



Soldier For Life Sets Transitioning NCOs on Path to Success

By Martha C. Koester

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As the Army draws down, the NCOs at U.S. Army Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Ky., are working to set up every transitioning noncommissioned officer for success in the civilian world. A proper transition for the Soldier will begin with the Soldier Life Cycle initiative, which was implemented Oct. 1, to better prepare him or her for post-Army life by ensuring that he or she has all of the necessary tools, opportunities and counseling, officials said.

“We owe it to our Soldiers, our veterans, for what they have given, that their opportunities for life after active duty are set up for the best success they can possibly have, whether they transition into opportunities for a career, education or as entrepreneurs,” said Sgt. Maj. Anthony Williams, the sergeant major of the Army Transition Division at HRC.

Central to the mission is the Soldier For Life–Transition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Army Career and Alumni Program, or ACAP. The program is part of an initiative Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno launched about two years ago in order to ease transitioning out of the Army and make it more productive.

“It ensures lifelong success for our Soldiers and their families,” Odierno said last year during the program’s launch. “Our goal is for Soldiers who are leaving the military to be career-ready.”

Transition principles will be introduced to Soldiers during their first year in the Army and during certain military career benchmarks. The program will offer counseling, as well as employment and educational workshops.

“It is our responsibility to ensure that transitioning Soldiers have some successful plan in place, so that when they leave, they are transitioning into better opportunities,” Williams said. “Thus far, we are seeing positive results. We are preparing Soldiers for a [successful] post-military life by ensuring that the Soldiers have the tools, resources and employment opportunities, as well as educational [ones].”

Focusing on Soldier Life cycle

The Soldier Life Cycle, which is central to the program, is divided into three phases to better guide NCOs by distributing segments of the Army’s Career Readiness Standards through the span of their careers in the Army. Phase One begins during the Soldier’s first year in the

Army and includes civilian credentialing information on the Soldier's military occupational specialty, or MOS, and an eight-hour financial readiness class. Phase Two, also known as the career phase, occurs over two parts: from one to 10 years of service, and from 10 years of service to transition or retirement. Phase Three deals with the actual transition, and includes training on employability, résumé writing and job hunting.

"The goal of the Soldier Life Cycle is to retain quality [NCOs] in the force and to support them," Williams said. "It is geared toward developing [NCOs'] career skills while introducing them to the many benefits that the Army has to offer. It also prepares [NCOs] to mentor their Soldiers ... throughout the life cycle of the Soldier."

"We help develop Soldiers throughout their careers," Williams said. "Leaders also help Soldiers put together their résumés as their particular careers change, because the résumé of a young specialist is different from the résumé of a staff sergeant."

To comply with career readiness standards, each Soldier must meet and achieve individual transition plan goals, which include registering for Veterans Affairs e-benefits and My HealthVet registration, an MOS crosswalk or gap analysis, and a 12-month post-separation budget.

Weighing options to stay in

Soldiers in transition from active duty also have the opportunity to continue their military careers in an Army Reserve or National Guard capacity. Reserve component career counselors will "lay out options for the

Soldier so that he or she can make an educated decision based on his or her life, and his or her family," said Sgt. Maj. Gregory Jacobs, sergeant major of the Army Reserve Transition Branch at Human Resources Command.

"It's a huge cost savings to the taxpayers if we keep the active component [NCOs] in boots or in the reserve component. So we look at it from that aspect, too — preserving that investment," Jacobs said.

The goal of reserve component career counselors is to engage transitioning Soldiers as far out as possible from their expiration term of service, or ETS, date. That way, counselors can provide as much assistance as possible.

"How can we help a Soldier? If they can help themselves by getting to us early, we will be able to fully show them what is out there in terms of options, opportunities and their benefits with either Army Reserve or National Guard," said Sgt. Maj. Scott P. Spigelmyer, sergeant major of the National Guard Transition Branch at HRC.

Reserve component career counselors work "hand in hand" with the Soldier For Life–Transition Assistance Program on a daily basis, Jacobs said.

"There are things we can show [transitioning NCOs] that the National Guard and Army Reserve can offer them so that they are not without medical insurance," Jacobs said. "You've got a part-time job and you're drawing a paycheck every month by coming to battle assemblies."

"It's probably the best part-time job in the world because they offer you medical [insurance], they offer you a paycheck every month, and they offer you a retirement at the end of your 20 years [of service], if you want it,"



The Soldier For Life–Transition Assistance Program aims to help Soldiers develop career skills for the civilian world as they transition out of the military. Soldiers (above) meet with civilian recruiters at a recent job fair at Fort Huachuca, Ariz. (Photo by Rob Martinez)



Contractors for the Transition Branch at Human Resources Command at Fort Knox, Ky., prepare forms to mail to transitioning Soldiers. (Photo by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

Jacobs said. “There aren’t too many part-time jobs out there that can offer [NCOs] those three things.”

Keeping the ‘best of the best’

As the Army moves to downscale, efforts will still be made to retain Soldiers who are best suited to become future leaders.

“We’re trying to retain the skill set, the knowledge and experience — what they have done over the past three, four, five years and they have deployed two or three times,” Spigelmyer said. “There is a lot of value that both the Army Reserve and the National Guard can take from separating NCOs.”

“Our NCOs who [work as reserve component career counselors and] help young Soldiers transition

out into the civilian world preserve a huge amount of skills,” Jacobs said. “It’s a win-win situation to have these active component Soldiers transition to the Army Reserve or National Guard.”

The Soldier For Life–Transition Assistance Program is geared toward helping Soldiers develop skills through the progression of their Army careers until they transition out of the military.

“We have been getting out, trying to let [NCOs] know what the Army’s transition program has to offer and why it was put into place,” Williams said. “We tell Soldiers, ‘You can go through the process and just be that knot on the log and not grasp the information, or you can really take advantage of the program and learn things that you never thought you could actually have as you transition out the door.’” ■

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