



# MARKETING YOURSELF FOR A SECOND CAREER

**MOAA  
PUBLICATIONS:  
YOUR RESOURCE  
FOR EVERY STAGE  
OF LIFE**



## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The time has come to take off your military uniform, make a career pivot, or re-enter the workforce. *Marketing Yourself for a Second Career* is a comprehensive, strategic, and tactical guide that includes best practices, tips, and tools to help you navigate your transition no matter what stage you are in. For more career-transition information, visit [www.moaa.org/career](http://www.moaa.org/career).

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## GETTING STARTED

Thanks to The MOAA Foundation, MOAA's career-transition consultants support uniformed servicemembers, veterans, military spouses, and surviving spouses with making sound career and life decisions.

Now these award-winning programs are being shared directly at select military installations worldwide through the Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (ENPP). Initiated by DOL to assist transitioning servicemembers and their spouses by leveraging the services and expertise of the many nongovernmental organizations, the pilot affords MOAA the opportunity to deliver valuable career assistance information and resources through seminars, workshops, webinars, and virtual career fair events with the transitioning uniformed services community.

**Seminars and workshops.** These interactive sessions are designed to help you activate a resilient mindset that will serve you throughout the ups and downs of your transition (and any other life circumstance). With guidance from MOAA experts, you will learn

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**The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)** is a nonprofit veterans' association dedicated to maintaining a strong national defense and ensuring our nation keeps its commitments to currently serving, retired, and former members of the uniformed services and their families and survivors. Membership is open to those who hold or have ever held a warrant or commission in any component of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and their surviving spouses.

## MOAA PUBLICATIONS

For more than 90 years, MOAA has been fighting for the interests of military members and their families. We understand the challenges you face, because like you we served, and we're ready to share our expertise and experience. The MOAA library of guides and reference tools is available to help you navigate the challenges that arise at each stage of life. Visit [www.moaa.org/publications](http://www.moaa.org/publications).



### CONTACT MOAA

- Email [beninfo@moaa.org](mailto:beninfo@moaa.org)
- Visit the MOAA website at [www.moaa.org/benefits](http://www.moaa.org/benefits) info.
- Call the MOAA Member Service Center at (800) 234-MOAA (6622).
- Mail the MOAA Transition Center: 201 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314

>> continued from facing page how to:

- Build a stronger and broader network to accelerate your job search.
- Maximize your self-marketing tools, including your résumé and LinkedIn profile.
- Understand your TRICARE and VA benefits.
- Prepare for your next interview or your next salary and benefits negotiation.

**Webinars.** MOAA's Transition Center regularly presents educational webinars offering in-depth analysis on finance and benefits, valuable advice on careers and transitioning, and information on your earned veteran benefits. Find the MOAA archived productions at [www.moaa.org/webinar-archive](http://www.moaa.org/webinar-archive). (Note: Some webinars are available after initial broadcast to Premium and Life members only.)

**Networking and hiring events.** MOAA offers a variety of in-person and virtual professional development and networking/hiring events. These are great opportunities to get connected with industry executives, talent acquisition professionals, hiring managers, and resource specialists. Check out our upcoming events at [www.moaa.org/events](http://www.moaa.org/events).

**Federal job resources.** If you are considering civil service, see [www.moaa.org/fedjobs](http://www.moaa.org/fedjobs) for

information on working for the government.

### RESOURCES FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Thanks to the generous support The MOAA Foundation, MOAA has a series of transition resources available to all military spouses, including:

- MilSpouse Remote Telework Grant Program. Learn more at [www.moaa.org/spousegrant](http://www.moaa.org/spousegrant).
- *Military Spouse Employment Guide*, available for free download at [www.moaa.org/spouseguide](http://www.moaa.org/spouseguide).

### MAXIMIZE MOAA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Make the most of your membership benefits. MOAA's award-winning team of experts provides these personalized services for Premium and Life members:

- Get a jump-start on the competition through a career consultation session, professional résumé critique, and LinkedIn profile review. Email [transition@moaa.org](mailto:transition@moaa.org) for more.
- Get your questions answered. Contact MOAA's health care, financial education, and military/veterans benefits experts at [beninfo@moaa.org](mailto:beninfo@moaa.org).

Let MOAA's team of experts guide your journey with trusted advice and decisional support.

# Starting the Transition

As you prepare for any transition, it can be helpful to think about it as a journey or process rather than a destination or “light switch” event because it takes the pressure off having all the answers at once. It gives you space to be curious, explore, and discover what it is you want to do in your civilian career. Determining your professional niche takes time, self-reflection, and patience — even when you have a good idea. Some might find the idea of a new career daunting and maybe even a little scary, while others are excited. Regardless of how you are feeling, you are not alone. Thousands have successfully gone before you. Now it’s your turn.

As a servicemember or military spouse, you have a wide variety of highly desirable skill sets and experiences to offer the civilian world. As such, you are very marketable. However, you might be overwhelmed by the many options. Keep in mind, just because you are skilled in a particular area does not mean you have to keep doing that type of work — especially if you do not enjoy it. So, before you jump into résumé writing or job sites, take some time to answer the questions below. Your answers might surprise you, and/or reinforce what you already know. Either way, they will help you gain clarity in discerning your unique purpose and increase your odds for fulfillment and satisfaction outside of the military.

- What are my values and priorities?
- What does success outside of the military look like?
- If I knew I would be successful, what (career) would I pursue next?
- If money, time, and resources were not an issue, what would I pursue?
- What activities am I doing when I lose track of time because I am so absorbed in the task at hand?
- What impact do I want to make in the world?
- What challenges do I want to solve or fix?
- What does my ideal workday look like? (Where



## FINANCIAL CALCULATOR

Check out MOAA’s military-to-civilian financial calculators at [www.moaa.org/calculators](http://www.moaa.org/calculators) to help you determine how much civilian pay you’ll need to match your existing military pay.

are you? What do you see, smell, hear, feel? Who are you with? What are you doing? What are you wearing?)

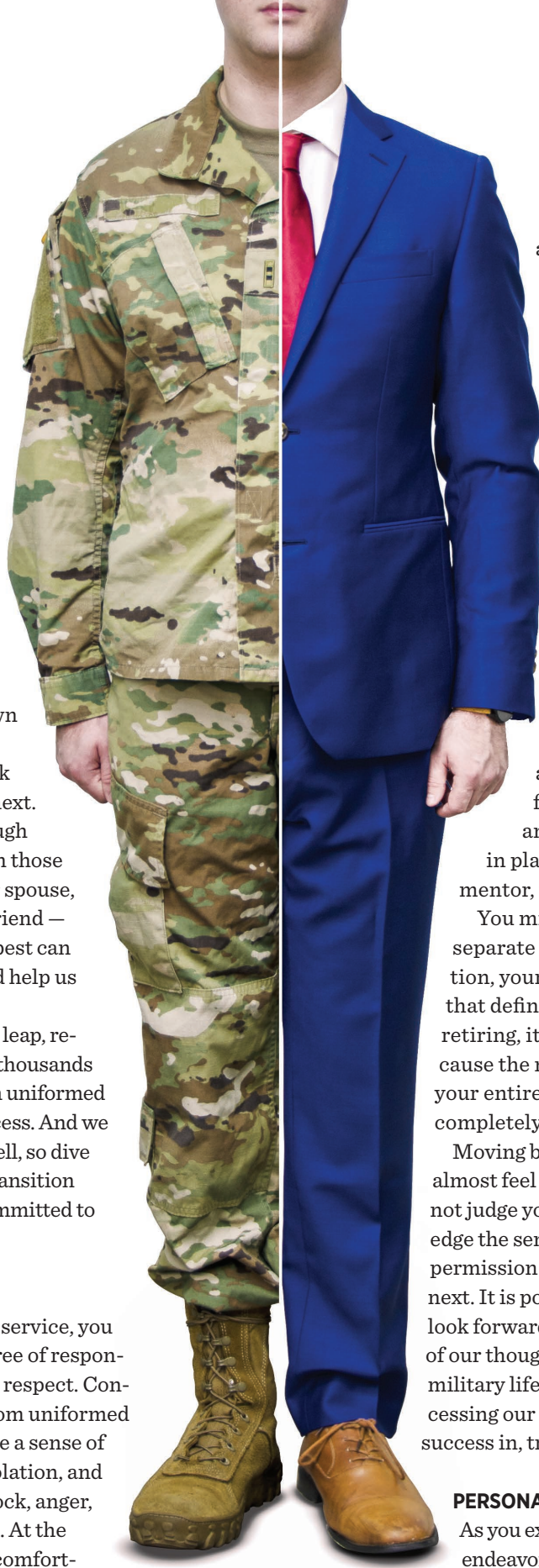
- What do I want my legacy to be?

