



# VETERAN CAREER GUIDE



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Searching for a job as a veteran presents unique challenges and opportunities. Rather than shying away from veteran status, vets should look to highlight the [many coveted qualities](#) they bring to the table.

A key difference between military recruiting and civilian hiring is the variability in hiring needs. Civilian hiring will fluctuate based on contract awards, the economy, and a variety of other factors. For this reason just having a great resume (while important) is not the only thing necessary to help you land a job. Veterans need to brush up on an entire host of skills as they begin their job search, and be prepared to invest some serious time.

This career guide includes a round-up of some of the most important job search advice for vets, including tips on crafting a transition timeline, mapping your career goals, building a better resume, interviewing, and networking.

# Military Transition Timeline: When To Do What

You can give your post-military career a big head start by planning early. If you're retiring after a career in the military five years out isn't too soon to begin contemplating next steps. You won't want to begin applying for jobs just yet, but you may want to look into graduate degree programs, civilian certifications or other ways to use your GI Bill benefits. It's also a good idea to begin joining relevant industry associations and attending networking events.

For service members who have spent a term, rather than a career in the military, one year out is the right time to begin planning.

## By six months out from separation you should have:

- Visited the transition office and attended the required pre-separation briefing, completing the [DD 2648](#) or DD 2648-1, Pre-separation Counseling Checklist. (To access detailed information online, visit [TurboTap](#).)
- Taken advantage of the [Transition GPS](#), Veterans Affairs (VA) and/or Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) workshops and other career counseling services, even if you plan to go to college full time.
- A good understanding of your potential VA benefits, entitlements and periods of eligibility. You can always refresh your memory about benefits such as compensation, pension, education, home loan, vocational rehabilitation, and life insurance online at the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).
- Given serious thought to what you want to do when you get out. Will you be taking some time off to get used to being a civilian again? Will you want to or have to go immediately into a new job? Are you going to college using your GI Bill?



**When you find yourself at the six months from being a civilian mark, make sure you take care of these points:**

- Begin assessing your marketable skills and [researching the job market](#). Figure out what you want to do, where you want to do it and how much of a salary you will need.
- Understand exactly what happens to your security clearance after you leave the military. Your personnel security office can give you the answers you need.
- [Network](#) your little heart out and begin to apply for concrete jobs when you are about three months from being able to begin work. If you're considering continuing work for the government as a civil servant, apply for those positions even sooner. Go back to the transition assistance office and take advantage of one-one-one career counseling assistance.
- Get copies of your medical and dental records. Schedule appointments now while you aren't paying for them.
- If you live on a military installation, contact the housing office for detailed clearing information.
- Visit the finance office to determine what, if any, separation pay you may be entitled to upon your separation.
- Update your will and power-of-attorney and/or obtain free legal advice through the legal office.
- Line up your transitional health care plan.
- Review your draft DD 214 worksheet at the transition office. Make sure it is letter perfect. You may need it throughout your life for various reasons, like if you want to buy a house using a VA home loan or get a job with the Federal government.
- Inquire about potential unemployment benefits. For more information, visit the Department of Labor's [State Contacts for UI Tax Information and Assistance](#).
- Upgrade your professional wardrobe to one that is more in line with your target industry.



It seems like a lot to accomplish, but that's why careful advanced planning will help. Take advantage of career counselors through the military's new Transition GPS program. But don't depend only on a career counselor — you're still ultimately responsible for your post-military success.

# Mapping the Terrain: Career Goals

One of the biggest struggles for vets can be taking a career in the military and a jack-of-all trades attitude and translating it into a specific career path. Your military transition program will probably walk you through Briggs Myers and other personality testing, but in addition to looking at the big picture it's important to drill down into the nitty gritty of establishing a specific career goal.

Our best piece of advice? Focus on your strengths, not your weaknesses. Determine specific, indispensable skill sets for the industry you'd like to pursue and use GI Bill benefits to build up in those areas, rather than focusing on improving weak areas. Consider the work you did in the military, but don't let that limit you.

