situation, please ask for help.

Transition is a team sport, yet veterans are reluctant to ask others to assist. A great way to overcome this is by creating your own board of advisors.

ASSIGNMENT #6 :

CREATE A PERSONAL BOARD OF ADVISORS

Companies and non-profits leverage outside advisors to help navigate challenges, increase effectiveness, and guide strategic decisions. You can do the same by creating a personal board. In this assignment, we'd like you to identify a handful of individuals you trust.

Select individuals with diverse perspectives and try to fill each of these key advisory roles:

Challenger	Someone who provides differing views and identifies blind spots that enable you to think deeper.
Planner	Someone that provides advice that helps you develop pathways to reach your goals.
Connector	Someone who introduces you to others that might assist.

Once you've identified the correct group, ask if they'd be willing to provide their candid opinions to help you navigate career challenges. This process takes time, so be patient and nurture these relationships. Write down questions in your journal prior to meetings (in-person or virtual). Let them know you value their ideas and make the most of each interaction. Reciprocate by offering your support when they need assistance, and continually build these relationships.

Another useful technique is to gather lessons from your current environment. Since taking off the uniform, what have you learned?

The civilian workforce can be significantly different, and past assumptions might need to change. Think about how decisions are made in your current workplace compared to the military? What about social dynamics, performance feedback, schedules, and punctuality? Understanding these will help as you adapt.



PHASE 2: ADAPT

After assessing, the next step is to improve your situation. This can be done in three ways: 1) adapt yourself, 2) adapt your role, or 3) both. Remember that 6 out of 10 veterans say the transition required more time than they expected. Maybe you need to be patient, reoriented to your new environment, and learn how to apply your skills and experience in a civilian context. We recommend asking others to help you understand and find solutions. If you have faith, ask for guidance and wisdom.

In addition to your board of advisors, you should speak with your employer about opportunities, challenges, and frustrations. Give them an opportunity to resolve or assist. The next assignment should help you prepare for this conversation.

ASSIGNMENT #7 :

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

In your journal, write out concerns, challenges, or frustrations in your current role. Next, ask yourself why this issue is generating concern. Continue asking why, with the goal of getting to the root issue. For example, let's say you're frustrated because you're not contributing at the level you prefer.

Ask yourself why? Maybe you need to learn more about the industry or are still building trust with clients. Why? Maybe you need additional industry training or time with clients.

Why? Because you've only been with the company for four months but are making good progress and are certain to achieve this level of contribution, or greater, in the coming months. It took time for you to gain confidence and reach your peak in the military, and the same principle applies in the civilian workforce.



HERE ARE SOME POTENTIAL TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR EMPLOYER:

- **Unclear work expectations**
- **Workload balancing**
- **Autonomy or supervision level**
- **Schedules**
- **Career development and training**
- **Follow-on roles within the organization**

When ready, schedule time with your employer to discuss and explore ways to address concerns.

Discomfort helps get our attention; however, it's important to understand the difference between a challenging role and a toxic environment. Positions that force us out of our comfort zone and help us develop skills are useful. These are like a hard gym workout for our careers - painful in the short term but beneficial in the long term. Unfortunately, some roles offer pain without career gain. These often include toxic environments, irrational bosses, or unsafe practices. If your situation isn't developing skills or providing experiences that will benefit your career, you should consult with your advisors and your employer. If your manager is the issue, consider elevating your concerns.

After employer discussions, you might need to adapt further or prepare for a greater change. If you haven't already engaged with other veterans in your organization, maybe now is the time to connect for mentoring or lessons on cultural adaptation. Does your company have a veteran employee or a veteran affinity group? These are a great way to build connections and learn from the experiences of others. If there's not a veteran's group, consider starting one. Maybe others are experiencing similar challenges, and your efforts can help them. As you progress, continue focusing on the things you control and let go of those out of your control. Here's a vision exercise that may help you see ways to adapt within your current role or make a greater change.

ASSIGNMENT #8 :**LETTER FROM YOUR FUTURE SELF**

Envision a future where you're achieving at a high level, fulfilling your life purpose, are part of a connected team, and are truly happy at work and at home. Invest the time and see yourself in this future environment, and then write a letter to your present self. First, describe your life in vivid detail. Highlight your accomplishments, followed by the challenges you conquered along the way. What decisions contributed to your success? What obstacles did you avoid? What lessons did you learn? Conclude with advice to guide your present self from this future perspective. Write this letter in your journal, and adapt yourself and the environment as necessary.

Maybe your situation requires more than simple adaptation. As you continue to assess, you might also start preparing for a more significant change.