Honesty is critically important as you ponder these questions and move through transition. It can be easy to let fear of the unknown drive your decisions or get wrapped up in what you think the world expects you to do next. With that said, don’t go through transition alone. Confiding in those closest to you — such as your spouse, partner, mentor, or trusted friend — is wise. Those who know us best can challenge our blind spots and help us avoid pitfalls.

As you prepare to make the leap, remember MOAA has assisted thousands in making the transition from uniformed service to civilian career success. And we stand ready to serve you as well, so dive into our full suite of career-transition services and tools. We are committed to supporting you.

## EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Throughout your uniformed service, you are accustomed to some degree of responsibility, status, decorum, and respect. Consequently, as you separate from uniformed service, you might experience a sense of loss, lowered self-esteem, isolation, and negative feelings, such as shock, anger, disbelief, fear, and confusion. At the very least, you might feel uncomfort-



able being on an unfamiliar path without a known destination for the first time in many years. In fact, the unknown can be a little scary. Rest assured; this is completely “normal.”

Although no two people react the same way, most transitioning servicemembers will experience highs and lows and a host of conflicting feelings as they move through the different stages of career transition. (See the Career Transition Journey chart at right.) And remember, there are good and bad days in and out of uniform. That is why it is important to have a support system in place (spouse/partner, coach, mentor, friend).

You might also find it difficult to separate yourself from the organization, your colleagues, and the structure that defines military service. If you are retiring, it can be especially difficult because the military is all you have known your entire adult working life. This is completely natural and understandable.

Moving beyond uniformed service can almost feel like a grieving process. Do not judge yourself for it; rather, acknowledge the sense of loss and give yourself permission to be curious about what is next. It is possible to miss the military and look forward to what is next. Awareness of our thoughts and beliefs regarding post military life is incredibly powerful in processing our emotions about, and finding success in, transition.

## PERSONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

As you explore your next professional endeavor, there are factors to take into

It can be very helpful to speak with people you know or friends of friends to learn more about the various avenues and the pros and cons of each path.

## THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF CAREER TRANSITION

1. Personal Assessment
2. Self-Marketing Plan
3. Network Expansion
4. Interview and Salary Negotiation
5. Winning the First 90 Days

## CAREER TRANSITION JOURNEY

Time Until Separation	Steps to Take
No later than 12 months	Your vision values
	What’s your why
6-9 months	Develop your personal brand, write bio, and refine LinkedIn profile
	Research industry, and cull and strengthen your network
4-6 months	Refine bio, and develop your résumé
3-4 months	Refine résumé
As required	Interview preparation

## MOAA CAREER TRANSITION RESOURCES AND SERVICES

**Transition Center Services:**  
[www.moaa.org/career](http://www.moaa.org/career)

- Résumé-development assistance
- LinkedIn profile review
- Interview preparation
- Career-management consultants

**Transition Events:**  
[www.moaa.org/events](http://www.moaa.org/events)

- Interactive career-transition seminars
- Webinars
- Virtual Career Fairs
- Virtual Classroom Forums

**Nationwide Job Bank:**  
[www.moaa.org/jobsforveterans](http://www.moaa.org/jobsforveterans)

**MOAA’s Military State Report Card and Tax Guide:**  
[www.moaa.org/statereport](http://www.moaa.org/statereport)

consideration, such as relocation, establishing geographic stability, perhaps your spouse's or partner's career, your children's schooling, aging parents — and the list goes on. Everyone's situation is unique, so there is no one-size-fits-all formula to ace transition. That's good news because it means a successful career transition can look like many different things.

For example, some retirees want to hit the ground running with their next employer as soon as possible, while others might see a certain freedom in working part-time while still meeting their financial goals and pursuing personal interests. Many take time off before jumping back into the workforce. All paths can be successful. It is up to you and your family how you want to execute this next phase.

If you are transitioning before retirement eligibility, perhaps your motivators or expectations for change include higher pay, more career flexibility, more family time, geographic stability, and/or remote work. Perhaps you have the option to join the National Guard or Reserve? Remember, the grass is not always greener and there is no monthly retirement income to bridge a salary gap, so it is important to be clear and realistic about your motivators and expectations.

You might find yourself in a scenario in which you are reluctant to leave the military, such as a missed promotion, medical issue, or other extenuating circumstance. That can be difficult to process, but it is critically important to do so productively so you are empowered to move forward from a place of choice. You control your transition journey narrative, so choose one that aligns to your dignity, strengths, and the value you bring to a team.

Regardless of your separation circumstances, and keeping your answers from the previous set of questions in mind, where do you feel most inclined or curious to explore? Ask yourself:

- Do I want to seek a position that uses my transferable military skills or embark on a radically new career?
- Do I want to go to a Fortune 500 company or seek a more freewheeling, entrepreneurial firm?
- Is now the time to buy a business, become a con-



Veterans have a strong presence in U.S. businesses with historically low unemployment rates.

sultant, attend graduate school, or enter public service?

- Would an international opportunity be a career-catapulting move at this time?
- Is now the time to explore full-time remote work opportunities?
- Is this a time to seek outlets for aspects of my personality that haven't been previously expressed?

Understanding who you are and what you would like to become for the next phase of your professional life requires much introspection as well as consultation with people you trust and respect and who have successfully made the career transition.

#### ANALYZING THE CHOICES

Speaking with former colleagues, getting insight

from mentors, and availing yourself of various career-assessment tools and personality inventory tools can help you think through what the best career path for you might be. There are many options, and these are just a few you might want to consider. (See the Characteristics Table at right.)

• **Public sector (federal, state, or local government):** What types of agencies/work interest you? Are jobs plentiful in those fields?

• **Private sector:** Are you interested in becoming an employee of a large, medium, or small company? Which industries are of particular interest to you? Are you up to date on current trends within each of those industries? How can your skills and talents help companies within those industries save or make more money?

### JOB-SECTOR CHARACTERISTICS

GOVERNMENT	FOR-PROFIT	NONPROFIT
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support on all sides</li> <li>• Driven by political realities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to build cross-functional relationships</li> <li>• Sell or perish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees wear multiple hats</li> <li>• All hands on deck</li> </ul>
<b>ADVANTAGES</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic stability</li> <li>• Defined path</li> <li>• Greater work-life balance</li> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Defined benefit retirement</li> <li>• Culturally closer to military</li> <li>• Telecommuting opportunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High income potential</li> <li>• Prestige</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial environment with greater opportunity for creativity and upward mobility at some companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with passionate people</li> <li>• Some work-life balance</li> <li>• Meaningful work</li> <li>• Some job security</li> <li>• Potential for greater impact</li> </ul>
<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lengthy hiring process</li> <li>• Entrenched bureaucracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less work-life balance</li> <li>• Difficulty breaking out of military-type pecking order</li> <li>• Less job security</li> <li>• Mentoring challenges posed by remote reporting relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower pay</li> <li>• Limited upward mobility</li> </ul>

Note: The information in this graphic is generally true but is not factual in all circumstances.

• **Nonprofit sector:** Are passion and a meaningful mission more important to you than financial compensation? Is there a cause especially near to your heart that could readily become your full-time focus or full-time occupation?

• **Entrepreneurship:** Are you interested in starting your own business? Are you a risk-taker? Do you have the financial wherewithal or the investors you will need to get your business off the ground and growing? Is owning a franchise of interest to you? If so, what kind of franchise has the greatest appeal? Do you prefer an owner-run model or a manager-run model?

