

MILITARY-TRANSITION.ORG

WINNING THE EMPLOYMENT GAME



VETERAN EDITION

HOW TO WIN

Transitioning back into civilian life is difficult for service members, and the challenges associated with employment add to the stress. This booklet was written by veterans who've navigated the unknown and want to help guide your path. Let's start by agreeing that finding a meaningful career is challenging for everyone, not just veterans.

Finding the ideal job will require you to compete against veterans and non-veterans, both of which have already navigated the employment maze. To succeed, you need to understand how the process works.

An ancient proverb says, "To win a competition, you must know when it begins and ends, the outcomes, and the rules."

The search for your career begins the minute you elect to transition, and continues until you find an ideal position for you and your family. Since the work environment impacts your entire life, the outcome is the happiness of you and your loved ones. What's not clear are the rules of the game.

Two decades of experience and research confirms there's no lack of incorrect or misleading information on this subject. Knowing the rules before starting the transition enables you to better prepare for success.



As you transition, don't assume the employment game is fair. Many veterans believe the most qualified individual will get the job offer. Since veterans have great training and leadership experience, we assume they should be one of the most qualified applicants. This assumption isn't true, so don't be lured into a false sense of security or entitlement. You must win the competition against other candidates, some of which are more qualified than you.

So how is the game played?

PART

THE BASICS

The rules for hiring aren't written anywhere, but the general process is consistent across all industries. Let's call it the hiring funnel. Candidates enter the funnel when they submit a resume, and the process culminates with a job offer. The steps in-between are specific to employers but generally include resume reviews, pre-employment screening and testing, interviews, reference checks, and finally, a job offer.

In the military, the hiring process is generally clear, objective, and fair. Don't assume the same of the civilian world. It's a different game, and knowing the difference is critical. Let's start by explaining the open and hidden job markets.

UNDERSTANDING THE TWO JOB MARKETS:

THE OPEN JOB MARKET

The open job market is when available positions are visible to candidates inside and outside an organization. Open positions are communicated or advertised through venues such as jobs boards, websites, and career fairs. When candidates apply, their packages are reviewed and those which meet pre-determined criteria are merged into a selection pool. All candidates follow the same process and hiring is done from the resumes within this pool.

Many veterans think employers read every resume collected, so their extensive experience will eventually become clear when submitting in this manner. This leads veterans to think it's only a matter of time before they're contacted by a company. Once again, don't make assumptions. A single job posting can generate thousands of responses and resumes can get lost in pools. You'll also discover that sometimes other candidates inflate their qualifications on resumes, making your experience appear less impressive. In addition, companies rely upon automated filtering tools to manage large numbers of resumes. This means that HR might not actually review any resumes until late in the process.

The chances of finding your ideal job when blindly submitting a resume aren't good, so you need to become more familiar with the hidden job market.



Another challenge veterans discover is that companies advertise positions when they already have someone identified or don't take down job postings until the role is filled. This adds confusion to the process and may create false expectations. Don't assume an organization will contact or hire anyone based upon an announcement or a website that invites applications. Many organizations have a reputation to uphold, and the individuals who seek employment are also in their community or customers. The company's HR team will be polite if you make contact, but they have other ways of finding talent beyond resume pools.

THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

Large organizations always have openings and constantly hire but don't advertise all of their available positions. Military organizations have a defined number of positions, and increasing these requires time and justification. That's not the case with civilian organizations. They can add or eliminate positions at will. If the company can pay the salary and benefits, hiring can be done regardless of openings. Sometimes organizations create a new position to match a candidate's skills and use the role as a bridge until a permanent position becomes available.

With industry, it's all about getting the right talent on board. This often occurs via the efforts of sponsors and advocates or recruiters and agencies.

WHAT ARE SPONSORS & ADVOCATES?

Sponsors introduce people, make connections, and encourage managers to consider specific individuals for opportunities. The sponsor's impact depends upon their level of influence within the organization; however, the ultimate situation is when the sponsor is directly involved in the hiring process. Sponsors may require you to follow a company's normal hiring process and submit a resume like all other candidates, but they will seek out your information while discounting other candidate materials. Sponsors also circulate resumes within a company and influence others who make or review hiring decisions. Sometimes a sponsor asks another influential person to assist on your behalf. This person may advocate without knowing you because they trust your sponsor's judgment. Having an influential sponsor can be a game-changer, so cultivate relationships, but realize the process also works in reverse. Never forget the importance of networking and that trust is built over time.

WHO ARE RECRUITERS & AGENCIES?

