Your Job Search Journey: Where to Begin

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I wish I could tell you there was a magic formula for finding a meaningful job after you leave the military. There isn't. Every person's job search process looks and feels different, and there is no secret you're missing in making the transition.

Leaving the military to work in the private sector might look familiar – you were a civilian before you joined the military, right? – but much of it will feel different.

What can you control?

Navigating the job search starts by understanding what you can – and can't – control. You can control your attitude, how you present yourself, the tools you use, and the people you build relationships with. You cannot control other people – their motivations, biases, misperceptions and actions. Knowing this is important, because it's easy to become frustrated with hiring managers and recruiters when you feel you have done everything right but don't get an interview for the job. There are factors outside your control.

How to successfully navigate the job search

The day you decide to turn in your separation papers is the day you begin your job search. Here are the steps I recommend you pay attention to:

1. Inventory what you have to work with

- How is your reputation? Your reputation (or personal brand) clearly communicates your value to a potential employer. Employers hire people they find skilled, compelling and relatable. Your job is to make it easy for the hiring manager to see how/where and why you fit into their organization by clearly outlining how you can add value.
- What kind of work do you want to do? Think about what you are qualified to do AND what you are passionate about. Just because you know how to do network engineering doesn't mean you want to do that as a career.
- Identify the skills, training and experience you want to take into the civilian workplace.

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Be sure you translate your military skills into a language that hiring managers can understand.

2. Build your network

- Your network will support, endorse, refer, and inform you. Building a strong network is critical to a successful civilian career.
- Compile a list of who you should know and how you will meet them.
- Identify the groups or associations you should join (in your community or industry).
- Prepare your elevator pitch – how you will answer the question "What do you do?"

3. Create your marketing assets

- Build your LinkedIn profile. Recruiters, hiring managers, and people who can help you find your next job are all on LinkedIn.
- Update or prepare your resume. Add your military experiences and accomplishments, and make sure your resume reflects your values and passions. Speak to the civilian hiring manager in their language by translating your experiences for them.
- Prepare business cards with your name, email, cell phone and short description of what you are looking for. For example, "Ben Smith, USMC (Ret.), Dedicated IT Network Administrator" or "Susan Jones, USN (Ret.) Writer Who Turns Ideas into Narrative."
- Assemble a job search wardrobe. Consider whether you'll be applying for a job where you need a suit or will you dress more casually.

4. Next, do some homework

Research the companies you want to work for and learn:

- What are their priorities?
- Do they hire veterans?
- Is the company growing and expanding?
- Are they hiring right now?

Put yourself out there:

Once you have assembled your job search assets and tools, start talking to people about what you need and what you're looking for. You will feel vulnerable, but remember that asking for help is a routine part of the civilian job search. Others expect that you will. You are not showing weakness by putting yourself out there.

When the transition gets frustrating, remind yourself that this is a step in a process. Not everyone lands an ideal job the day they take off the uniform. For some, the process of finding a meaningful post-military career is long and arduous. If you can regroup and

refocus in times of frustration, you can tap into the resiliency you were trained to have during your career in the military.

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.

By Lida Citroën, CEO, LIDA360