



Build Your Brand

This series of short articles will help you with everything from resumes to interviewing. Companies work hard to establish their brands, and you should do the same. What's your brand? You're a highly trained individual who has gained a special set of skills while courageously serving our country, skills that are valuable to a civilian employer. Every conversation, every exchange, every opportunity to present yourself in your job search should reinforce that brand. When employers always see you at your best, in your communications, in person and online, your chances of landing the job you really want will greatly improve. Think of these articles as your own personal branding kit.



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Create an effective resume and cover letter

These two tools are pivotal in achieving your main goal at this stage: getting an interview. And remember, it's not just what you say, but how you say it.

With a resume, remember that first impressions are everything

This is your professional life on a sheet of paper. Make it look great. Keep it short. Print it on a quality piece of paper that feels good in your hand. Make sure it looks good on a computer screen. When it comes to the resume, the details are everything.

Speak hiring managers' language

One of the biggest challenges transitioning service members face is translating their military experience into language that civilian hiring managers can understand. You can find help with this online, with sites like resumeengine.org that feature skills translators. All you have to do is input your military job code, and the translator uses HR-friendly language and keywords to describe your duties and responsibilities while in the service. Years of living with highly specialized military talk and acronyms often results in veterans speaking a language an employer may not understand. So it's important to use terms and descriptions that they use to make them fully appreciate your experience and skill levels.

Customize it based on your audience

The goal of your resume is to get someone interested enough to bring you in for an interview. So what should you put in your resume to get there? The first rule is to know your audience. Sniper school may be relevant only if you're applying for an FBI job. Mention only what directly applies to your dream job. You will probably want to craft multiple versions of your resume that are specifically tailored to each different position you are seeking.

Include relevant accomplishments

It's not unusual for you to be reluctant to talk about your accomplishments in the military. You've been trained to be humble, to put others before yourself. But when you are looking for a job, you must be willing to speak up on your own behalf. You'll need to let employers know

what you have accomplished and what you are capable of doing for them. Suppose you received a medal for an innovative computer application that helped track down terrorist threats. If you're applying for an IT security job, not only should you mention the medal, but you also should describe how your outside-the-box thinking could help safeguard the employer.

Your DD 214 can be considered your military resume. You can look to it as a source of information about your work history, skills, education and recognitions. All these categories belong in an effective resume. They will have to be translated into civilian language, of course.

Ask others to read it

As we've discussed above, military jargon and acronyms will make civilians' eyes glaze over. It's a great idea to ask civilian friends and family members to give your resume a once-over. If you know someone in the career field you are trying to break into, having them read your resume would be a huge benefit. If they don't understand something, change it. Finally, have someone proofread it for typos and other errors.

Make everything easy for the employer

If you work in a field where it's necessary to show the employer a portfolio of your work, make those materials as accessible as possible: In your resume, include a link to a site where a company can easily view it.

Emphasize all the qualities that the military ingrained in you

It's not just about degrees; employers want people with integrity, poise, strong communication skills, adaptability, leadership ability and a can-do attitude. All of those traits and more are attributes you possess that were strengthened through your military experience. Teamwork, accountability, efficiency and diversity are values that both the military and U.S. companies demand.



Military terms and their civilian translations

combat = hazardous conditions

company = company, department or section

medal = award

military personnel office = human resources

mission = task/function/objective

Military Occupational Specialty classification = career specialty

squad/platoon = team or section

reconnaissance = data collection and analysis

regulations = policy or guidelines

security clearance = security clearance

service members = employees

subordinates = employees

TAD/TDY = business trip

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Make the cover letter personal

In addition to being an introduction for you and your attached resume, a cover letter is your chance to establish a personal connection with the employer. Show you've done your research and offer specifics about how your military service makes you a valuable asset to their business. Do not create a one-size-fits-all cover letter. Each employer should receive a letter written just for them.

A good cover letter has three parts, and each is critical to its success

Intro

Start your letter with the reason you're applying. It's not enough to state your name and where you found the listing. Also, both you and the hiring manager know who connected you. Mentioning that will quickly give you more credibility. Explain why the position intrigues you, followed by a short explanation of how a particular military skill, experience or training makes you a strong candidate. But don't go overboard with adjectives in describing your skills or in praising the company; too much can seem insincere or exaggerated.

Body

Tell the employer why you like the company and try to work in an interesting fact that you found in your research. Then explain what you bring to the table to boost the bottom line and/or overall mission of the company. Be careful not to simply restate your resume. Instead, tell a story that's not on your resume about what brings you to this company or about who you are. Remember to avoid military jargon and acronyms. In the plainest possible language, talk about how your experience as a veteran makes you qualified for the position. And consider tailoring this so that it specifically addresses the needs that are cited in the job description.

Conclusion

At the end of your letter, ask if you can interview with them. Suggest a method for contacting you and let them know you are available at their convenience. Summarize your qualifications and how you will benefit the company, then thank the reader for their consideration.



Resume checklist

- Highlight the qualities you sharpened in the military
- Translate military experience into civilian language
- Customize it to the audience
- Be selective about accomplishments
- Check for spelling and grammatical errors
- Ask someone you know to read it for suggestions or possible errors
- Make sure the formatting is consistent throughout (fonts, bold headings, bullet points, indentations, etc.)
- Make sure your name, home address, phone number and email address are at the top



Advice for marketing yourself online

Learn to effectively establish a reputation, promote your professional accomplishments and make your skills more visible for employers to see. Here are five tips for getting started.