• **Academia:** Are you interested in the business/operations side or in teaching? If so, at what level?

Do you need additional degrees or certifications to be competitive for those opportunities? Are you prepared to go to school at night? Can you afford to lose the income of a full-time job to focus on earning additional degrees or credentials?

A job that might seem appealing at first glance could have hidden downsides not readily apparent to those outside the field. It's important to do your research and talk to contacts in each field so you understand the unique characteristics of various employment sectors.

### UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO AN ORGANIZATION

Every organization, whether public, private, or nonprofit, goes through a series of four cycles as it navigates changes in leadership, in the macro-economic environment, in the competitive landscape, and in the regulatory environment.

The broad types of organizational life cycles include:

- Start-up
- Turnaround
- Realignment, transformation, and change implementation
- Sustaining success

Reflecting on your career, in which of these cycles do you have experience? Are there employment opportunities where your organizational life cycle experiences could be particularly helpful?

For example, many of the skills needed to commission a newly constructed warship or lead a newly activated battalion are similar to those required in a start-up, including a broad knowledge across the enterprise, the ability to wear many hats, and the capacity to excel when stretched outside of your comfort zone.

In many cases, your prospective employer is interested in your ability to optimize time and make or save money. Focus on the specific skills that can help your next employer achieve organizational goals and objectives; thereby, enhancing productivity.

As you review employment opportunities, also try to determine whether the organization

PROS AND CONS OF LARGE VS. SMALL COMPANIES	
LARGE COMPANIES	SMALL COMPANIES
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More competition for internal resources</li> <li>• More task specialization</li> <li>• More leadership turnover</li> <li>• Predictable pay and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally less stable</li> <li>• More agility</li> <li>• Faster hiring process</li> <li>• Less leadership turnover</li> <li>• More collegial</li> <li>• Informal structure requires more adaptability and flexibility</li> </ul>
<b>PROS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name recognition</li> <li>• Training and onboarding</li> <li>• Informal mentorship opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater access to senior leadership</li> <li>• Less bureaucracy</li> <li>• More influence</li> <li>• Employees more vested</li> </ul>
<b>CONS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger bureaucracy</li> <li>• Less internal and external visibility</li> <li>• More internal competition for promotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less external name recognition</li> <li>• Fewer promotion opportunities</li> <li>• Fewer benefits</li> <li>• Might be undercapitalized</li> </ul>

Note: The information in this graphic is generally true, but not factual in all circumstances.



### ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit [www.moaa.org/career](http://www.moaa.org/career) to stay up to date with the latest career news and tips, including archived guidance organized by subject.

is considering both internal and external candidates. In most cases, if a search has started, the company might not have internal talent options available. As an external candidate competing with internal talent, it becomes even more important to generate networking connections inside the firm to identify challenges and opportunities that might be known only to insiders. The greatest enemy of the internal candidate is complacency. The greatest challenge for the external candidate is understanding the informal organizational structure and identifying the opportunities where your skills, experience, passion, and education can help the organization.

### TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER

As you evaluate competing opportunities, it's important to consider the trade-offs of each. For example:


- Trading a higher salary for a less well-compensated job where you feel more passion
- Trading a title or an organizational position for a role with more responsibility or one that might be a better match for your skills and experience
- Trading a higher-powered role for one with more work-life balance and/or more remote work
- Trading a role in a larger, more recognized organization for a position in a smaller organization with greater responsibility, authority, opportunity for growth, or the chance to learn all phases of the business

### THE WAY AHEAD

This chapter provides a broad overview of the self-assessment and research you are encouraged to do as you prepare to leave military service. In the chapters that follow, you will be introduced to the essential steps and useful tools in a successful career transition.

If this feels overwhelming, that is completely natural. Remember, transition is a journey — not a one-time transaction. Take a deep breath, and begin with what you do know. You have preferences — write them down across these priority areas:

- Family needs
- Money
- Location
- Work-life balance
- Impact you want to make in the workplace

Refer to the information throughout this chapter, truly reflect, get curious, and start talking to those you trust and who know you — including those who have gone before you in transition. Taking purposeful action is important to building confidence as you go through career transition because you will learn essential transition elements each time you speak to someone or research something. So, when something seems scary, shine a light on it. You will likely find it is fear of the unknown that is scary versus reality. You know more than you think you know. So have fun as you explore what's next. You got this! 

## Plot Your Way Forward

This checklist might be helpful as you determine the path ahead in your professional life.

- Consider the model for professional success outlined by Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* that has enabled many good companies to make the leap to great, best-in-class companies.
- Seek a balance between your skills/experience, your passion, and a desired/reasonable economic motivator for the goods and services you provide.



- Avoid a dollar-driven decision.
- Consider that the employer offering a lower salary could be the best fit for your skills and experience and your long-term goals. Moreover, it might be the place where you will attain your greatest monetary and nonmonetary rewards.

- Determine whether the job or geographic location has priority before you begin active research and networking.
- Assess your financial needs and the income level needed within the household to handle family expenses, including children's education, medical expenses, retirement savings, long-term care, etc.
- Evaluate your own energy level, and consider the level of stress/typical work hours that are acceptable to you.
- How do you feel about a job that requires travel? What percentage of travel, if any, feels right to you?
- How do social needs — such as major sports teams, cultural attractions, or a long outdoor activity season — factor into your selection of location?
- What aspects of your recent work have you enjoyed doing?
- What parts of your job would you prefer to avoid in your new career?

Other factors that might influence your choices include stability for your family, proximity to extended family members who might require assistance with daily living, your spouse's or partner's career requirements, proximity to military bases, and tax-planning considerations (see [www.moaa.org/statereport](http://www.moaa.org/statereport)).



# Self-Marketing Essentials

Once you have spent some time reflecting on transition success and identifying your priorities, it is time to consider how you are going to self-market. This is not yet résumé-writing time; this is arguably more important: understanding your value, knowing what you want to be known for, and how to communicate it to your personal and professional network and beyond.

Why? Having a clear sense of your value and what you want to do (or what your interests are) will help others (in and outside of your network) help you find your next role. Early on, spend some time crafting and mastering your “brand statement” so when you connect with your network or meet people serendipitously, you can concisely articulate your strengths, value, and interests. After all, you never know who they know, and your memorable, authentic, power-packed brand statement could lead to an opportune introduction and/or your next job.

What is your personal brand? Your personal brand defines who you are and what you

**Before you** start networking, craft your “elevator pitch” so you can quickly tell others who you are and what you bring to the table.

are known for — it is what people think about when they hear or see your name. It speaks to your passions and interests. Think of it as your self-marketing slogan — capturing the essence of your key strengths.

## AN ELEVATOR PITCH

A key branding tool is the “elevator pitch,” also known as “the 30-second commercial,” that provides you with a practiced and polished response to the question: “What are you going to do when you transition?” It concisely provides others with an idea of who you are and what you bring to the table. The elevator speech highlights your key skills, goals, and unique value and should include your newly crafted personal brand slogan.

Contents of an effective elevator pitch should include:

- Your name
- What you do or have done (most recent assignment/position)
- Two or three skills or strengths

- What you are interested in doing, the impact you want to make, what you are looking for

Characteristics of an effective elevator pitch are:

- Short (30-60 seconds)
- Simple (use plain language, i.e., no military jargon)
- On-target (tailored to your audience)
- Focused on YOU (this is what differentiates you from your peers)

Introduce yourself using your elevator pitch whenever possible to gain practice and become comfortable relating your skills and talents to potential employers. The more you practice, the more natural and authentic you will come across to others, and that will increase the likelihood of a meaningful connection, which is great for expanding your network.

## NETWORKING

It does not matter how great your elevator pitch is if you keep it to yourself, which brings us to networking, or relationship building. Why? On average, 80% to 85% of all jobs come from networking. To that end, ensure everyone you know — friends, family, professional colleagues, casual acquaintances — is aware you are transitioning and has an idea of what you are interested in pursuing next. Generally, people will be glad to offer advice and tips in support of your transition. However, people can’t help you if they are not aware, which is why it is important to shore up your brand tools sooner rather than later so you can start communicating them across your network.