PHASE 3: PREPARE

A successful change requires preparation, and it begins with your intent. You've assessed the situation, defined your ideal future, and adapted. If this isn't working, the next step is to prepare for greater change. If you're considering a role with the same organization, you likely considered this when completing the employer engagement exercise. In this case, continue these discussions. If you're looking outside, we suggest being discreet and not sharing this decision beyond family and close friends, while continuing to perform work duties to the best of your abilities.

If you're thinking about a new role with a different organization, there will be questions and actions to consider. We listed some of these on the next page. The key to successful preparation is a clear objective. We asked questions throughout this booklet to help clarify, and now we will ask you to write out your desired position.

ASSIGNMENT #9 :

DESIRED POSITION

Based upon your research, outcomes from previous assignments, and conversations with mentors, please describe your desired position. Be as specific as possible and include the industry, duties, work environment, culture, preferred location (city or region), management style, work-life balance, and compensation. What other attributes are critical? Write this in your journal and be specific. Talk with friends, family, and advisors. This is the culmination of all the other exercises in this booklet, and the target of all subsequent efforts. Take your time, be clear and intentional.

HERE ARE QUESTIONS AND ACTIONS TO HELP YOU PREPARE:

- What education, skills, training, certification, or experience gaps must I fill?
- How will I fill these gaps?
- What obstacles could impact my ability to secure this opportunity?
- How am I reducing or removing these obstacles?
- Have I asked friends, family, and mentors to help?
- Who else can help me connect with this opportunity?
- Is my resume current and aligned with my intent?
- Have I updated my LinkedIn profile?
- Am I ready for an interview?
- Are there recruiters that specialize in this area?
- When will I be ready to make this change?
- Is my family aware and ready?
- Have I mapped out my timeline?
- What do I need to consider that I haven't already?



PHASE 4: ACT

Now that you've assessed, adapted, and prepared, it's time to take concrete steps while monitoring progress, and optimizing your approach. A word of caution: we recommend that you not act too quickly.

Frequent job changes are common in the military; however, civilian managers may avoid resumes with multiple jobs in a short period of time. There are different opinions; however, we think you should stay in any role for at least one year and preferably two. This provides ample time to make a fair assessment, and avoids the reputation of someone who changes jobs frequently.

Your current employer may discover your intent to depart and change the situation.

Some may attempt to keep you in the role with different conditions, or possibly offer a different position. Others may expedite your departure.

Be ready since either of these may occur, or your employer's expectations may change for you and your role.

Success isn't the result of luck. It's a product of clear objectives, rigorous planning, and purposeful actions. Do the work, have difficult conversations, map your path, grow your skills, push your limits, and achieve your goals.

Your ideal position is out there, and people are willing to help you navigate the journey.

As you progress, be sure to continue the self-reflection, journaling, and vision exercises within this booklet and never stop working towards your ideal future.



PART IV:

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

In this booklet, we shared thoughts and exercises to evaluate your current employment, define a better situation, and develop plans to help achieve your goals. We focused on post-military employment, since this is the foundation of a successful transition.

We also shared lessons from those who navigated the challenges you're facing. Our final advice is to recognize that you're not alone and that others are here to assist. If you're at the point of losing hope, please ask for help. There are people and organizations that are here to help you get through this period, so ask.

FINDING PURPOSE, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY

We highlighted the value of joining or starting a veteran employee group to help build connections and community. There are many other ways to develop purpose, identity, and belonging after the military. In addition to local community, faith, and volunteer groups, here are some of the organizations we recommend: Team RWB, IAVA, Team Rubicon, The Mission Continues, SVA, American Legion, AMVETS, DAV, and Blue Star Families.

In addition, we suggest connecting with local groups through churches or networking events. Take a class and meet people with similar interests. Volunteer to help someone else.

Another great way is to mentor others through organizations such as ACP, Veterati, or the USO. You can also request a mentor to expand your board of advisors.

There are countless ways to connect with others and find purpose outside of the military. Just get started.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS



Made for Your Military Life

We're here to support you with all aspects of your military career, while serving and beyond.



Joining the military

Learn more about joining the military and develop a personalized timeline to help you along the way.



Deploying

Use our checklist and tips to help you and your family prepare for your deployment.



Military move, or PCS

Whether domestic or overseas, simplify your next move with our PCS checklist and tailored advice.



Leaving the military

Use our assessment to see if it's the right time to leave, or use our checklist and job finding service to ensure a smooth transition.



Military spouses

See how we can help you navigate the ins and outs of military life.



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