

Transition Field Guide for Veterans: Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship after Service

As you transition out of the military, you will face many different and difficult decisions. One of the most important decisions for you and your family will be what path you take to gain meaningful employment. This field guide lays out four paths you could pursue and then explains each step along the way. The four paths explored include: entering the job market, obtaining further training or certification, going back to school and starting a business. While each servicemember's situation is unique, the following field guide is designed to ensure that you are better prepared for this transition and don't miss a step along the way.



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INTRODUCTION

The transition from military service to civilian life requires that you make many different and difficult decisions. Additionally, since there are so many resources out there, it may be daunting to find the best tools to aid your transition. While each servicemember's situation is unique, the following field guide is designed to ensure that you are better prepared for this transition and don't miss a step along the way.

This graphic provides some of the pathways to civilian employment. Checklists associated with each path are designed to help you uncover the questions and resources you need to successfully make the transition from military service to the civilian workforce.



PRIOR TO LEAVING MILITARY SERVICE –

UNDERSTAND YOUR CAREER AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES.

Ideally, you'll start developing your plan 12 to 18 months before separation. Start by asking yourself a few questions: what do I want to do, where do I want to live and what steps do I need to get there? As you begin to answer those questions, keep in mind what career and/or education opportunities exist in the geographic location where you plan to relocate after military service. If your family situation allows, seek out geographic areas with highest job growth potential. Next, consider the following steps:

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- Research the various paths to the civilian workforce:
 - Direct employment/enter the job market
 - Further training or certification into employment
 - Higher education into employment
 - Entrepreneurship/start a business
 - Assess your job skills and interests and then determine how they relate to today's job market. Determine the necessary skills and degree/certification requirements for those positions. Some helpful tools include:
 - The Department of Labor's [list of fastest growing occupations](#) for the next decade.
 - [Top states for job creation in 2014](#).
 - The Department of Labor's [CareerOneStop](#) and [O*Net OnLine](#) are helpful resources to search for potential occupations including those with high growth job opportunities.
 - The [DoD MWR Library](#) provides study guides, printable sample tests, resources, articles, and other related links for various examinations ranging from academic test prep to career and certification prep.
 - If you are considering going back to school, take the [Online Academic Skills Course](#) (OASC) for Military Success to assess your reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math skills.
 - If you are considering starting your own business, visit Operation Boots to Business, an entrepreneurship program operated by Syracuse University (SU) in cooperation with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).
 - Assemble your initial network by putting together a list of people who might help with leads for job searches. (You'll work to expand your network later in the process.)
 - Draft your resume and ask your contacts for feedback. (You'll refine your resume later in the process. Career One Stop has great [resume resources](#).)
 - Create a profile on [LinkedIn](#); take advantage of the free upgrade for veterans.

PRIOR TO LEAVING MILITARY SERVICE –

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HELPFUL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES.

Once you've done a little bit of research and understand your options, take advantage of the government resources available to you. Consult your personnel office to verify your actual date of separation, retirement, end of contract or EOS. If you will have unused leave on the books, determine whether selling it back or taking it as terminal leave is the best option for you, from both a financial and timing perspective.

- ❑ Attend the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) workshop. Attend the tracks relevant to your post-service career plans: Career Technical Training Track, Education Track, and Entrepreneurship Track. TAP will also give an overview of the VA benefits process. Access the transition tools available by branch of service:
 - [Army Career and Alumni Program](#)
 - [Marine Corp's Transition Assistance](#)
 - [Navy Transition Assistance Management Program](#)
 - [Air Force Transition Assistance Program](#)
 - [Coast Guard Transition Assistance Program](#)
- ❑ If you have a service connected disability or if you are planning to file for disability, attend the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) workshop as well. If you will have a service connected disability rating, consider how you may use [Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits](#) for career transition.
- ❑ Determine what paperwork is necessary to support your separation, discharge or retirement. Review, copy and retain copies of all of your personal and medical records.
- ❑ Investigate the possibility of no-cost TAD/TDY orders for job search/transition. Likewise, see if you qualify for permissive temporary duty (PTDY) to support this.

► TIP:

Set a goal of doing one transition-related activity each week: research, speak with a recruiter/headhunter, meet a contact for coffee, ask your contact for 5 additional people he/she would recommend you meet, read a professional development book, go to a job fair, etc.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO SEEK ADDITIONAL TRAINING OR OBTAIN CERTIFICATIONS BEFORE YOUR JOB SEARCH.