Consistently building and nurturing your network is a wise business practice, even more so during a season of transition. When developing your network, consider the following areas of life:

- Professional associations
- Career fairs
- Alumni events
- Personal references
- Friends and family
- Religious organizations
- Community and volunteer groups
- Airports and traveling

# Networking Groups and Membership Organizations

Various formal and informal groups exist that support job seekers — alumni associations and professional organizations are two excellent places to start.

While few colleges and universities provide placement services dedicated to alumni, many do offer career services that might lead to job opportunities, transition events, and



networking contacts. Contact the director of alumni services at your undergraduate and graduate alma maters, as well as any colleges and universities in your local area, to see what services they provide.

Consider joining professional membership organizations, which often offer several key services, not to mention excellent networking opportunities. Examples include the National Society of Professional Engineers, the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Project Management Institute, and many others.

Almost every industry has a business organization to advance its goals and objectives. These industries can range from tourism to health care, social sciences, sales, and utilities.

Some organizations, like MOAA, help in seeking employment through career counseling, résumé critiques, job postings, interview preparation, job fairs, and networking connections.

Organizations with local chapters are a wonderful way to connect with people who have similar interests.

**Attendees listen** to a panel discussion, above, during MOAA’s networking event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., Oct. 4, 2023.

- Social gatherings
- Sporting activities

Take every opportunity to meet new people and to establish new relationships. Each person represents a potential connection to a job opportunity. If you have been heads-down in your day job for quite some time and have let your personal life lapse in terms of hobbies, clubs, sports, and other entertainment, give yourself permission to re-engage or to start participating in the things you enjoy outside of work. This is part of networking. This is also part of transitioning and developing your life following uniformed service, which has likely been all-encompassing for many years. Be sure to maintain an enthusiastic, confident, and optimistic attitude. Remember that practice makes perfect, so give yourself plenty of opportunities to network, beginning with your everyday activities.

Consider investing time and energy on the following networking tools, which have a high probability of being used, often before you share your résumé.

### Biography

A biography is an excellent way to paint a coherent picture of yourself to someone other than a potential employer. While a résumé screams “I’m looking for a job!” a biography is a subtler way to introduce yourself to a networking contact or as a read-ahead for a meeting or an engagement with someone you might not know well. What you choose to include depends on what you want to accentuate and how you want to be perceived by the reader(s). Biographies can raise your visibility and establish your credibility.

Whether you are a guest speaker or you’re going on an informational interview, a civilian professional biography is a useful introductory tool. Follow these best practices:

- Include a photo taken in business attire with a nice, warm smile.
- Do not try to hide your military experience by using civilian job titles (e.g., CEO, COO).
- Do not burden your reader with lengthy sentences of personal information unless it applies



A biography is a subtler way to introduce yourself to a networking contact.

directly to the subject for which the biography has been prepared.

- Avoid excessive acronyms and military jargon.
- Focus on your achievements and accomplishments rather than jobs.
- Write in third-person voice (e.g., “Chris has extensive experience as a project manager”) and use a conversational tone.

A biography should follow this format:

- **First paragraph:** Connect with your reader or audience by highlighting a major career achievement. Include your name and former military title.
- **Second paragraph:** Describe some of your proudest accomplishments from throughout your work history.
- **Third paragraph:** Emphasize special skills and strategic connections that could have significance to the reader.
- **Fourth paragraph:** Validate your achievement by citing educational credentials and business-related honors.

### Business cards

Another networking tool you want to prepare sooner rather than later in your career transition is your personal business card. Convenient to make, low cost, and easily accessible in a networking situation, business cards are a must have. You can quickly provide the recipient with a tangible reminder of your interaction with them by writing a note on the back. On your business card, include your name, email address, phone number, and your LinkedIn URL. You might also include a target position type or industry if you know what you want to pursue or your short brand statement (slogan). Refrain from using your official work business cards because they have an expiration date; once you leave the military or your current employment, the contact information on them will no longer be accurate.

Business card best practices:

- Print a personal networking business card. Do not use your current job.
- Do not include a photo.
- Include essential contact information only, such as name, credentials (if primarily seeking roles that call for them), phone number, email, and personalized LinkedIn URL address.
- Avoid excessive acronyms and military jargon.
- It’s OK to include a QR code that embeds contact and additional information.

### Informational interview

An informational interview is an opportunity to get an inside look at career fields that interest you. You are not asking for a job; you are exploring and learning about an industry, company, and/or role. Identify people in and out of your network who are in the types of job or industries you desire. People want to help you in your career transition — but it is up to you to give them the opportunity. So, don’t be shy. Ask! Start with someone you already know. You can set up a 20-minute phone call or meet in person for coffee or otherwise. Use your intuition for what’s most appropriate, or suggest options and allow the other person to decide what’s preferred.

Before meeting, you might want to provide your

## Networking 101

For those who do not enjoy or who struggle with networking for any reason, consider the following concepts to shift away from negative associations or from the notion that it is extra work:

Networking is simply relationship building, and I already do that in the military.

Networking is not a separate or additional “task” — I can incorporate it into my daily interactions by being more deliberate about sharing my upcoming transition.

Networking does not always take place in a formal setting, such as a job fair, I can network at the gym, at social gatherings, and online.

People like to feel useful, so asking for information, a point of contact or otherwise, is likely more awkward for me, than it is for the person being asked. After all, it’s not like I am asking for a job, and I would be willing to help someone when positions are reversed.

When I go to a formal networking event, instead of being overwhelmed by the number of people, I will set a goal to meet two to three new contacts with whom I will follow up (coffee, phone call, email, LinkedIn).



### GET ANSWERS

Have questions? Contact MOAA’s health care, financial education, and military/veterans benefits experts at [beninfo@moaa.org](mailto:beninfo@moaa.org).

brief professional biography that details your background, skills, education, and experience.

Before leaving the informational interview, ask whether he or she can refer you to someone else in the field. And don’t forget to formally thank the person who grants you an informational interview.

Typical questions to ask during your informational interview:

- How can I get into this field?
- What skills, functions, or certifications are required for this type of work?
- What professional organizations are critical to join?
- What does a typical career path look like in this field?
- What is the general salary range for someone with my background and skills?

- What should I emphasize in my résumé?
  - What best practices would you recommend I follow?
  - What major challenges or opportunities does the industry (or organization) face?
    - Informational interview best practices include:
      - Give thanks, and show appreciation.
      - Respect each contact's time.
      - Thoroughly research the organization and the individual with whom you plan to meet.
      - Ask questions based on your advanced research.
      - Listen, take notes, evaluate, and act on the information collected.
      - Keep confidences.
      - Ask for new referrals every time you make a contact.
      - Don't delay in contacting a referral you have received.
      - Keep a contact meeting system to track the value of the contact, activity, and any follow-up action required.
      - Never use a contact as a reference to another contact without permission.
- Finally, develop a system or method (i.e., a network tracker) to keep track of your networking connections and interactions.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

The third essential aspect of self-marketing is social media. Websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and X (previously known as Twitter) have dramatically and significantly changed the way job searches are conducted today. To be effective, you must have a digital persona online that can be readily seen by prospective employers.

Social media allows you to find people and for people to find you. More and more companies are using social media channels to find and hire talent. They also post positions on popular sites, so follow companies to stay informed of the latest opportunities.

In today's increasingly virtual world, greater and greater percentages of employers use social media to screen potential hires, and according to Betterteam, nearly 95% of recruiters use social media to post and promote job openings.

### 10 TIPS FOR DEALING WITH NETWORKING CONTACTS

1. Don't delay in contacting a referral you have received.
2. Thoroughly research the organization and the individual with whom you plan to meet.
3. Ask questions based on your research.
4. Listen, take notes, evaluate, and act on the information collected.
5. Keep contact meeting system to track the value of the contact, activity, and any follow-up action required.
6. Ask for new referrals every time you make contact.
7. Respect each contact's time.
8. Never use a contact as a reference to another contact without permission.
9. Keep confidences.
10. Give thanks, and show appreciation.

