



(U.S. Army photo by Alexandra Shea taken Feb. 18, 2020) Staff Sgt. Humberto Dovalina, with 2nd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, speaks with a local heating and air conditioning company during the Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program Hiring Fair at Fort Jackson Education Center, Feb. 18, 2020.

Your Transition, Your Story

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Too often U.S. service members leave military service without proper information and planning necessary to enter the civilian workforce. Whether it's retirement, Expiration Term of Service (ETS), family, medical, or even disciplinary issues, separation from the military can be an overwhelming task. It takes discipline, experience, planning, and a multitude of other tools learned during military service to take charge of your transition. This article provides tools and recommendations for U.S. Soldiers to smoothly transition into the civilian workforce.

Planning

It is important to research a career field of interest and assess. Do you need more education, certifications, or

training? What is the job market like? Is the career path driven by the economy, is it stable? And is it realistic?

You don't have to ferret out answers to those questions alone. Begin by building a network. Use friends, family, former supervisors, and military buddies. According to Indeed, an online international job site, "Networking enables you to take advantage of personal and business connections, rather than relying solely on your resume. These connections are not only beneficial for you but also for employers, who hire many new employees through networking" (7 Networking Tips, 2020, para. 3).

Another suggestion is to become active in veterans service organizations (VSOs). This community already has experience and resources to help you transition. Use



(U.S. Army photo taken Feb. 19, 2020) The Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program, Career Skills Program installation administrator, Brittny Sutton conducts a CSP class to transitioning Soldiers Feb. 19, 2020, at Fort Shafter, Hawaii.

this network to seek out people who are working in an area of interest and find mentors who can guide you into a seamless transition and new career path.

Preparing

Military applicants might be intimidating to civilian employers. What civilian skills can be translated from Army skills that may “seek, close, and destroy an enemy target?” Sarah Roberts, head of military and veteran programs for LinkedIn said, “specific industries tend to see veterans as not being a good fit, which is likely in part because they don’t understand the skills veterans bring to the table” (Bushatz, 2019, para. 9).

A future civilian employer might not be looking for a 13B (Artilleryman). But an employee who is technologically inclined, able to work in a pressure-filled and constantly changing environment, capable of working within a team environment, understanding standard work, a teacher and mentor to small groups, and is willing to work overtime. Learning how to communicate your experiences in terms a civilian interviewer will understand is crucial. If companies don’t comprehend your value, they’ll hire a civilian candidate who might be less experienced, but communicates their qualifications in terms that can be understood.

Even more important than the verbal communication is the written message conveyed through your resume. The resume gets your foot in the door. In 2018, studies showed that job recruiters only looked at a resume for 7.4 seconds (O’Donnell, 2018). This means that if your resume is too long, too vague, too military, or in the wrong format, you will not get called in for an interview.

Your resume should be concise and one to two pages in length. Only relevant information and skills tailored to the job you’re applying for should be included. Indeed, another large job resource organization, has four tips to creating a great resume:

- Instead of including every job duty for each position you’ve held at every company you’ve been at, consider including two to three bullet points of quantified (where possible) achievements.
- Avoid using filler words like “that,” “the,” “a,” “an,” or “like.”
- Consider removing experiences or information (like details in the education section or first jobs) that may not be relevant to the position you’re applying for.
- Study the job description to get a better idea of what the employer may be looking for in your resume and what potential keywords to include. (How Long Should a Resume Be, 2020, para 4)

If creating a concise resume seems overwhelming, there are plenty of free resources available at career sites such as CareerBuilder, and Indeed. Additionally, use programs designed for military transitions such as the Soldier For Life Transition Assistance Program, National Guard’s Citizen Soldier for Life Program, and other VSOs.

Furthermore, the Army has taught Soldiers tools that can assist in the transition process to civilian life like the *8 Step Training Model*, the *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) process*, the *Operations Process*, and *Troop Leading Procedures*. With slight modifications, these templates can be used as roadmaps for a deliberate and successful transition.

8-Step Training Model

Step 1—Plan the training your transition.

Step 2—Train and certify leaders Is additional education, training, and/or certification required for the path I am interested in?

Step 3—Conduct a reconnaissance research, career and location based.

Step 4—Issue an order for the training transition.

Step 5—Rehearse.

Step 6—Execute.

Step 7—Conduct an after-action review (AAR).

Step 8—Retrain Refine and reapply.

IPB process

Step 1—Define the battlefield career transition environment.