Next, forget the five year plan, and focus on the next stage in your career. Few careers today go through a predictable year-by-year arc (federal employment is the main exception). Think about what you'd like to be doing when you retire from a civilian job, or where the professionals you most admire are in their career, and consider the steps it will take to get there, including professional development, training or relocation.

## What they're looking for:

If you've established clear career goals, it will be easier to research and apply for positions. As a veteran, you may still need to look for equivalencies, however. Often civilian training or terms have military counterparts but don't expect a hiring manager to know that. Keep in mind that many positions will also waive degrees or other required elements for candidates with more experience or other coveted skills. When in doubt, don't hesitate to reach out to a hiring manager and sell your case for how your military experience gives you the qualifications necessary to succeed.

## Keeping tabs on your security clearance.

Don't underestimate the value of your security clearance. Know the date of your last reinvestigation and keep tabs on the details you'll need for the next, such as references and work history. [Self-report](#) issues that may come up between investigations and don't [do anything dumb](#) that would jeopardize your security clearance and your career.

Building a career plan doesn't need to be an intense process. It can be as simple as a bulleted list of workplace accomplishments, education and training goals, and jobs that lead you to your dream career. Do yourself a favor and speak with a mentor, or transition counselor to get feedback. Don't get so caught up getting a job today, that you neglect to plan for your career tomorrow.

### Keep it COOL:

Both the Navy and Army have Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) programs for service members. The COOL sites will inform you of relevant civilian credentials by military MOS and in many cases offer opportunities to complete necessary training and certifications online.

*"If you have a clearance, it is always good to know when it was granted and when it expires. Do your homework and avoid answering "I don't know" to the clearance question. Be proud that you possess a clearance and learn all there is to know about the clearance you currently have."*

—Anne-Marie Moschera  
[Pragmatics, Inc.](#)



# Government Employee or Contractor?

Some service members leave the military with a strong preference for either government or contracting work. Others don't care at all. Which you choose may have less to do about preference and more about pragmatics — who happens to be hiring when you happen to be looking. In an economic downturn many see government work as more stable, although that's not necessarily the case. When major cuts happen government employees are impacted along with contractors, especially recent hires and those still in probationary periods.

Despite the risk of contractors moving into government positions, 59 percent of contractors prefer contractor status, according to a [2011 survey by ClearanceJobs.com](#). Only six percent of those same respondents said they'd consider accepting a government position, but 54 percent said "maybe." In contrast, 27 percent of government employees reported they were considering switching to an opportunity as a government contractor.

For current contractors salary and compensation represent the top reasons for preferring contracting. Cleared contractors earned, on average, approximately \$15,000 more than their counterparts in the civil service, according to the [2012 ClearanceJobs Compensation Survey](#).

Surprisingly, benefits — long considered a highlight of civil service — ranked second, with several respondents specifically noting the increased availability of personal days and the number to work overtime — and be compensated for it.



Government employees, on the other hand, have less workplace flexibility, and typically more requirements for things like overtime approval or requesting days off. [Time-to-hire](#) can often be a major challenge for new government employees, as well. OPM reports that it took, on average, 105 days to hire for a new position. In contrast, cleared professionals typically face a much easier employment process with government contracting firms.

Contracting work isn't without its downside, however, and several contractors noted feeling like "[second class citizens](#)" in their government assignments. Contractors also noted that despite doing the same work, they're frequently treated differently, with higher standards and in some cases lack of access to resources, including things as simple as an office email address. For service members used to being a part of a cohesive team and with a mission-oriented attitude, government employment may seem like the choice with a more direct allegiance to Uncle Sam.

Civil servants participating in the ClearanceJobs survey noted that job security was the number one perk of government employment, with easier upward mobility cited as the second highest perk. Government promotions, while slower, do lay out a predictable track for employees to follow.