Let's face it, the job market is competitive. Obtaining additional training and/or certifications before pursuing employment will give you a competitive edge over other applicants.

- ☐ To the extent possible, don't wait until after separation to pursue training and certification programs. Use all available military training programs, career preparation programs and/or certifications offered by your unit.
- ☐ Enroll in the [Veteran Career Transition Program](#) (VCTP) operated by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. It is completely free for post-9/11 veterans and military spouses. The coursework is delivered online so can be accessed from any location at any time. There are three tracks that lead to industry certification: technology and operations, human resources and professional studies.
- ☐ For apprenticeship opportunities and training programs nationwide, visit the [Registered Apprenticeship Program](#) and the [Department of Labor's list of apprenticeship and training programs](#) searchable by state and county.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO ENTER THE JOB MARKET –

KICK NETWORKING INTO HIGH GEAR AND GET YOUR RESUME IN TOP SHAPE.

You have decided to reenter the civilian workforce. There's no exact science for finding a job; it's about timing, preparation and job availability. At this point, you should finalize all necessary documents for your job search and network as much as possible.

- ☐ Continue to expand your network. Consult and network with other veterans. Ask your contacts to recommend 5 other people with whom you can discuss career options and get advice.
- ☐ As you expand your network, find mentors who can give guidance and introduce you to people. Consider individuals who have successfully managed the transition and those who are in the industry you have targeted for your job search. Ask them to help identify knowledge, skills and traits needed for employment in your target industry.
- ☐ Arrange informational interviews with people in your network. (This is a very common practice in the civilian workforce so don't feel guilty for requesting someone's time.) Remember to send thank you notes to those you meet.
- ☐ If you haven't already, create a profile on [LinkedIn](#) and take advantage of the free upgrade for veterans. LinkedIn is a very helpful online networking tool and your LinkedIn profile will turn up in top search engine results. Keep your profile updated, relevant and professional.
- ☐ Remember recruiters often check job applicants' social media pages. Don't have anything online you would not want a recruiter or hiring manager to see.
- ☐ Refine your resume based on job descriptions that interest you.
- ☐ Your Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) Document (DD Form 2586) could be helpful in describing your training and experience for your LinkedIn profile and resume.
- ☐ Put together a portfolio of your work. Include resumes, reference list, separation paperwork, awards, diplomas, academic transcripts and certificates of completion.

► REMEMBER:

Recruiters often check job applicants' social media pages. Don't have anything online you would not want a recruiter or hiring manager to see.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO ENTER THE JOB MARKET –

KICK NETWORKING INTO HIGH GEAR AND GET YOUR RESUME IN TOP SHAPE. *(continued)*

- ☐ Draft a cover letter that you can adjust for various job opportunities. Career One Stop has great [sample cover letters and interview tips](#).
- ☐ Budget for your job search and track expenses and save your receipts. Many of your job search costs may be deductible on your tax returns.
- ☐ Use voicemail to your advantage. Ensure the outgoing message on your voicemail is professional and business-like in content, instructions, and delivery. Remember these points when you leave messages in your job search as well. Often, your voicemail is your first impression.
- ☐ Complete (at least) one proactive job search activity every day: submit a job application, follow up on an existing application, ask for an information interview, check job boards, make a call to your network, attend a trade or association meeting or volunteer for an organization.
- ☐ Remember to send thank you notes to those you meet.

► CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Resume
- ☐ Cover Letter
- ☐ References
- ☐ Separation Paperwork
- ☐ Awards
- ☐ Academic Transcript
- ☐ Thank you Note
- ☐ Update LinkedIn Profile

YOUR JOB SEARCH.

To the extent that you can, begin applying for jobs 6 months prior to separation. (This is not always a quick process so starting early will only work to your advantage.) Again, there's no exact science for finding a job; it's about timing, preparation and job availability. Exhaust all options – and know that recruiters want to hear from you.