Social media allows you to find people and for people to find you.



Connect with us on LinkedIn:  
[www.moaa.org/linkedin](http://www.moaa.org/linkedin)

### Creating your social media image

Always be cognizant of your professional appearance. Before posting a picture or comment, ask yourself, "Would I want a potential employer to see this?" Refrain from anything that doesn't portray you in a positive light, including, but not limited to, excessive partying, overly strong political views, negative experiences, and complaining rants.

Also be vigilant about being "tagged" on Facebook. If you are tagged in a photo, it means there is a photo of you with your name on it and anyone who looks at the photo will see your name. This can be problematic if the photo reflects unprofessional (or illegal) activities or language, even if you were not directly involved. Instead, show aspects about who you are that reflects your brand and helps you stand out in a positive way in a prospective employer's mind, such as membership in professional organizations and affiliations, social groups, alumni networks, and appropriate community interests.

Check your digital footprint. See what comes up when you Google yourself. Your prospective employer will Google you, and you should know what they are likely to see. If it's negative information, try to remove it or have it removed. If it can't be removed, be prepared to defend it. Alternatively, if nothing about you comes up, you know you have some work to do to increase your online presence, and to promote your brand.

Finally, beware of negative images or posts from people with a similar name as yours. You don't want to be associated with their bad choices.

### LinkedIn

LinkedIn, the most popular business/professional networking site in the world, has facilitated millions of business introductions. Employers increasingly are looking to LinkedIn to find the talent they need. Because of the impact it has had on the job-search landscape, a robust LinkedIn profile is imperative.


LinkedIn is:

- Your business network
- Based on the concept of six degrees of separation (LinkedIn is three degrees)
- A job-, people-, and company-search resource

LinkedIn is not:

- A replacement for face-to-face interaction
- Something you can ignore
- A social networking site — be professional in the content of your profile
- A substitute contact-management system

Ensure your LinkedIn profile is optimized for communicating your talents, abilities, and skill set. Ensure your LinkedIn profile is structured correctly and that it leaves the reader with an accurate overall impression of you and what you have to offer. This is your "personal brand," and your LinkedIn content is a very effective way of conveying your brand to visitors who are perusing your profile. Be sure to include your customized LinkedIn Public Profile URL with the other contact information on your résumé and business cards.

Seek a wide array of connections in a variety of industries and management levels to maximize the usefulness of your LinkedIn profile. Think about your overall philosophy for accepting connection requests. Look at profiles before accepting connection requests to learn more about the individual making the request; determine common professional interests that may facilitate mutual networking benefits. For example, one approach might be to accept connections from those who have served in the military or who went to the same school as you. 

## Tips to Enhance Your LinkedIn Profile

The following tips can help improve your profile on LinkedIn, which can be a valuable tool as you navigate your job search.

- Customize your public profile URL to your name to optimize search engine visibility (for example: [www.linkedin.com/in/jacarmann](http://www.linkedin.com/in/jacarmann)).
- Ensure key words, achievements, core skills, and industry experience are explained in the summary and skills areas of your profile.



- Ensure you have a professional picture with a neutral background in which you are wearing professional attire and smiling — taking a photo of yourself and uploading it is preferable to having no photo at all.
- Personalize connection requests by initiating a request from the dialogue box on the contact's profile page, and include a line or two

about why you want to connect with them, such as shared background, schooling, networking event, or professional interests.

- Join groups to increase the reach of your network and to connect with current, former, and potential future colleagues — even minimal participation in group discussion threads gets your name and face recognized in your professional areas of interest and raises your profile in search results (the search algorithm is biased toward those who are active on the site, and it is keyword based)
- Hiring managers and recruiters see three indications of behavior on LinkedIn: "more likely to respond" if active within the past 30 days; "open to opportunities" if that button is turned on; and "engaged with talent brand" if the individual is following the company on their profile.



### LINKEDIN PROFILE REVIEW

Premium and Life members, get expert help to develop your LinkedIn profile. Go to [www.moaa.org/career](http://www.moaa.org/career) for details.

**Sean Shanahan** runs the LinkedIn photo booth, above, at MOAA's networking event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., Oct. 4, 2023.





# Mastering Your Résumé

Many people think their résumé will get them a job. That is simply not necessarily true. Your résumé might get you an interview, which is where you then “seal the deal.” Your résumé reflects your capabilities, experiences, and accomplishments. However, it is not a biography and therefore should not include every wonderful thing you’ve done. You must be succinct and help ensure it is read. Writing your initial résumé might seem intimidating and/or uncomfortable — that’s totally normal. So, relax and have some fun with it. The three cardinal rules for résumés are: 1) Focus on the needs of the employer. 2) Demonstrate your accomplishments/impact through quantifiable and qualitative metrics. 3) Ensure its readability.

The recruiter has a position to fill and will be assessing your qualifications from that perspective. With that in mind, clearly connect the dots between the job need and your ability to fill it by tailoring your résumé specifically to what is relevant to the role versus everything you can do or have done. (Yes, you can — and should — leave

**Jai Salters** from ACT Now Education and Capt. Pat Williams, USN (Ret), MOAA’s program director for engagement and career transition services, conduct résumé reviews (above) at the MOAA networking event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., Oct. 4, 2023.

things out of your résumé.)

Impact speaks to how well you performed in a role versus what you did. This is how you distinguish yourself from your peers who may have a similar military career and could be competing for the same job. For example, you might have been rotated into a role in which you relieved someone early because of a negative performance issue. The role description would read similarly, but the impacts (accomplishments/results) would be vastly different. So, while the scope of responsibilities (what you did) is important for context and should be briefly included, the most effective résumé will emphasize impact through qualitative and/or quantitative metrics to prove how you could add value to an organization.

The third important aspect of a résumé is readability, which is simply the ease with which one can scan and find information, such as competencies, type of role, longevity, organization, and so on. Why? Recruiters spend between six to seven seconds reading résumés. Yes, seconds, not minutes. So make it easy for the reader. Elements

## RÉSUMÉ BEST PRACTICES

It is critical to keep the potential employer’s needs foremost in mind as you prepare your résumé. Consider the following tips.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep private-sector résumés to no more than two pages</li> <li>• Eliminate pronouns (e.g., I, me, my, our, etc.)</li> <li>• Write in the past tense, except for your current or most recent position</li> <li>• Keep it simple, and avoid fancy fonts and symbols</li> <li>• Use industry-specific key words found in the job announcement</li> <li>• Focus on accomplishment-based bullets versus job descriptions</li> <li>• Include only the past 10 to 12 years of your professional work history or experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italicize words or use special texts or elaborate fonts</li> <li>• Use a font size smaller than 11 or 12 points</li> <li>• Use graphics or art</li> <li>• Include references with your résumé</li> <li>• Pay anyone to prepare your résumé. You have the ability to do it, and you must be able to defend the contents in an interview</li> </ul>

that enhance readability include the strategic use of symbols, such as \$ and %, and abbreviating \$10 million to \$10M; end lines at varying lengths to increase “white space”; and use of bold font for each role or function being described.

## RÉSUMÉ TYPES AND STYLES

When it comes to résumés, one size does not fit all. Different kinds and styles are used based on the situation. There are two general types of résumés:

**Networking:** Usually, a broad-based document to socialize with your network or for a career fair that is written in language any reader can understand and highlights initiatives, accomplishments/results, and performance.

**Job-Specific:** Focuses on the needs of an employer as outlined in the job description and is tailored to reflect desired skills in the job description. Use language from the job announcement to demonstrate specific results, impacts, and accomplishments to prove how you can add value to the organization.

Next, consider the style you want to use. There are three styles of résumés.