The moral of the story is — personality and preference are often at the heart of contract vs. civil service debate, so most transitioning vets would do well to apply to both government and contracting positions, and then decide which job is the best fit.

#### In-demand occupations in federal government (via the Department of Labor)

- Information security
- Law enforcement
- Scientific research
- Financial services
- Registered nurses, physicians, and surgeons
- Computer and information research scientists

# Civilian Resumes

A civilian resume is NOT like an officer evaluation record. If you've never written a civilian resume, it will likely be one of the hardest tasks you'll tackle in your military transition. Fortunately, there are a number of resources available. Take advantage of your Transition GPS advisor and get as many people as possible to review your resume.

## Create a resume that reflects the career you want, not the career you've had.

What this means is that in a split second scan of your resume, a recruiter or hiring manager should know what career you're looking for. Simply codifying your military experience into a bulleted list and putting it on paper will not get you a job. And don't make the rookie mistake of listing an objective statement that outlines how you want the job in question, then follow it with a resume that lacks direction or proof that you have the required skills.

## Take credit.

We understand the military operates as a team, but your fellow service members won't be there in the job interview, and they shouldn't be all over your resume either. Use active language to show accomplishments and don't be modest in highlighting your skills.

## Use keywords.

Before you write your resume, review the position descriptions for several jobs you're interested in applying for. Take notes of which words or phrases reoccur within those position descriptions and make sure they appear in your resume. This is a great opportunity to ensure you're translating your military skills into civilian terms — you may have the same skillset listed but be referring to it in military speak. Don't.

## Related links:

- [Bullet Proof Your Defense Industry Resume](#)
- [Do You Need to Translate Your Military Skills?](#)



*“Never inflate your resume; a recruiter can usually tell when something isn't right. Being up front and honest from the beginning will lead to better rapport and unforeseen opportunities down the road. Integrity is everything.”*

—David Braun  
[Intecon](#)



## How to Highlight Your Security-Cleared Skills on Your Resume Without Revealing Classified Information:

If you're a security-cleared professional, searching for a job presents unique opportunities, and challenges. It's important to clearly articulate your skills, but at the same time, protect national security secrets and classified information. If you make the mistake of including classified or sensitive information, you can be sure your resume will go to the bottom of the pile, or even put you and the person who receives it in a heap of trouble.

**Here's a rundown of some of the dos, and don'ts, of ensuring your resume isn't revealing classified information.**

1. It's perfectly okay to specify that you have a clearance, as well as clearance type. It's also okay to list polygraph information and dates on your resume, according to intelligence agency resume guidelines, including those provided by the [National Security Agency](#). (The [Department of Labor](#) even encourages individuals to list their security clearance on their resume).
2. When it comes to offices you worked in, be sure that you're allowed to list specific locations or facility names — some locations, including the sites of signals intelligence operations or military facilities abroad — may be considered classified, and should not be listed on a resume. In those instances, you will generally need to list a headquarters office location.
3. Project names may also be classified. In these cases it may be possible to describe the type of work you were doing using unclassified descriptions. Don't assume a project, military location or other details are unclassified or okay to use just because you can find similar information or details online, or through open source channels. Classified or sensitive information is leaked online every day — you don't need to confirm it by including it on your resume.
4. Speaking about your coworkers, supervisor and office size may also be classified, as well as office budgets. While getting specific is important, when it comes to an intelligence community or defense industry resume there may be times when you'll need to be vague.

Focus on skills, software or hardware proficiencies or certifications, to fill in gaps where you're unable to discuss projects. Highlight language skills, overseas experience, and education, as well.

When in doubt, be cautious — it's not worth the risk to include information that may jeopardize national security. Consider having your human resources department review your resume, if feasible. And always be hesitant to post your resume or clearance information on any forum that isn't secure, vetted, and password protected. Even if the details you include on your resume aren't classified, they may open you up to spear phishing and data mining operations, so be cautious in what you post online and only share your resume on a secure site such as [ClearanceJobs.com](#).