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- ❑ Research job openings and submit applications to job postings of interest. Make sure your resume includes key words from the job description.
 - ❑ Here are helpful online job resources:
 - The [100,000 Jobs Mission website](#) provides profiles of more than 140 companies that are committed to hiring veterans as well as a [Veteran Talent Exchange](#) where you can upload your resume to connect with those companies.
 - Most federal government jobs can be found on [USAJobs](#). Both the Department of Labor's [O*Net OnLine](#) and [My Next Move for Veterans](#) provide crosswalks between military codes and civilian job titles.
 - Private sector and nonprofit jobs can be found on [LinkedIn](#), [indeed](#), [idealist](#) and [Monster](#). Review major business and industry coalition websites for jobs from military-friendly companies: [100,000 Jobs Mission](#), [Hiring Our Heroes](#) and [Hero 2 Hired](#).
 - [Military.com's online skills translator](#) can help match civilian jobs to your military occupation and training.
 - Attend job fairs and/or career conferences. [Visit Hiring Our Heroes](#) for upcoming hiring fairs by location.
 - Consider using a professional recruiter. Some free recruiter directories include [recruiterlink.com](#), [onlinerecruitersdirectory.com](#), [searchfirm.com](#) and [i-recruit.com](#). You can also search for recruiters' profiles online by doing a keyword search on networking sites such as [LinkedIn](#) or [Doostang.com](#).
 - Use tools such as skills translators and job search engines to match military job codes with civilian opportunities. Don't rule out jobs as a result of using these tools. Some hiring managers and recruiters will use these tools. Understand results so you can address why jobs are good fits with your skills and experience.
 - Since translators use different algorithms, be sure to use multiple tools to increase the number of job opportunities to review.
 - Visit your state and local employment services, especially the Local Employment Veterans Representative. Additional veteran resources are listed on the [DOL website](#).

YOUR JOB SEARCH. *(continued)*

- ☐ Join industry or professional association(s). Join local military and veterans groups where you want to relocate – both online and in-person. Join or renew your membership in professional societies, alumni organizations, and trade associations. Target those organizations that offer career transition programs and sponsor networking events.
- ☐ Review civilian trade journals, newsletters, business magazines, newspapers and blogs.
- ☐ Complete (at least) one proactive job search activity every day: submit a job application, follow up on an existing application, ask for an information interview, check job boards, make a call to your network, attend a trade or association meeting, or volunteer for an organization.

► JOB SEARCH RESOURCES:

- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ indeed
- ☐ idealist
- ☐ Monster
- ☐ 100,00 Jobs Mission
- ☐ Hiring Our Heroes
- ☐ Hero 2 Hired

PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS AND LAND THE JOB.

You have spent all of this time and energy looking for a job – don't stop now! Invest in preparing for the interview.

- ☐ While it might feel boastful to emphasize your individual skills and experience, you should get comfortable fast. Recruiters want to hear details about how you led teams, were responsible for the lives of your comrades and most certainly want to understand the training and awards you have received.
- ☐ Obtain a list of questions you might receive in an interview. Prepare your answers, including identifying strengths and weaknesses. Be ready to discuss how your skills can benefit the organization and what you have learned from your shortcomings.
- ☐ Practice answering questions in front of a mirror, video camera or with a friend. Ask for feedback.
- ☐ Practice speaking without using military acronyms and jargon.
- ☐ Determine the appropriate attire to support your job search and interview activity, and then shop accordingly.
- ☐ Research the company and the people you are meeting on interview day.
- ☐ You should always have at least one question to ask the recruiter as it shows you truly are interested in the company and the role. For example, “what will an average day on the job look like?” (Avoid salary questions in the first interview unless the recruiter brings it up.) Answers to your questions should help you understand whether the job and the company are a good fit for your career goals.
- ☐ Find out if the company has an employee network for military veterans. If they do, you may want to connect with fellow veterans during the interview process to learn more.
- ☐ Use voice mail to your advantage. Ensure the voice message on your phone is professional and business-like in content, instructions and delivery. Often, your voicemail is your first impression. Remember these points when you leave messages in your job search as well.
- ☐ Send a follow up thank you letter after your interview. Keep a copy of all correspondence for each company.

ACCEPT YOUR NEW JOB.