### Chronological:

- Starts with the most recent job and works backward through the past 10 to 12 years of your career
- Can be used when past experiences and accomplishments match or are directly related to the type of job you are seeking
- Demonstrates a track record of progressively more responsibility
- Use a similar version of your private-sector résumé when applying to federal government jobs

### Functional:

- Showcases a wide variety of skills and experiences that fully support your job and career objectives
- Cites experiences and accomplishments in specific functional areas for skills that are critical to a specific job or industry
- Used when contemplating a major career change and you want to highlight relevant skills but downplay previous position titles or employers
- Used when seeking to return to a function or skill set you employed early in your career; experience that would be lost in a chronological format
- If taking this approach due to a gap in employment or career pivot, consider the hybrid/combo style below

### Hybrid/Combination (combines aspects of both the chronological and the functional styles):

- Lists specific accomplishments and where they were achieved on the first page of the résumé, immediately preceding the employment history
- First two-thirds of the résumé is written in the functional style and the last one-third includes a short chronology of the professional work experience, starting with the most recent position and working backward, emphasizing your most recent and relevant work experience (i.e., the past 10 to 12 years)
- Can be helpful for reservists who want to reflect both military and civilian experiences in a cohesive yet distinct way



### RÉSUMÉ REVIEW

Premium and Life members can get an expert review of their private sector résumé. Go to [www.moaa.org/resume-reviews](http://www.moaa.org/resume-reviews) for details.

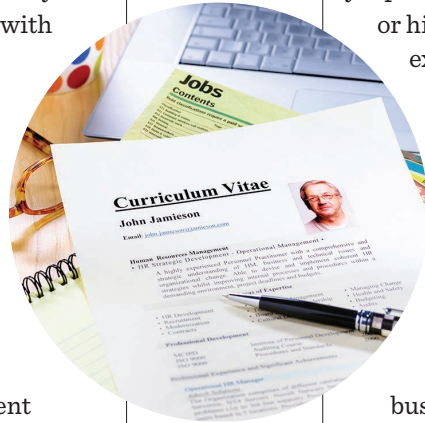
### RÉSUMÉ BASIC PARTS

Every résumé should contain these basic parts:

- Your identification, including name, email, phone number, customized LinkedIn public profile URL, and metropolitan area or city and state (not your personal address)
- Overarching summary that includes what you want to do (by role or by industry, along with your professional qualifications)
- Key competencies, certifications, and licenses, as applicable
- Clearance level (for federal résumés or defense-related positions or jobs requiring it)
- Professional experience (role, organization, location, time frame, and three to four bullets that include results/metrics: the “so what”)
- Education and professional development (do not indicate year awarded)

### CURRICULUM VITAE (CV)

Résumés and CVs generally contain the same information. However, CVs are longer in length, much more detailed, and include information about research performed, articles and books written or published, presentations made, along with honors and awards received. CVs commonly are used in academia, particularly by those seeking or holding faculty positions, as well as the



medical profession, research positions, and other unique or specialized professions. Consult your network for best practices in your targeted area.

### COVER LETTERS

The cover letter is an opportunity to personally, yet professionally, connect with the recruiter or hiring manager. It is a chance to concisely explain why you are a good fit for the role by connecting the dots between the employer’s needs (from the position description) and your qualifications. Remember, the résumé will get between six to seven seconds of review, while the cover letter will likely be read in its entirety. So don’t miss the opportunity to make a great impression. A cover letter should be in standard

business letter format. When able, address it to the hiring manager by name. Include the following:

- The title of the position you are applying for, and any personal reference, if someone from the company told you about the role (“XYZ personal reference, who referred me to apply to the position, indicated this position entails ...”)
- How your experience is relevant: Connect your skills, experiences, and education to the job requirements
- How you can contribute to the organization

## Working With Recruiters

Companies pay recruiters to help fill vacancies with available talent. They can be effective in connecting you with a company that would be a good fit for you. It is important to keep a couple of key points in mind when working with recruiters. In most cases, there should not be a fee associated with using a recruiter. Recruiters and recruiting firms are paid by the companies who hire them, not by you, so their allegiance and best interests lie with who is paying them. You are viewed as a

*The better you know your recruiter ... the better he or she will present you as a candidate.*

commodity passing through their system and are treated accordingly.

When recruiters need someone with your background, education, and experience to fill a vacancy at a company they represent, they will be able to accommodate you. If they do not have a requirement for the skills you possess, they will feel little need to devote much time to you and likely will not be overly responsive when you contact them.

Nevertheless, if you feel like you are spinning your wheels in your job search, then seeking the services of a recruiting firm might be a way to jump-start your efforts.

• Demonstrate your enthusiasm and state you are looking forward to interviewing with the organization

- Thank the reader for his or her consideration
- Provide your contact information

Additionally, do not repeat your résumé in the narrative and keep your cover letter short and focused.

For federal jobs, do not send a cover letter unless the job announcement asks for one.

### REFERENCES

References are an important part of the job-search process and, because they are needed at the end of the interview cycle, can sometimes be an afterthought until requested by an employer. To avoid this situation, consider the following tips to help manage your references:

- Carefully select four to six professional references.
- As a professional courtesy, ensure you obtain permission to use them as references.
- Prepare your references to best represent you by giving them a copy of your résumé and asking for résumé feedback.
- Keep them informed of your job-search progress.
- Have your reference list ready to present when requested.
- Always keep contact information updated.
- Don’t list references on your résumé. ❌

### Types of recruiters

#### • Contingency

- Receive their fee upon placement
- Typically handle salaries up to \$150,000
- Job opportunities usually are not exclusive
- Normally have a “bench” of many candidates they present for each position

#### • Retained

- Paid as “in-house” recruiters by the employer
- Typically handle salaries above \$150,000
- Usually market exclusive job opportunities
- Present a smaller, more targeted number of candidates for a given position (about three to seven)



### FEDJOBS WEBINAR

Watch our webinar “Top 10 Tips for Finding a Federal Job,” and go to [www.moaa.org/fedjobs](http://www.moaa.org/fedjobs) to see our other federal job resources.

## Federal Résumés

The federal job-selection process is governed by the Office of Personnel Management. The most common way to access federal employment opportunities is via the USAJOBS.gov portal ([www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov)).

When seeking federal employment, have a targeted position in mind as well as a job-specific, tailored résumé. Use the résumé builder on USAJOBS.gov to help ensure your résumé is in the proper federal format. Keep in mind, federal résumés might be several pages in length as opposed to the two pages typical in the private sector. Use a chronological style, and include your supervisor’s name and contact information and your salary history — this demonstrates you have the right level of experience and grade.



The federal job-search process can be complex. Most military installations offer classes on federal résumé writing and the federal job-search process.

When working with recruiters, maintain control of your résumé. Your agreement should state that the contingency recruiter or firm cannot send your résumé anywhere without your permission. Also determine the recruiter’s relationship with the client organization. If the relationship isn’t good, that might affect how the company looks at you as a desirable candidate. Finally, get to know your recruiter. The better you know your recruiter, in a personal relationship, the better he or she will present you as a candidate to a prospective company.



# Career Fairs and Networking Events

Career fairs and formal networking events provide opportunities to expand your network of contacts and practice interacting with potential employers. They also allow you to collect additional information and research about your chosen career or industry. So be prepared. Treat them like a formal interview, and brush-up on interview techniques in advance of the event. For more information about networking events and career fairs, go to [www.moaa.org/career](http://www.moaa.org/career).

## Before the event:

- Set a goal by defining your objective for the event (e.g., meet with six employers or obtain one interview).
- Consider the event forum, and dress appropriately.
- Bring your résumé and business cards.
- Refine/rehearse your elevator pitch so that it comes across authentically and naturally.
- If known, research target employers using the

**Lt. Col. Michael Armistead, USMC (Ret), Director of Communications, Marine Corps Association, above, speaks at the Network for Career Success with MOAA networking event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., Oct. 4, 2023.**

Internet and traditional publications to find out what each entity does, where it is located, its mission, and satellite businesses.

- Prioritize companies, as you might not have time to meet with them all. (Hint: If you are nervous, consider beginning with a company that has a lower priority than your top three so you can rehearse, refine, and gain confidence before engaging with those that are your top choices.)
- Review posted career opportunities, and apply for positions that are a potential match.
- Develop a list of questions to ask, including:
  - What types of positions are you looking to fill?
  - How would you characterize your ideal candidate?
  - How would you describe your corporate culture?
  - What competitors most concern you?
  - What do you like best about working here?
  - What are the hiring manager's expectations for the first six months?