Recruiters and agencies also develop resume pools, but these are customized to specific employment requirements. Some recruiters specialize in veteran placements, however not all service members fit their target audience. Reputable firms conduct extensive screening and invest time developing a candidate's skills. They often require veterans to complete training programs that build or enhance skills to increase marketability. The company pays for these services which are generally a percentage of the first-year salary, a flat fee, or a combination. You shouldn't pay for these services but might be required to undergo a comprehensive review or training before they will represent you with their client companies.

THE DOD SKILLBRIDGE PROGRAM:

SkillBridge is changing the way service members transition and everyone should look into the program. At its core, SkillBridge enables members to expand relevant skills and gain new skills that employers require. The program benefits members in multiple ways and connects individuals with industry partners in real-world job experiences.

If not already clear, you need to understand the importance of networking and finding opportunities that aren't openly advertised. This is the best way to find meaningful employment, but also requires an investment of time and energy on your part.

PART 2 GETTING STARTED

It's time to develop a gameplan and chart your path to success. Before applying for any civilian positions, you need to invest the time and understand your long-term goals. Both personal and professional goals should be part of the process, and don't forget to include your family in the conversation. The first step in the transition journey is candid self-reflection. Write your thoughts in a journal and be honest with yourself. This will become your playbook and there's a list of resources in the back of this guide to help get you started.



QUESTIONS TO BEGIN:

1. What do I like to do and am good at?
2. What are my weaknesses or things I don't enjoy doing?
3. What motivates me to work hard or achieve a goal?
4. How do I define success?
5. What are the dominant skills that have enabled me to succeed?
6. What do I want my day to look like?
7. What types of co-workers and work environments do I prefer?

When done properly, this process will help get you started on the right path. It should generate more questions along with materials that can be used in resumes and interviews.

After true self-reflection, you can develop plans and materials to empower your career search.

“*Get started now and don't make excuses. You are responsible for your own transition.*”

PART 3 THE RESUME



The next step is selecting career highlights which best align with each opportunity and writing these in simple language. Think of the resume like a movie review. The intent is to generate awareness by appealing to the audience's interests.

Every resume should be customized to the specific role for which it's intended. This might be as simple as changing the order of the bullets, so relevant items are closer to the top. It doesn't mean you need to write an entirely new resume for each position. Please understand that one-size-fits-all resumes might be easier to create, but aren't generally effective. A great way to tailor your resume is to incorporate words and phrases from the job description. You can also align the resume based upon discussions with a company insider or an industry expert.

Resumes are objective, meaning you have the background and experience needed, or you don't. The more your qualifications align with an organization's needs, the more likely you'll get invited for an interview. Many candidates ask friends and family to help develop a resume, while others hire a professional writer. At a minimum, you should have others review your resume to strengthen the materials and identify spelling, grammar, spacing, and punctuation issues.

PART 4 THE INTERVIEW

If resumes are written reviews, then interviews are movie trailers purposely developed to generate interest. Trailers assemble the best scenes and bring the written description to life.

An interview should do the same thing – bring your written story to life.

Hiring managers (your audience) are busy people with many demands on their schedules, and they don't have time to waste. Being invited for an interview means they think you have the potential to do the job. This assessment is based on the content within your resume along with any endorsements from trusted sources.

THERE ARE TWO PRIMARY REASONS ORGANIZATIONS CONDUCT INTERVIEWS:

- Assess potential
- Check compatibility



“Resumes get you invited and interviews get you hired.”

REASON

ASSESS POTENTIAL



RULES TO WIN THE GAME – VETERAN EDITION

After two decades, we've learned the hard lesson that statements on resumes aren't always true. Skills and experiences are misrepresented because of intentional or unintentional errors. When unintentional, it's often because the individual can't accurately assess their own skills and contributions. Maybe they've been told they're great at something and now believe these comments or their frame of reference is limited. These candidates believe their resume statements are accurate, but there's a substantial difference between their assessment and reality. In other situations, job seekers intentionally inflate skills and experiences so they appear more qualified.

During an interview, the organization is trying to assess a candidate's true potential so they ask challenging questions or conduct exercises to better understand how they will perform on the job. They're always looking for inaccurate information, whether intentional or unintentional, with the goal of making an accurate assessment. During the interview, they also need to learn more about relevant skills and experiences to succeed in the organization. Always remember the interview is an opportunity to bring your resume to life and provide context beyond what's written. You do this by telling interesting and relevant stories based upon the questions or discussion topics.

REASON 2 CHECK COMPATIBILITY

The second reason is to check compatibility, which is sometimes called fit. For simplicity, let's say this comes down to their ability to get along with you. When interacting with members of the organization, look for opportunities to make connections and always demonstrate your interest and desire to be part of their team. Sometimes hiring managers need to bring different views and perspectives into their organization. Compatibility doesn't mean you must look, act, and think like everyone else. It means they need to have meaningful interactions with you and still be able to sit in the office or travel together and maintain their sanity.