Step 2—Describe the battlefield’s civilian career effects.

Step 3—Evaluate the threat (competing job seekers).

Step 4—Determine threat COAs.

Operations Process

Planning

Preparing

Executing

Continuously assessing

Troop Leading Procedures

Step 1—Receive and analyze the mission *to transition*.

Step 2—Issue a warning order.

Step 3—Make a tentative plan.

Step 4—Initiate movement. *transition preparations*.

Step 5—Conduct reconnaissance (*research*).

Step 6—Complete the plan.

Step 7—Issue the order *Execute the transition*.

Step 8—Supervise and refine.

As you are creating your plan, research is key. Review and understand the value of a professional online networking site like LinkedIn. Read other members' profiles and research what they post. Then create your own profile and communicate your story/skill set.

Be prudent selecting a profile picture. Think professionally because this is the first impression of you to potential employers. The Muse, another large job search organization, states "Take a look around at what the people in your target company, industry sector, or business level are wearing. Match that" (The 31 Best LinkedIn Profile Tips, n.d., para 6). I had my wife take my photo. We hung a dark sheet over a bedroom door for a "professional studio" look.

Continue to research and read job descriptions. Understand the minimum requirements and do a skills assessment. CareerBuilder, Monster, and Indeed are great sites to research careers of interest and assist in identifying

possible skill gaps. Then develop a plan to overcome those deficiencies through additional education, professional certifications, or memberships.

Executing

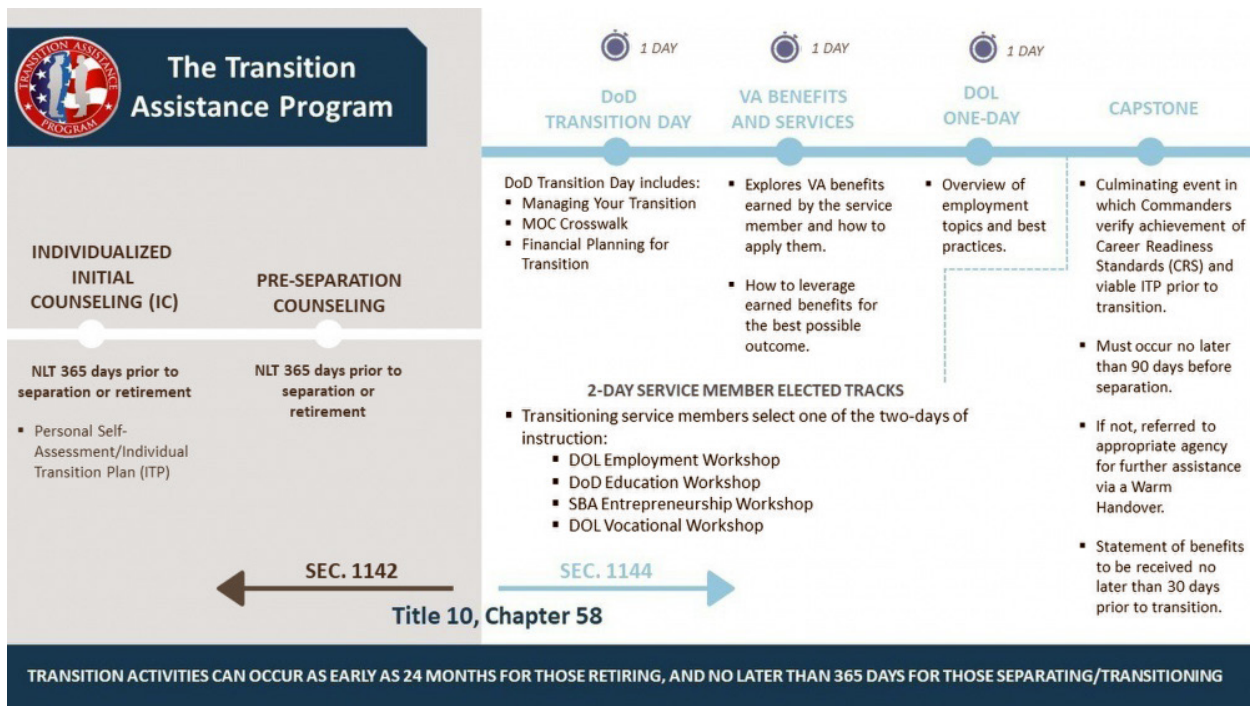
Throughout the application process, be **confident**. Do not take yourself out of consideration just because you don't meet all the qualifications. People rarely meet all the qualifications and many companies will train their employees. Julia Malacoff at Glassdoor said, "more than ever, employers are looking for potential rather than exact match, which means there are jobs that you may seem 'underqualified' for that you absolutely should take the time to apply for" (2017, para. 1).