# Military-to-Civilian Interviews



Interviews are a critical stage in the job search process. Landing an interview means you've passed an initial applicant screening and are seen as a possible fit for the company or position. This is the time to let your personality, and your skills shine.

## Recon the target.

Interview preparation is key. You'll need to research both the company, and the specific position you're applying for. You should have an understanding of the mission of the business you're interviewing with, some of their biggest customers or industry partners, and the values they appreciate. The good news is you can find most of this information on the company website, but don't hesitate to contact someone within the company if you know them.

Let them know you're coming in for an interview and ask them for any tips or relevant information.

Be prepared for the 'typical' interview questions, including what salary you're anticipating and where you see yourself in five years. [Salary questions](#) are probably the one time where it's okay to meet a question with a question — 'what's the salary range you were expecting for this position?' But you should still have a reasonable figure in mind, so you know what the position would net in the open market.

## Do a mock interview.

Mock interviews may sound silly but it's a great idea to run through a list of potential questions prior to the interview. Ideally, you'll enlist a relative or friend to play the role of interviewer, but if you can't, simply sit in front of a mirror and go over a few responses out loud. The point is not to memorize specific phrases but to simply get used to the interview format and be prepared for curveballs. A friend or mirror will help alert you to any 'deer-in-the-headlights' looks you might get with a tough question or when nerves set in.

Use your research notes to jot down questions you're expecting, as well as questions you'd like to ask the employer.

*“Share your enthusiasm when interviewing! Having a “can do” or positive attitude is one of the soft skills that employers desire most.”*

—*Maria Morrone*  
[COMSO](#)

### **Attitude is everything.**

While you'd like to think the interview will be focused on skills, a number of hiring managers say they're looking for a personality fit with the company. This means you are being judged on your personality and attitude, so you'll want to stay positive even when questioning gets tough. Direct, concise answers may have been your friend in the military but in the civilian hiring world you'll need to elaborate on your responses, providing examples to go along with your answers. Avoid responding with just yes or no. Just like your resume, you'll want to take credit for your work and avoid referring to yourself as a part of a team. While that's appropriate in questions related to your ability to work with others, as a general rule recruiters want to know what you accomplished.

### **Act interested.**

An interview is a two-way street. A chance for the company to get to know you and see if you're a good fit, and a chance for you to see if you'd enjoy the company and position. One of the best ways to demonstrate you're interested is by taking the time to research one or two good questions to ask during the interview. Questions better than, 'So, do you like working here?' Think through the position description and any gaps in the information you've been given that you think would be key to doing well at the job. Ask about the management structure of the company, especially if you'll be working on-site as a contractor with a supervisor who may be in another location. Well-researched questions cue the interviewer that you're interested in the job and know how to prepare. Finally, if during the interview you realize you are absolutely not going to be a good fit for this position — either you don't have the required skills or the kind of work is completely different than you'd expected — tell the recruiter. They'll be more open to considering you for another position if you're honest up front and don't waste their time.

### **Related links:**

- [Military-to-Civilian Interview Tips](#)
- [Personal Marketing: Guidelines for Interviewing](#)
- [Phone Interview Tips: Ace Your Phone Interview](#)



# Networking for Veterans

Ever tried finding your soul mate in a crowded bar? Sometimes where you look matters — including where you look for connections to help you land your next job or career advancement. Networking helps you land a job and keeps you relevant as you consider ways to advance in your career after you're hired. You should never stop networking, but you'll want to use your time well — not all networking events are created equally.



