

Navigating the Job Search

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The military-to-civilian transition presents many new challenges for veterans, including the job search. Some of you will seamlessly transition to careers in the government or with a defense contractor, making it feel as if your career change was easy.

For most of you, your job search begins with matching your background, training, and experience with the goals and interests of a civilian employer. This can often be difficult.

The job search process can be frustrating and challenging. Some of you may pursue work in industries, communities, and companies that are not aligned with your goals and values. For others of you, your resumes, industries and skills will seemingly align beautifully with a job description, but you receive more rejection letters than interviews.

An effective job search should include much more than just sending resumes and cover letters, filling out online job posts, and pursuing hiring managers at industry meetings. An effective job search means making yourself compelling, relevant and findable to potential employers.

Build Your Personal Brand

The first step in a successful job search is to build your personal brand. Consider how your reputation substantiates what your resume and references speak to. Are you clear about how you want others to perceive you? Being clear and focused about how you want to be perceived dictates the way you will present yourself, network with others, conduct yourself in the job interview and perform on the job.

Create a Game Plan

Your job search should be your full-time job until you land a position. Set a plan, including:

- What kind of work would you like to do?
- Where are those jobs (geography, industries)?
- What companies in those areas are hiring?
- Do they have a military hiring program?

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- Who do you know that works a) in the companies you're targeting or b) in that type of job who could give you mentoring?
- What is the company culture for your ideal employer?
- What do you need to successfully get the attention of hiring managers? For instance, are they active in local community events? Do you know contacts who can connect you? Will they want you to apply online or in person for a job? What do they look for?

When you have your responses gathered, create a game plan. Identify your first steps, next steps, follow up, and alternative strategies to get in front of key hiring managers at companies you want to work for. Use all the tools in your job search tool box – from your personal and military contacts, to a polished resume and cover letter, to your online presence and profiles.

Focus On Social Networking

Building your brand and reputation online is easier today than ever before. Use online social networking sites to let employers and referral sources know who you are and what you are looking for (career-wise).

As you use social networks to build your profile and attractiveness to employers, remember these rules:

1. Nothing you type into a mobile phone, tablet, or computer is private. Anything you post online is public, regardless of privacy settings. Use LinkedIn, a business tool, to promote your experience, passions, and career goals. Remember that project details and confidential information should stay off your profile and out of your comments.
2. Build online profiles on business and professional social networking sites. Recruiters and hiring managers use social networks to find candidates online. Make sure you are findable to them. If they can't find anything about you on a business site like LinkedIn, or even in Google, they might not move forward with you. It doesn't sound fair, but it's true.
3. Project a professional and appropriate image. Start with your profile headshot – make sure it looks like you today and gives the viewer the impression of your personality and the job you desire. If you are an outgoing and friendly person, then smile in your photo. If you are more conservative, then not smiling is appropriate. The photo should look like who you are.
4. Share aspects of your military experience that a civilian recruiter or hiring manager will understand. Avoid using overly technical jargon and military terminology. This can make the civilian recruiter tune out. Instead, relate your experiences and skills to

understandable values. Use civilian language if you are looking for a civilian opportunity.

5. Post regularly. Sending an update to either your LinkedIn or Facebook status or profile, groups, or apps ensures you stay top of mind with your network. Post something relevant every day if you can. Otherwise, posting an update or sharing content every few days at least increases your odds of being top of mind with most of your contacts. Some things to post include: updates on your career, professional interests, or business; links to articles, blogs, news, comments, or ideas; or celebrations about trends, happenings, and topics of interest that relate to your business, industry, and professional circle of influence.
6. Research. If you are focused on finding a civilian job, then you should spend much of your day researching companies, hiring managers, and influencers and posting content in your desired industry and company. Social networks are rich with content, information, insight, opinion, and perspective. Take advantage of the power of the Internet to learn as much as you can about the industry, company, and people you want to meet.

The Choices Can Be Overwhelming

Unfortunately, there is not a manual to advise every service member transitioning to the civilian workforce about landing a great job. Each person's transition is unique and includes different goals, parameters, non-negotiables, and requirements. Perhaps you want to be an entrepreneur and launch your own business. Maybe you will pursue a corporate job, or join a start-up venture or go back to school. Regardless of what you decide, know that you are not alone in feeling overwhelmed by the choices, intimidated by the differences in culture and process and confused by the lack of consistent norms in the civilian sector.

Transitioning from a military to a civilian career is a process, a journey. In the first few months and years after separation or retirement, you will learn a lot, ask questions, lean on others for information and support, and make decisions. Remain calm, focus on your long-term objectives and your reputation goals, keep connected to your support system, and assess opportunities clearly to successfully navigate the job search process.

Developed through the VFW's collaboration with Lida Citroën of the international brand strategy firm LIDA360, this article is part of the VFW's expanding education and transitioning services, resources and [webinars](#) designed to provide service members and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce with an opportunity to learn about personal branding and strategies for navigating the job search process. To learn more about Lida's commitment to the veteran community, [check out her recent TEDX talk](#).

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