## During the event:

- Be confident and professional when introducing yourself (use your elevator pitch).
- Build rapport through connections and by asking questions.
- Be a good listener. Let the person respond — strive for balanced conversation.
- Maintain eye contact.
- When/if appropriate, present your networking résumé (without a cover letter) and trade business cards.

## After the event:

- Follow up within 24 to 48 hours with a personalized email thanking the person for their time, the opportunity to connect, and follow-up items per event conversation.
- Update your network tracker with next steps and context of meeting, including any additional notes or lessons learned.

## General tips:

- Don't ignore less well-known or privately held employers. Talk to everyone, as time permits.
- Be prepared to ask questions.
- Focus on the employer's needs.
- Be sure to smile and be comfortable.
- Remember to thank them.
- Give the job candidate ahead of you the courtesy of a private conversation with the recruiter. IIII

## Virtual Fairs

Nowadays, virtual career fairs have become increasingly common for a variety of reasons. They are a great way to get started on a job search from anywhere in the world, even while deployed. When attending in a virtual format, do not wear your military uniform as it could be distracting or make it difficult for the prospective employer to imagine you as part of the team. Ensure your lighting is adequate and the video and audio are sufficient, verify the camera angle on your device, do your best to have a neutral background, and avoid distractions.



## MOAA Event Makes Career Connections

Hundreds of transitioning servicemembers, veterans, and military spouses attended MOAA's Network for Career Success event at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., Oct. 4, 2023, in search of connections and support.



Participants mingled with employers, job coaches, and MOAA leaders and staff. As MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret), said in his welcoming address (pictured above, bottom right): "Networking is the key to your success, so make sure you take advantage of that. You will likely land your next job through networking relationships."

Don't miss this marquee event in 2024. Mark your calendars for Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024, at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va.



# Acing Your Interviews

The interview is a critical step toward achieving your goal of employment. A job is won or lost at the interview. That is why preparation is so important — as a military officer, you know how to prepare for complicated exercises and real-world events. You can and should be prepared for your interview.

An important fact to note: If you get the interview, you are at least minimally qualified for the job. Employers have determined you made the cut — now they want to determine your true interest in the role and if you are a good fit for the team and the greater organization.

Federal interviews are much like private-sector interviews except they tend to be more structured to help ensure impartiality in the selection process. Read about performance-based interviewing, a common federal interview technique, at [www.va.gov/pbi/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/pbi/index.asp).

## PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Regardless of whether the format is in-person or virtual, preparation is key to success. It all begins

Preparation is key to success. It all begins with doing your homework.

with doing your homework, including:

- Gather all the information and documents you might need for the interview, such as the position description and your résumé.
- Research the company using its website, LinkedIn, and Facebook pages.
- Review details of the job description, and be able to explain why you are a fit for the job and how your qualifications match the requirements of the job.
- Research the interviewers' backgrounds (via LinkedIn and Google).
- Have a copy of your résumé, your application, and company information on hand. Also have a calendar for scheduling a follow-up interview.
- Practice answering questions aloud — record yourself, look into the mirror, or practice with someone who has gone before you and can give constructive feedback.
- Do a full dress rehearsal. Put on the outfit you are going to wear, and make sure there are no issues and everything is ironed and fresh. Walk around, sit down, and stand in it, so there are no interview-day surprises.

• Prepare several questions to ask the interviewers that are not readily answerable in the public domain and that can help you better understand the employer's needs and demonstrate your level of interest in the position and organization. Consider the following:

- What do you like most about working here?
- In the first six months, what are the outcomes you are looking for from the successful candidate?
- What are the opportunities for growth over the next two to three years?
- Where has this department or division been the most successful or the most challenged?
- What competitors most concern you?
- What is the next step in the process? May I stay in touch?

## In-person preparation considerations

Review the route, and if able, do a drive-by around the same time you will be going on the day of your interview to understand traffic and parking availability. Be in the immediate area well in advance (parked in your car, take a walk, etc.), but arrive at the actual interview space no more than five to seven minutes before the scheduled time. Early arrivals can be as annoying as late arrivals.

Remember, you never know with whom you might cross paths en route to the interview, so be sure to be professional, pleasant, and courteous to all those you encounter from the time you leave your home.

## Virtual preparation considerations

Be in business mode — dress the part even if you are not going to be on camera. If you are going to be on camera, ensure you have a neutral background, adequate lighting, and a good camera angle and eliminate distractions. Be in the virtual waiting room five minutes early.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

Follow these best practices for a successful interview:

- Smile, even if you are not going to be on camera, as it shows through in your voice.

Be sure to be professional, pleasant, and courteous.

## Moving Past Rejection

Rejection might be a part of your job-search journey. It's completely normal and difficult if you choose to believe that it means: "I am not good enough" or "I am not qualified" or a hundred other self-deprecating thoughts. Instead, consider choosing to think about rejection as "this was not a good fit, and there is a better opportunity out there for me." This mindset will enable you to learn from your experience and continue to persevere in your job search from a place of confidence.

Whatever you do, do not take the rejection personally. After all, there might have been other factors influencing the selection process besides the strength of your résumé and/or the quality of your interview, such as an internal candidate or a strong networking connection. So, reflect on what you learned from the process and move on to the next opportunity. Regardless, here are a few tactics to help you rebound from this setback:



• Write a thoughtful "turn-down" letter to the employer thanking them for the opportunity to interview and expressing disappointment about not being selected for the position. You can also reaffirm your interest and ask permission to stay in touch for future opportunities.

• Be advised that because of legal constraints, a company is unlikely to share details about the reasons you were not selected. Instead, focus on being as prepared as possible for your next interview and ask mentors, friends, and colleagues for advice and feedback. MOAA's Transition Center offers free assistance and interview preparation for members. Email [transition@moaa.org](mailto:transition@moaa.org) to learn more.

• Recognize that many hiring managers are looking for an extremely close fit between the skills and experiences on a résumé and what is required as delineated in the job description.

• Continue to tailor your résumé so it closely matches job descriptions.

The bottom line is to stay focused and remain positive. Move on to the next interview with enthusiasm.

- Build rapport with the interviewer(s).
- Make eye contact. Many interviewers use eye contact to look for enthusiasm and sincerity. Be sure to look at all interviewers when there is more than one (i.e., panel interviews).
- Watch your posture while sitting and/or standing. Good posture helps you listen, demonstrates interest, helps project your voice, and exudes confidence (be careful not to appear overly confident or arrogant).
- Remember names and position titles.
- Strive for a more conversational tone and less testimony. Ideally, the discussion should be a 50-50 mix between you and the interviewer, so more of a comfortable conversation.
- Listen intently without interruption.
- Be sure to answer the question(s) asked, and be mindful of two-part questions.
- Use examples of your past achievements that are applicable to the organization/job.
- Keep answers to less than two minutes, but do not rush your words.
- If you need to “buy” time to form an answer, consider asking the person to clarify the question, or re-state it.
- Ask your prepared list of questions that were not

addressed during the interview.

As the interview comes to a close, do the following:

- Thank the interviewer(s) for the opportunity and their time.
- Let them know you are excited about the role.
- Ensure you understand next steps in the process.
- Get contact information.

#### In-person considerations

Chemistry and rapport are crucial factors in interviewing and are much easier to establish in person than virtually. You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make it a good one. To make a positive first impression, incorporate the following:

- Smile.
- Offer a firm, warm handshake (not the weak “limp fish” or the “bone crusher”).
- Look professional, confident, and competent.
- Keep body scent light, or don’t wear any (people can have negative associations or reactions to scents).
- If necessary, have mints, not gum, for fresh breath.

#### Phone considerations

Phone interviews can be challenging because you cannot read body language or have that face-to-face connection with the interviewer. Nonetheless, they are becoming one of the most prevalent types of interviews at all levels. Do the following:

- Be alert for multiple people on the call. Sometimes others jump in and join the conversation. It can be somewhat disorienting if you’re not expecting it, so be mindful.
- Posture affects voice clarity and quality. To optimize voice quality, consider standing at your desk during the phone interview.