- ☐ After reviewing your job offers, comparing benefits, and evaluating future growth opportunities, you should accept the offer you believe provides the best prospect for your career. If you respond verbally, you should also respond in writing. Maintain copies of your acceptance letter for your records.
- ☐ Now is the time to reinforce your positive impression with your new employer, as well as with individuals at other companies with whom you have spoken in your job search. If you do it right the first time, you'll have the beginnings of a strong network to propel you forward in your career.
- ☐ Once you have accepted the best offer, inform the other companies that may be considering your resume that you have accepted another position. You do not need to provide details, but be clear that you appreciate their consideration and look forward to staying in touch. Thank those who have been of assistance to you in your job search and transition to the civilian workforce.
- ☐ Maintain relationships with your mentors and network, as a strong network is a primary key to continued career advancement.
- ☐ Update your LinkedIn profile to reflect your new job!
- ☐ Join your new company's employee network for military veterans. Fellow veteran employees are great resources as you start your new job.
- ☐ Find a mentor within the company who can help you navigate your career.
- ☐ Learn if your company provides volunteer opportunities. That's a great way to meet new colleagues and continue giving back to the community.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL –

DECIDE WHICH SCHOOLS YOU'LL PURSUE, UNDERSTAND DEADLINES AND STUDY FOR ENTRY EXAMS.

Ideally, you'll start researching academic programs 12 to 18 months before separation. Start by asking yourself a few questions: what career do I want to pursue, what should I study to reach my career goals, what schools offer the programs I'm interested in and what are the education benefits associated with that school? Next, consider the following steps:

- ☐ To the extent that you can, begin to research academic programs 12 to 18 months before separation. Determine which trade schools, colleges or universities have the training program, certification or degree you need to pursue your target career.
- ☐ To ensure that you don't miss critical dates make sure you clearly understand each institution's application and selection cycle.
- ☐ Keep in mind occupations that are on the [Department of Labor's list of fastest growing occupations](#) for the next decade. You may also consider colleges in [top states for job creation](#).
- ☐ Focus on academic institutions with strong, veteran-friendly reputations. These institutions can be found by using resources such as [Military.com](#).
- ☐ Schedule and prepare for college entry exams such as CLEP, SAT, GRE, LSAT and GMAT. Visit the Education Center on your military installation to take academic entrance exams, college admission tests or challenge exams. This service is free to active duty servicemembers, but be sure you are prepared to take the exams. Some exams, like CLEP, have a waiting period before you can retest; for example, CLEP has a 180 day waiting period before you can retest on a CLEP examination with the same test title.
- ☐ Request and obtain sealed original copies of your academic transcripts (including high school) to avoid future delays when applying to schools.
- ☐ Determine if you can obtain college course credit for your military experience and training. Talk with your admissions counselor about transfer credit because each school assesses transfer credit differently.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL – COMPLETE THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND CHOOSE YOUR SCHOOL.

- ☐ Begin applying for admission to education programs.
- ☐ Be sure to emphasize your unique military career, leadership and deployment experiences in your application essays. Colleges look for students with different viewpoints, backgrounds and experiences.
- ☐ If you are asking for letters of recommendation, ask several months before letters are due to give recommenders enough time to complete.
- ☐ Learn about [The Common Application](#) to submit one application for many schools. (only applies for undergraduate applications)
- ☐ Remember application deadlines. Submit early if possible.
- ☐ Keep complete copies of everything you send to each school.
- ☐ As you narrow down your list, visit the schools if possible.
- ☐ Evaluate reported student success, career placement, cost, location and cultural fit when making your decision.
- ☐ Contact academic advisor to discuss required courses, course load, scheduling, and availability of veteran resource programs on campus or in the community.
- ☐ Find out if the school has a student veteran group on campus. If so, consider talking with some of the members to learn more.
- ☐ Complete required financial aid applications, GI Bill, scholarship, fellowship and other sources of funding.
- ☐ Join veterans group(s) on your campus. [Student Veterans of America](#) can help identify local chapters and veterans who are active in those chapters.
- ☐ Once you graduate, take a look at the career steps we've included above.

NAVIGATING YOUR EDUCATION BENEFITS.

- ☐ Contact your Transition Assistance Program counselor to help you understand how to apply for and receive GI Bill and Tuition Assistance benefits.
- ☐ After you transition out of the service, contact the VA and begin the [education benefits process](#).
- ☐ Determine what education benefits are available where you plan to relocate. In some cases, certain states have separate higher education benefits solely for veterans, which include reduced or free tuition at public universities; supplemental funding for education at any university in the state; training and education programs related to your military career; and civilian licensure or certification. Start with the state veterans department (note: they are named differently in most states). Some states require you to be a resident of that state, while others do not.
- ☐ Use the [GI Bill Comparison Tool](#). This tool will help to guide your school choices by comparing education costs, culture and geography, and academic graduation and placement outcomes. Further, the office of admissions at colleges and training institutions can provide you with information.
- ☐ If you will have a service connected disability rating, consider how you may use Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits for education and training leading to a career.