Attend as many career fairs as possible, rehearse selling your story and get your resume circulated. Additionally, if you are planning to utilize placement agencies or 'headhunters', avoid agencies that require applicant payment upfront. Instead, use firms that are paid upon your placement (Vulcan, n.d.).

There are several national organizations that cater to military transitions such as USAA and Veterati (Transition Resources, n.d.). I have worked with coworkers who have chosen this route, and hired a couple team members from these pools as a manager. The strength in these targeted recruiters is their preparation of candidates.



(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Maria Henderson taken Nov. 17, 2018) Soldiers attend a Paychecks for Patriots network hiring event in Florida, Nov. 17, 2018.



The DoD Transition Assistance Program timeline outlines the changes in requirements for transitioning as a result of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, effective Oct. 1, 2019. (Courtesy graphic from The DoD Transition Assistance Program)

Assessing

As you continue your transition process, continue to visit Step 7—Conduct an after-action review (AAR) and Step 8—~~Retrain~~ *Refine and reapply*. Review what is working and what obstacles you are encountering in your plan. The Army has taught you to be adaptive. Trust in your training and trust in your preparation.

Conclusion

You must become your own motivation. No one is going to spoon-feed you daily activities or tell you how to pack your rucksack. Your transition and success is dependent upon your discipline, planning, research, and ownership. Find your story and convince the employer you are who they've been looking for. ■

My Story

I voluntarily transitioned from active duty as a staff sergeant after 10 years into the civilian sector and National Guard service. During my transition, I assumed that my military occupational specialty as a 92Y (Unit Supply Specialist) would open direct access to civilian logistics management roles. I quickly realized my experience and veteran status was not enough. A bachelor's degree was needed to open the doors I wanted to go through.

After finishing three quarters of my degree plan, I was called for an interview from a major defense contractor who was working the post 9/11 airport security transition from civilian screeners to federalized Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screeners. Based on my online profile that highlighted my logistics experience, military leadership skills, and growing education, I was hired as a logistics manager

for one of the busiest airports in the country.

This job concluded after six months and I returned to full-time studies. Six months later, I was again approached by a major engineering, procurement, and construction company that had a large-scale Army contingency contract. They liked my background, experience, and continued education. I was offered a position as an operations specialist in the operations cell that supported contractors and customers overseas.

After three years of advancements, I interviewed for a new position within the manufacturing group of the parent company as a production group leader. I didn't have any experience in manufacturing, however I did have experience in leading people, working to a mission, standard operating procedures, and enforcing standards and discipline thanks to my time as a non-commissioned officer in the Army. The hiring manager

took a chance on me and I stayed with the organization and progressed for another seven years. My culminating role was a plant and project lead for the construction of a new \$35,000,000 manufacturing facility.

But after 10 successful years, I was unfortunately selected for a reduction in force due to the local economics of oil and gas. But with the experience gained over the years, I was able to quickly transition into a machine shop manager with a new employer. Unfortunately, four months later, and due to variables outside my control, I found myself unemployed twice in six months.

For this reason, it is important to continually return to your previous planning and self-assessments. Just because you have a good job and comfortable life do not become complacent. Periodically return to Step 7—Conduct an after-action review (AAR) and Step 8—*Retrain Refine and reapply*. Review where you are and what is working and what new obstacles

are emerging through your experience and maturity. By continuously refining your resume, you will always be ready for an opportunity that may unexpectedly arise. Or you'll be ready to readjust if something happens and you're out of a job.

I took this second unemployment phase as an opportunity to get my master's degree. During this time, I continued to work on my resume, interview skills, confidence, and marketability. A year and a half later with a newly minted master's degree I found myself hired by the fourth largest community college in the country as director and soon to be dean of advanced manufacturing.

My success in recovering from setbacks is continuous learning and preparation. The civilian workforce is a competition, between your peers, the recruiter/interviewer, and you against the clock.

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Command Sgt. Maj. Frederick Heard has 29 combined years of service and is currently serving as the brigade command sergeant major of the 71st Expeditionary Military Intelligence Brigade, Texas Army National Guard.

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