#### Panel interview considerations

A group interview, with a small number of employees firing questions in rapid succession, can intimidate even a seasoned interviewer. However, panel interviews are quite common, so be prepared.

In addition to the obvious challenges of remembering the names and positions of the interviewers, you must accommodate a range of personalities and agendas. However, group interviews also present an opportunity to build alliances and connections with several panel members who later could be decisive in overcom-



A well-written thank you note ... is simply good etiquette.

ing resistance from other panel members regarding your candidacy.

Maintain eye contact with all panel members, and direct your answers to the entire group. Don’t assume organizational roles and authority based on age, gender, or race. In most group interviews, no single panel member can get you hired.

However, a no vote from any panel member can often eliminate you from further consideration.

#### AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It is imperative to send a thank-you letter promptly. A well-written thank-you note will help preserve future options with the company and is simply good etiquette. It is recommended you email a thank-you note the same day. You may also mail a handwritten letter.

The thank-you letter serves several purposes:

- It expresses your appreciation for the opportunity to interview.
- It can reinforce any points or clarify important issues that surfaced during the interview.
- It reinforces your interest in the position.
- It is short and focused and keeps you top-of-mind. 🏢

# Salary Offer Negotiation

In the realm of negotiating salary and benefits, knowledge is power. Do your salary homework before going to the negotiation table. Have a general idea of the salary range for a position before your interview and before starting to negotiate. This will prevent you from asking for too much or too little, both of which might remove you from consideration.

#### SALARY

Where do you find salary information? Use re-



sources from your installation’s transition office where you can access and read the Occupational Outlook Handbook, available online at [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh); trade and professional journals; The American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries; and the Jobs Rated Almanac.

Talk to friends and colleagues, consult your network, and schedule informational interviews. Remember, the informational interview is a great opportunity to ask, for example, how much a person with your skills and background could “expect” to earn in your desired industry.

Virtually everything is negotiable, and, if possible, try to have a written job offer in-hand

before talking salary specifics.

If the salary question is introduced early in your discussions with a company but no job offer has been made, the best ways to respond include:

**Defer.** “I’d be more comfortable discussing salary once I have a better understanding of the position.”

**Toss back.** “My range is probably more flexible than yours. What is the range you are considering for this position?”

**Respond with market information.** “Based on my research, I understand salaries are between \$X and \$Y for similar positions. Is this consistent with your salary range?”

Another option is to negotiate for an early performance review and to be considered for a pay increase if your work performance justifies a pay increase. A six-month period is typical; however, ask for longer if you have significant initial train-

# After Accepting a Job

Even after accepting a new role, your work is not done. Adhere to these basic best practices.

- Send thank-you notes to those who assisted you in your job search (coaches, mentors, references).
- Organize records and update contact information.
- Update your LinkedIn profile.
- Address personal transition decisions (e.g., health insurance, and 401(k)/Thrift Savings Plan transfer).
- Work at fitting in at your new organization by being true to yourself.
- Keep your résumé current.
- Periodically connect with members of your extended network.
- Maintain professional associations, certifications, and affiliations.
- Seek regular formal and informal feedback.

ing up front. Use this option carefully, and make sure you fully understand your job responsibilities beforehand and can meet expectations prior to your initial performance review.

### EVALUATING AN OFFER

When an offer is extended to you during the negotiation process, make sure you understand, evaluate, and negotiate (if necessary) the offer.

When you are operating at the executive level, things can get complicated quickly when discussing offers. The onus is on you to ensure you understand the details of any offer you receive. This should be part of your preparation for the job-search process.

Some questions to consider:

- Where will this put you in terms of your overall career strategy?
- What is the position title?
- What are the principal responsibilities?
- What are the key things you will be expected to accomplish?
- What resources will you have to do the job (people, money, material, time)?
- Where is the job located, and are there hybrid/remote work options?
- To whom will you report?
- What is that person's management style?
- How and when will your performance be evaluated?
- Where is this position within the organizational hierarchy?
- Who are your peers?
- How much travel is involved?
- With whom will you principally interact inside and outside of the organization?
- What skills are necessary to succeed in this position?

### NEGOTIATING BENEFITS

When negotiating for a position, do not focus solely on salary. Benefits are an important com-



ponent of the overall compensation package. There can be a considerable difference between the benefits and entitlements you have now and what a company will offer. Educate yourself on the differences, and ensure you are prepared to negotiate in a manner that best meets the needs of you and your family.

As you enter negotiations, think about medical benefits, retirement plans, 401(k) plan availability and employer match, life insurance, vacation, sick leave, perks, and incidentals.

Keep in mind, your offer letter normally will not contain any of the following negotiable items:

- Moving expenses
- Education
- Work schedule
- Entertainment
- Housing allowance
- Frequent flyer miles
- Telephone
- Hiring bonuses
- Office parking
- Transportation
- Start date
- Maternity/paternity leave
- Computers/tablets
- Wardrobe
- Office space
- Association fees
- Commissions
- Reporting relationships
- Gym membership
- Job title

It is up to you to determine one or two areas that are most important for you, then effectively convey them to the employer during the negotiation phase. Be advised that smaller companies typically have more flexibility in what they can offer than larger companies. Also, successful negotiation most often results from an in-person discussion with the recruiter or hiring manager.

### EVALUATING THE COMPENSATION PACKAGE

The salary negotiation process is not an adversarial one. Unlike other formal negotiations you

might have done, such as with cars or homes, this relationship will continue over your time with the company. Moreover, your conduct during the negotiation process will directly affect your relationship with your future employer. The employer wants you to be happy, but it is up to you to effectively articulate what will give you the greatest job (and personal) satisfaction.

Points to consider:

- Take time to evaluate the offer (about a week is common, and a “respond by” date will be included in the offer letter). Never accept an offer the same day it is presented. You owe it to yourself to consider the offer in a calm, neutral environment.
- Discuss benefits with your family, spouse, and/or partner to ensure your needs will be met.
- The company's human resources representative should be available and willing to discuss details of the benefits they offer as well as answer any benefits-related questions you might have.
- Look for opportunities to convert taxable income and expenses to pre-tax or tax-deferred dollars, such as with a flexible spending account or asking for a personal computer in lieu of a \$2,500 signing bonus.

Upon receiving the offer, your options will be to accept, decline, or negotiate. The initial offer normally will not specify benefits and perks. Employers expect you to renegotiate, so do so wisely, using information from your research and not from unverified sources. ||||

### SALARY RESOURCE

Log in at [www.moaa.org/transitionwebinars](http://www.moaa.org/transitionwebinars) to view the archived “Salary 101” webinar for more information. Other resources include:

[www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/acinet.aspx](http://www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/acinet.aspx)

[www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

[www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com)

[www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com)

[www.naceweb.org](http://www.naceweb.org)

[www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)

[www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com)

[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) (nonprofit salaries)

# Winning the First 90 Days

Congratulations, you got the job! Now what? What is your plan for the first 90 days? Making a positive first impression is especially important. Here are a few things to consider when starting your new position:

- **Observe and listen.** There might be similarities when comparing your new company with the military, but there will be some big differences, too. Try to keep in mind you are stepping into a new organization and culture, so it is important for you to figure out how to fit in.



Keep an open mind and observe how business is done in the company. Take notes, and ask questions.

- **Manage expectations.** It is particularly important to meet with your boss and understand his or her expectations. Identify one to two promising opportunities and focus on relentlessly translating them into wins. Ask questions, and be sure you have a firm handle on those expectations.

• **Effectively communicate.** Determine how your boss prefers to communicate (i.e., email, phone, face-to-face). Seek more frequent and informal feedback. Practice active listening, and avoid jumping in with your opinion or giving unsolicited advice.

• **Build relationships with colleagues.** Begin building relationships with seniors, juniors, peers, and key external constituents at your new company to help facilitate your assimilation into the company and the team.

• **Show enthusiasm for your new job and company.** Pitch in where you can, even if it is not a part of your job description. Pay it forward — help someone today; they might have an opportunity to help you later. ||||

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