YOU'VE DECIDED TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

- ❑ Do Your Homework! Business ownership is not for everyone, so take the time to understand the implications of business ownership for:
 - Yourself
 - Your Family
 - Your Lifestyle
- ❑ Consider broadly the advantages and disadvantages of the various paths to business ownership, such as franchising, versus new venture creation, versus purchasing an existing business versus joining a family business.
- ❑ If you are still in transition from active service, participate in the “Entrepreneurship Track” of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) workshop.
 - As part of TAP, you can also register for [Operation Boots to Business](#), an 8-week entrepreneurship program for transitioning service members operated by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and Syracuse University (SU).
- ❑ Position yourself for success by leveraging the many resources and supportive services available to veteran-business owners.
 - Visit the [Veteran-Owned Business page](#) on the SBA's website, where you will find many helpful resources including how to write a business plan, financing your venture, how to become a government contractor, and many others.
- ❑ Seek out a mentor. Many veterans like yourself have leveraged business ownership as a post-service vocation, and their experience is priceless with regard to navigating your own entrepreneurial journey.
- ❑ Once you get your business off the ground, consider registering as a veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned business with the U.S. Veterans Administration. This is particularly important if you plan on doing business with the government.
- ❑ If your plans include supplying other large businesses, start by reviewing the National Veteran-Owned Business Association's list of “[Best Corporations for Veteran-Owned Businesses](#).”
- ❑ If you think you need additional education, take a look at the [top 25 undergraduate colleges](#) and the [top 25 graduate schools](#) for entrepreneurship.



ABOUT THE 100,000 JOBS MISSION

Launched in 2011, the 100,000 Jobs Mission is a coalition of over 140 companies committed to hiring a total of 200,000 U.S. military veterans by 2020. The coalition's companies have collectively hired more than 117,000 veterans through the end of 2013. For more information on the 100,000 Jobs Mission, visit jobsmission.com.

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1. LEAVING MILITARY SERVICE

- Try to develop a plan 12-18 months out.
- Research your opportunities: job market, training, school or entrepreneurship.
- Assemble your network, draft your resume and create a profile on [LinkedIn](#).
- Attend the Transition Assistance Program workshop.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION

- Contact the VA and begin the [education benefits process](#). Use the [GI Bill Comparison Tool](#).
- Determine if you can obtain course credit related to your military experience and training.
- Focus on [academic institutions](#) with strong, veteran-friendly reputations.
- Prepare and schedule college entry exams such as CLEP, SAT, GRE, LSAT or GMAT.
- Join a local chapter of [Student Veterans of America](#) or another Veterans Service Organization.

3. TRAINING OR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- For Apprenticeship, Licensing, Credentialing or Certification opportunities, enroll in the [Veterans Career Transition Program \(VCTP\)](#) and/or check out the [Registered Apprenticeship Program](#) and the [National Resource Directory](#).
- To start a business, visit the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University (IVMF) for a list of [entrepreneurship programs for veterans](#).
- Register for [Operation Boots to Business](#).
- Visit the [Veteran-Owned Business page](#) on the Small Business Administration website.

4. CAREER EXPLORATION

- Continue to expand your network; consult and network with other veterans.
- Update your resume and [LinkedIn](#) profile; enroll in the free upgrade for veterans.
- Become familiar with online job resources, such as [Veteran Talent Exchange \(VTX\)](#), [indeed](#), [idealist](#), [USAJOBS](#), and [My Next Move for Veterans](#).
- Review [JobsMission.com](#), [Hero 2 Hire](#), and [Get Skills to Work](#) for careers with military-friendly companies.
- Visit [Hiring Our Heroes](#) for upcoming hiring fairs by location.
- Research job openings and submit applications to job postings of interest.
- Practice interviewing.

5. JOB OFFER OR SCHOOL ACCEPTANCE

- Accept the job offer, school or program you believe provides the best prospect for your career development.
- Find a mentor and continue to grow your network.
- Network with other veterans at your company or school using [LinkedIn](#).
- Consider community volunteer opportunities.
- Continue to build on your transition plan to address your next goals.