

MILITARY TO CIVILIAN CAREER CHANGE STRATEGIES

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If you are planning to use your military career experiences and skills to match up with a proper civilian position, you need to know some of basic career change strategies. First, you may think you're prepared for this move but you probably don't realize the extent of the change or what it takes to do it properly.

What complicates a shift from military to civilian careers? "I really had no idea that making this move would stress out my family so much," says David Prenson, a military officer who served eight years in various positions worldwide with the United States Army. "I really thought my two young sons and my wife would just simply be relieved that I was not going away anymore. Although they were thankful for my safety in not having to serve it also worried my wife a lot because I was not mentally prepared to make the switch." Career changes like this can stress a family because these moves often involve physical moves, loss of support network, income reduction (for retiring and non-retiring individuals) and many other issues.

Jane Condro, a drilling four-year reservist, was called to active duty for one year and got her job back with the same company. "My challenge was this – I came back and I just wanted to make another move after Iraq. As a small business my company could not provide me the growth I wanted. Although I was thankful to get my former job back, I felt I wanted to move on, make more money." Sergeant Condro states: "I came back a changed person, actually more confident in myself. I just realized that you have to go for what you want now because you aren't promised another day really. Even though I love and still love the military and supporting our country there were no services for someone who was wanting to change careers." With life and death experiences so present in her mind, Sergeant Condro was stuck. Without additional specific proven additional steps and coaching she wouldn't have made a good transition and been frustrated.

Business owners know how difficult it is to serve for a year or more on active duty and come back. "I really couldn't keep my business going when I was away," says Robert Calliendre. "I had a services company, sold items via the web and had a small retail operation but I couldn't ask my employees to sell for me. The business just couldn't handle my being away. So when I came back I had to really reinvent myself, switch careers and work for someone."

The bottom line is that any military to civilian career transitions, whether you are active, reserve o

r guard can be difficult. How do you write down and document what you have done and its value to a potential employer or target organization? What skills are transferable from your new experiences or your years of experiences in the military? Have you ever written down and understood how valuable your supervisory, training or technical skills are to employers? Do you specifically know the companies and individuals to network with now or during your transition phases? Can they clearly understand your value to them from your resume and cover letter?

Some of key difficulties military people have in marketing themselves include:

- Properly translating military occupational specialties to fit the requirements of civilian occupations; it takes a great deal of thought to demilitarize the language while not trying to make your military background sound like you had a civilian career. It's a balance and it's tough to strike the right balance on resumes and during interviews.
- Lack of understanding of the interview and hiring process for civilian or public sector (local, state, federal) hiring processes.
- Use of improper resume styles and ineffectively representing content to articulate a vast amount of data to a potential employers
- Not understanding that with 8000+ military occupational specialties (MOS) and 40,000+ civilian sector occupational codes and titles, there is a vast amount of data for anybody to edit and tighten for potential civilian or public sector jobs.
- Not rehearsing and understanding the basics of the most current methods in behavioral or general interviewing processes.

- Most military individuals, including active duty and reserve members, invest massive amounts of time planning missions and collaborating with others regarding key military duties. They don't do it when it comes to planning ahead for their career or specific career options.

If you are in the military in any capacity, consider this advice. Realize that your skills have both direct and transferable value to public and private sector employers. Thank you for serving our country but you need to be urged to take time, effort and invest in yourself for your future career. Even if you never left the military, never worked outside of the military you know this—military careers must be prepared for and planned too. So put effort in now to handle the many transitions and situations that may occur during this time. In this volatile time for military families you owe to yourself and your family to anticipate and plan for change in your career life.

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In 2004, Mr. O'Connor became the first private practice Certified Federal Job Search Trainer (CFJST) in North Carolina. He is also a Certified Electronic Career Coach (CECC). With a unique fiction writing pedigree with fiction publications as well, he obtained a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Bowling Green State University. With over 14 years experience in professional career transition, resume writing and career coaching, O'Connor applies his considerable job market expertise to career transitioners nationally.

He has been featured recently (May 2003 and May 2004 feature) in the Raleigh News & Observer, Resume Writers Digest, The Gladiator, Execunet, Career Masters Institute Monthly Newsletter, Monster Career News and other national publications such as JIST. Additionally his diversified experience includes serving as a college professor.