**Here are some of the best opportunities for veterans:**

- 1. Tradeshows and conferences.** But don't just hand out your resume to every vendor — tradeshows are not career fairs. Have business cards printed and keep a couple of copies of your resume in your briefcase, just in case someone asks for one. Take advantage of professional development opportunities and try to network with individuals attending who are with companies you're interested in. Use the tradeshow or conference as an opportunity to make a connection, and then follow-up with a request for coffee later on.
- 2. Industry associations.** But get as niche as possible. Every service branch and practically every military specialty has an alumni association or group — join the ones for your arena and let them know you're looking for work. This is an area where it's great to get involved early — you can begin joining relevant associations while still in the military and then ramp up your participation after you leave service. Make it clear you're transitioning out of service soon, and what your timeline is. Veterans love to help their own so the peer network of industry associations can be great. Also, don't neglect university alumni associations and other non-military groups.
- 3. Online talent communities.** By now you know just throwing your resume up online isn't going to get you a job. But you can [network with recruiters online](#), so take advantage of the opportunity, especially if you're willing to relocate. Beware of using popular social networking sites for your career networking, however. While social media is a great way to stay in touch with friends, it's not a secure place for your personal data or career details.

Join the [Cleared Network](#) on ClearanceJobs.com to participate in safe, secure career networking including connecting with companies and recruiters, building a profile and taking advantage of useful career apps. If you're not taking advantage of [Cleared Network Groups](#), then you're missing out on one of the best features the Cleared Network has to offer. Whatever your region, specialty or clearance level, there's likely a Cleared Network Group for you. These niche communities within the Cleared Network offer targeted news postings, recruiter connections and job listings — don't miss out.

## Related links:

- [Intelligence Community Networking: 10 Tips for Networking on the Inside](#)
- [Career Networking at a Defense Industry Expo or Tradeshow](#)
- [Top Spots for Vets to Make Career Connections](#)

# Special Section: Military Transition for Millennials

While the number of unemployed veterans from the Gulf War II Era (those having served in Iraq and Afghanistan) continues to fall, at 8.9 percent it remains higher than the rate for veterans at large. The good news for young vets is that thanks to several years of dropping figures, their unemployment rate is actually lower than the 12 percent unemployment rate for all people ages 18–29. Millennials have been hit hard by the current recession, with more than half of college graduates today unemployed or underemployed.

A key advantage for young vets is the career experience they've obtained in the military. Unlike many recent graduates veterans can walk into an interview with proven leadership credentials and a host of examples of overcoming adversity and getting a job done. Despite their advantage over their non-veteran peers, millennials may still face obstacles in convincing their baby boomer or Gen X hiring managers that their unique skills are the right fit for the workplace. Here are a few tips for capitalizing on those unique traits in order to land a job.

## **Build your personal brand.**

While many people shudder at the notion of having a personal brand, if you're a millennial you likely have one whether you like it or not. Pew Research Center found that one-fifth of millennials have posted videos of themselves online. Three quarters have a profile on Facebook or another social networking site. You can almost guarantee you're being 'Googled' as a part of an initial applicant screening, and you'd do well to know what your potential bosses are able to find about you online. [Clean up your digital dirt](#) and keep your personal networks and your career networking separate. Use your innate marketing skills to your advantage, however. Injecting personality into your job search is often a good thing.





### Embrace your technical savvy.

The government and defense industry are currently struggling with technical issues from BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) to big data — millennials have an effortless attitude toward technology that is coveted in many workplaces. Consider listing technical skills, from basic HTML to programming, somewhere on your resume. Focus on actual skills — ability to Facebook or blog is not going to cut it. Some hiring managers may see technology as a hindrance, so if it's something you value provide an example of how you used a technical solution (from an iPhone app to an enterprise technology) to solve a problem in the military.

*“Ringback tones are popular but sometimes they can be inappropriate. The song you pick may leave a bad first impression.”*

—Andrea Pineda

[\*Delta Resources, Inc.\*](#)

### Never stop networking.

Unfortunately, the phrase ‘last hired, first fired’ has been a reality for many millennials. In an uncertain economy you may find yourself on the job for just a few months and then unemployed due to downsizing or a cancelled contract. While having a negative ‘I’m next’ attitude toward layoffs is not a good idea it is a good idea to keep your career network active, even if you’re happily employed. Maintain a profile on career networking sites such as ClearanceJobs.com’s Cleared Network and keep current on industry news and trends.

