



Changing Ranks: Working As A Civilian

A job search guide for veterans

With over 11 million veterans in today’s workplace (U.S. Census) and over 540 companies offering “veteran-friendly” hiring practices (military.com), resources for veterans looking to transition to civilian work are more robust than ever before. If you’re an ex-military professional looking to land your next job and start a new civilian career, square away your job search with battle-tested tactics.

Your Mission: create an action plan.

First, decide on your next step. Pinpoint three to five types of jobs in the civilian sector that interest you. Think about your prior experience and brainstorm tasks you would enjoy in your next career, and use your school’s career center to find additional career information. Common career paths for vets include: government administration; defense; higher education; technology; and operations. However, don’t feel limited to what is considered typical!

ID your skills.

Translating prior skills is one of the main challenges that veterans face to overcoming hiring obstacles. Identify your “transferable skills”—skills that translate from one job/career to the next. Typical transferable skills from a military career include leadership, management, operations, and technical knowledge. Start by listing your tasks and experiences. For example, did you keep record logs and present these records to your supervisor? If so, highlight your “data entry and presentation skills.” And don’t forget those intangible skills—three top reasons why employers hire vets are for their leadership, character, and discipline—so highlight these assets! When writing your résumé, give more weight to the skills and qualifications needed for your future career. For more on translating your military experience to the civilian sector, listen to CCN’s podcast “Transferable Skills: Military Assets.”

Talk the talk.

Remove all typical military language from your résumé and describe your skills in a way that a layperson would understand. Stay away from military jargon, abbreviations, and acronyms.

Explain your services, awards, and accomplishments in a way that a civilian can relate. Research Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) translators online for assistance.

Walk the walk.

Stay connected with military colleagues for career opportunities. Ask fellow veterans for guidance on how *they* made the transition to the civilian world and for tips on résumés and cover letters. Use social networking sites to connect with other professionals you served with, and to get ideas on how to position your military skills. Plus, these colleagues can provide recommendations when a job offer comes along. However, don’t limit yourself to veterans—connect with civilian friends who work in the field you in which you are interested.

Government resources and grants.

Many resources are available through local and government organizations to help with a veteran’s job search. Check out groups like Hire a Hero or your local VA. Ample training options exist for transitioning vets, including The Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Going back to school can be a good plan of action for those considering a career transition. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, over 1 million veterans received student benefits in 2011 for a total of \$10.9 billion for the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. In addition to your school’s career center, groups like the Student Veterans of America provide student veterans with information on tuition and career and networking opportunities. And, through resources such as the the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act and the Returning Heroes Tax Credit, companies are given credits for hiring veterans. New resources become available every year, so check with your school career office for the most up-to-date information.



i n a nutshell:

The transition from military to civilian life is similar to any other change of career. For high speed, low drag:

- **Learn the language and culture of the new industry**
- **Establish a new professional network, not just with vets**
- **Highlight your transferable skills and leadership qualities;**
- **Use your career center, social media, government, and military-friendly job board resources for leads**
- **Seek guidance from fellow vets and civilian friends in the field; they can back you up**

Veterans, use the values, work ethic, and professionalism acquired during your service. You’ll stand tall as a very hireable candidate, and remain a valuable asset in your new career!