The key to a successful interview is showing the value you bring to the organization through interesting and relevant examples. This is done by focusing on the previously mentioned items and demonstrating those qualifications which enable you to accomplish the functions and tasks needed. When possible, highlight additional skills and experience that are relevant. Do your homework, know the industry, understand the organization's needs, and align your message appropriately.

Finally, show interest in being a member of their team and part of the organization. In our experience, passion for the organization and the specific role can generate extra credit.

PART 5 WINNING THE GAME



This booklet highlights a complex process, and we encourage veterans to consider these when developing their transition plans. Remember, being the most qualified doesn't guarantee you'll get the job. Don't be lured into a false sense of security or entitlement based upon your military experience. In the talent market, the candidate that best demonstrates the following will get the offer (even if they're less qualified):

- Potential to the organization (e.g., relevant qualifications aligned to the position)
- Compatibility (e.g., fit with the organization and people)

RESEARCH WITH THOUSANDS OF VETERANS HIGHLIGHTS THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION:

- Start preparing early
- Have a transition plan
- Build your network
- Learn how to translate your skills
- Be patient

The back of this guide contains resources to help address all of these elements as part of your individual playbook. We'll focus on networking and translating skills in the next section because these are enduring challenges for most veterans.

BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

This is an important but misunderstood element of a successful transition. Networking is really about building relationships of trust and mutual benefit. Having someone you can talk with regarding career or life decisions is a positive. Don't make the concept of networking more complex than it needs to be.

Connect with individuals you served with that have already taken off the uniform. Find veterans and non-veterans working in organizations and roles that sound interesting.

Get on LinkedIn and read about others' experiences. Utilize organizations such as ACP, Veterati, USO, Hiring our Heroes, FourBlock and Vets2Industry to identify mentors.

Ask questions and learn from their experiences while sharing your story and offering to assist them. Networking and mentoring are powerful tools that can be used throughout your military and civilian careers.

Networking is also the pathway to developing sponsors and advocates along with opening doors into the hidden job market. Invest the time to network ahead of your transition.



TRANSLATING YOUR SKILLS

This is one of the most important yet difficult and therefore delayed aspects of the transition process.

There are really two aspects of translating your skills:

- **Language**
- **Alignment**

LANGUAGE:

Using military terms and acronyms is like speaking a foreign language to civilian employers. It confuses them and decreases the likelihood of success. The earlier you begin using this new ‘civilian’ language, both written and verbal, the better. Ask your network to help translate examples on your resume and during interviews. Remove acronyms, jargon, and phrases that confuse and speak in terms the hiring manager understands.

ALIGNMENT:

The intent of all communications with an employer is to show how your skills and experience align with their need. Understand the position and know the skills required to succeed. After this, focus on how you will deliver value. Ask your network to help and practice telling relevant examples so your message is interesting and clear.

EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE:

#

1

A Senior NCO with 23 years of logistics experience began his transition two months before retirement, despite attending transition assistance the year prior. A demanding leadership position and family commitments prevented him from starting earlier. His first step

was contacting friends to discuss their experiences, but he didn't ask hard questions or invest the time for candid self-reflection.

He was confident that employers would hire him after seeing a resume based on his military performance reports with extensive leadership experience. His focus at this point was on minimizing disruption to his unit while preparing for retirement and relocation. His spouse was from the Midwest and they agreed to settle close to her family. He knew a handful of people in the area, but never asked them about the local job market.

Prior to moving, he sent 112 copies of his resume along with several follow-up notes to generic email accounts. Over the next nine weeks, four companies contact him.

Two of these asked questions but never engaged afterward and two of these conducted video interviews. No subsequent invitations, calls, or notes were received.

He felt ignored and his stress level increased. After three months of sending additional resumes with no response, he decided ask for help.

#1 EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE: CONTINUED ...

With the assistance of mentors, he evaluated his situation and established goals. He decided to focus on becoming a distribution manager and set a deadline of starting his new position.

With a clear focus and written plan, he identified specific examples that highlighted his relevant skills and experience.

His resume was updated and the stories he began telling highlighted individual contributions versus team accomplishments. The impact of his work became clear.

He expanded his network using LinkedIn, joined community groups, and attended networking events. He met with veterans and non-veterans in the distribution field.

His contacts began advocating across their networks which led to meetings with three growing companies.

He did extensive research, learned about their products, their organizational culture, and about the roles he was being considered for.

He refined and practiced delivering his tailored messages for each position.

He interviewed and received two offers. Both were great opportunities and compensation was above his expectations.

After consulting with his family and network, he made a selection and began two weeks later.



EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE:

#2

A Junior Officer with five years of intelligence experience began evaluating career paths early in her career. She wanted options, both in and out of uniform, and began exploring roles and industries across the workforce. After self-reflection and research, she felt her skills and interests aligned with financial analyst and process improvement roles. She discovered several relevant skills that overlapped with her current duties and started courses to learn more and build her network. She became proficient in business concepts that proved helpful in her military role.

After returning from a deployment, her mother became terminally ill and she elected to separate. She hadn't planned to get out at this point and her transition was rushed. She made a few business contacts while attending training earlier in the year and requested their assistance. She became active on LinkedIn and started asking good questions while learning from veterans and non-veterans.

She invested time and considered her long-term goals. Using these insights, and with the help of a growing network, she developed a resume that highlighted her individual contributions. She practiced telling interesting stories with the help of mentors and brought her resume to life. As a result of networking, a contact introduced her to a local company's VP of manufacturing.



#2 EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE CONTINUED ...

She impressed the company during an interview, but wasn't interested in the role because of the travel requirements.

Afterwards, the VP introduction her to the company's marketing director and they had coffee. This individual passed her resume to a supplier that was looking for an individual with vision, analytic expertise, writing and public speaking skills. With the help of a contact inside the company, she prepared for an interview and was selected for a marketing analyst position. She started her new career one week after returning home and stayed in this role for three years. Eventually, she was promoted into a senior-level marketing role. Five years later, she was hired by the VP she originally met with and became the marketing director at his new start-up company.

EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE:

#3 A Junior Enlisted member with four years of maintenance experience was frustrated with the military and decided to get out. He was a respected athlete in high school, but didn't want to attend college after graduation. He was proud

of his service, but wanted a more predictable lifestyle and missed his hometown. He planned to attend school while in uniform, but deployments made this difficult. As the informal leader of a small team, his confidence was high and thought doors would open quickly with civilian employers. He attended transition assistance eight months prior and took notes, but hadn't taken action yet.

#3 EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE: CONTINUED ...

He purposely waited to send resumes so he would be in the local area to respond and thought a strong resume alone would open doors for employment.

His military performance reports were positive and he simply changed a few words to help civilians better understand his duties and accomplishments. He thought an entry-level management position would be ideal and heard that companies always need leaders.

The military taught him to adapt and he was confident this would also increase his chances for success. He got out and began sending resumes to job boards and attending career fairs. Unfortunately, there was no interested in hiring him in a management role and his team lead experience wasn't valued. He was unemployed for three months until a friend recommended him to a local employer.

He practiced telling relevant examples with another friend that worked at the company. The interview was a success and they offered him a decent starting wage along with a promise to re-interview him for management once he finished school. The experience was much different than he expected and his military training wasn't helpful until several years later. He eventually learned the ropes and moved into a management role.



WHAT'S NEXT

CONGRATULATIONS – YOU'RE ALMOST READY.

It's a great feeling when you can choose what follows your military service. Unfortunately, this blessing becomes a curse if you're not ready.

The process of becoming a warrior didn't happen overnight and neither does the transition. Be patient and get started as soon as possible.

The first step in this journey is thinking about what you want after serving. Invest the time and keep a journal with thoughts, questions, and tasks. This is your transition playbook.

After self-reflection and some understanding of your goals, you can begin preparing.

A strong resume and the ability to tell your story (interviewing skills) are the equipment you need to succeed. You also need to have coaches (mentors) that enable peak performance and open doors into the hidden job market (the optimal playing field).

Finally, you should complete a few warm-up games (practice interviews) before playing in the championship. Use these to refine your approach and reduce anxiety going into the big game.

Now that you know the rules and how the game is played, go out and win!

A WINNING PLAYBOOK

RESOURCES TO ASSIST

military-transition.org/START

- Veterans.linkedin.com
- FourBlock.org/programs/find-your-calling
- CommitFoundation.org/pursueyourpurpose
- **Register**
- **Watch**
- **Complete**

military-transition.org/PLAN

- USO.org/transition
- HiringOurHeroes.org/career-services
- IVMF.syracuse.edu/apply/our-programs
- **Engage**
- **Utilize**
- **Visit**

military-transition.org/CONNECT

- ACP-usa.org
- Veterati.com
- Vets2Industry.org/events-page
- **Request**
- **Explore**
- **Network**

military-transition.org/TRANSLATE

- VeteransASCEND.com
- RecruitMilitary.com/job-seekers
- Kochind.com/careers/veterans/veterans-guide
- **Leverage**
- **Access**
- **Study**

military-transition.org/WIN

- Skillbridge.osd.mil
- Glassdoor.com
- Military-Transition.org/resources
- **Participate**
- **Research**
- **Bookmark**

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