Even if you were only on the job for a few months, it’s likely better to list it on your resume than leave a gap. Leaving a position due to downsizing or layoffs is not considered a red flag or issue. When it comes to listing short-term jobs, however, try to list specific accomplishments from the time on the job, no matter how brief, not just ‘time in desk.’



# Post-Military Employment Restrictions

As you transition out of service, you will be required to complete a Preseparation Counseling Checklist. At that point, you should be briefed on these employment restrictions.

## Here are the basics, in layman terms.

- If you were an active duty military officer, you can't represent someone else to the U.S. Government (i.e. an employer who hires you) regarding particular matters that you worked on while you were in the military. This applies to you, well, forever, unless you served in the enlisted ranks in which case this doesn't apply at all. *What it means:* you can't jump straight out of uniform and into a suit and do the same job as a government contractor, most likely. It may seem unfair, but it's similar to rules banning federal government civilians from doing the same, and it's why federal government contractors may be required to [disclose the former government workers they hire](#).
- Former military officers also have a two-year ban from being able to represent someone else (i.e. an employer who hires you) regarding particular matters that you didn't work on but that were pending under your responsibility during your last year of Government service.
- For one-year after leaving the military, former military officers are prohibited from aiding, advising or representing someone else (i.e. an employer who hires you) regarding trade or treaty negotiations that you worked on during your last year in uniform.
- After you leave the military, former officers can't accept compensation for representational services, which were provided by anyone while you wore the uniform.
- If you are a military retiree or a reservist, officer or enlisted, you are not allowed to receive pay from foreign governments without Congressional authorization. This can include receipt of pay from a U.S. contractor or sub-contractor for providing services to a foreign government.
- The DoD wants to avoid the appearance of favoritism. To that end, military retirees have, in the past, been prevented from being appointed to a civil service position within the first six months after retirement. This has included appointments to non-appropriated fund positions as well. The restriction has been temporarily waived but that waiver may not be permanent.
- Those who served as officers in the military may not hold a "civil office" with a state or local government while still on active duty to include terminal leave.
- If you are on terminal leave and accept a civilian position with the U.S. Government, you are permitted to draw your military pay and your new job civilian pay until your terminal leave ends.
- Military officers on terminal leave may begin working with a defense contractor but only in a "behind the scenes" capacity at the contractor's office or away from the Government workplace.
- Employment restrictions, just like any other provided guidelines, can be open to interpretation. If you have any questions or concerns, consult with a military staff judge advocate officer.

**While there's a lot you can't take with you, there's so much more you can.  
Keep these thoughts in mind when applying for your next position:**

- Your security clearance. One of the biggest employment perks out there, your security clearance can be the ticket to landing your next job. Try to find a job that requires the high-level of clearance you have. Keep [tabs on your clearance status](#) and be sure to find out when your last reinvestigation was before you separate from service.
- Your veteran's preference. Be sure to [list your veteran's preference on your resume](#). Government contractors and agencies are looking to hire service-disabled veterans and those with military experience. Listing your veteran's preference shows you have it.
- Your training. Highlight your military training. Be sure to put it into laymen's terms where necessary, but don't exclude it just because it didn't come from a university. That practical experience may be the critical factor that helps you land your next job.
- Your contacts. While there are restrictions against jumping directly into certain contract positions (especially if you were a program manager or oversaw certain contracts), the network of contacts you built during your military career is absolutely something you take with you into the civilian workplace. You probably already have an idea for the companies, offices, or areas you're most interested in. Reach out to individuals working within those organizations or similar ones and let them know you're on the market. Start [building your career network](#) before you separate from service, and reenergize your efforts once you're officially out.
- Knowing what you can take with you when you separate from service, and what you can't, can make the difference in landing your dream job, or landing yourself in hot water. Keep in mind that many post-military employment procedures are up for interpretation, and when in doubt, ask your transition assistance officer or legal representative for advice. Happy job hunting!