Manage your social media presence

Get things started by cleaning up your Facebook and Twitter accounts. What does “clean up” mean? More and more employers are turning to social media to see what they can learn about prospective employees. They are looking for things you did not put on your resume. They are looking to see who you really are when your guard is down. So be careful about what you post, and be mindful of what you say to others. The best way to do this is to ask yourself this before posting: Would you say this in person? If the answer is no, then it’s probably a bad idea to post online.



Pick your strategy

Just as social media can cause problems if handled poorly, it can be extremely effective when done correctly. It’s free, and everybody uses it these days. But don’t stop there. Get creative. Blogs, vlogs, podcasts, websites, discussion posts and videos are all ways to increase visibility and promote yourself in your field. Another great tactic is to link all your content together. If you write a new blog post, promote it on your social media outlets. Or link one of your videos to your blog site. Develop a consistent message about who you are and what you know, and get it out there.



Remember: You’re a brand

Creating a memorable message, gaining impressions and building a connection with your target audience makes for effective branding. It’s what companies like Coke, Ford and UPS do, and even though it may seem strange to think of yourself this way, it’s what you should be doing online for yourself. You want to establish strong, positive associations with your name. So consider how you want to present yourself and your professional expertise. Then guard your brand online as if your career depends upon it. When you do it right, you can set yourself apart from your peers, give yourself credibility and make lasting impressions. One key: It’s important to keep your content current. You don’t want people losing interest after all that hard work you’ve done to create your brand.



Create a profile on LinkedIn

The career networking website **linkedin.com** now connects more than 300 million users across more than 200 countries and territories. Civilian hiring managers rely on the site to look for qualified job candidates, and the site makes it easier for employers to find you. You can build online connections with your military contacts, who can give you recommendations or information on opportunities they know about in your field. That can give you the edge you need to get your foot in the door and secure an interview. But overall, in addition to being an effective networking tool, a LinkedIn profile is a highly visible platform for you to define and present yourself.



Network with others in your profession

After devoting time to building your online presence—including making sure your LinkedIn profile is up-to-date and that it highlights your service and service-related attributes—you will likely discover that many other professionals have done the same. Don’t be afraid to network with them. Go to sites that professionals in your field tend to frequent. For example, if you are a videographer, you will want to have a large presence on YouTube. Follow others in your field whose work you admire. Stay current on new topics and trends and discuss them on your platforms. Become a thought leader in your chosen field. Remember to keep your communications professional. Discussion boards are littered with comments that people regret having posted.

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Getting the word out: networking essentials

When it comes to networking, be bold, be thorough and be positive. The good news is that, as a member of the military community, you're already way ahead of the game.

Start with who you know

Your friends, family and neighbors can be valuable for leads, so make sure they know you're looking. Tell everyone you know and see on a regular basis, and don't hesitate to bring it up more than once. Be specific with what you're looking for and chase every lead. If you're in the Reserve or National Guard, tell your chain of command and find your state's employment assistance office. If you're coming off active duty, visit your post's Transition Assistance office often.

Put the net in networking

Spend a few hours connecting with your former co-workers and bosses on social media sites. Ask a few people to write a recommendation for your LinkedIn ([linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)) page. When you send out your resume, some companies will turn to LinkedIn to check out your work history. A glowing recommendation will help you land an interview. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is current and includes a professional-looking photo.

There are more ways LinkedIn can help you effectively network. You have the opportunity to join special interest groups. There are hundreds of these groups related to veterans. They include groups for specific states and cities, or for your branch of service, or for the installations where you were stationed. There are groups for organizations that exist solely to help veterans find jobs. Hiring Our Heroes, for example, has over 22,000 members. That's 22,000 opportunities to network with that one group alone. Join a few of these veterans groups, and don't be afraid to post messages with questions. Veterans love helping other veterans.

Using LinkedIn will not only open more doors for you, it will also let you scout potential employers. In addition, LinkedIn also has special services for job seekers. Some are premium services that require a small monthly fee, but it could end up being money well spent if it fits into your budget.

Social media sites can be another great way to get the word out. If you already have profiles on Facebook and Twitter, focus on perfecting them. You want to clean up your profiles and info, remove unseemly pictures and tailor your tweets and comments to industry-related topics as much as possible. You want potential employers to see you at your best.

Do your research

Don't just sit back and wait for potential employers to find you. Go after them. On social media sites, follow companies you would like to work for. When you find the names of people who work at these companies, follow them as well. Reach out by "liking" their posts or replying to their status updates. Make a note of what the company and its employees are writing about and the tone of their messages. You can learn a lot about a company's culture by not only what they say, but how they say it. This era of social media has given job seekers an unprecedented look inside. It's often called transparency, or telling a company's story. It's all great information for anyone looking for jobs.

Make a short list of companies you are interested in, and take time to read through their website. Check out their competitors' sites as well. There are industry groups you may be able to join even if you are not currently employed in that industry.

Try to turn the contacts you make online into real-life interactions. Nothing takes the place of an in-person, face-to-face meeting. Work to get as many of these meetings as you can, even if they say a position is not currently available. If that's the case, try to get the names of more people you can talk to. Everyone has been in your position at one time or another. If you are polite and positive, you'll be surprised how many people will be willing to help you along.

Keep a notebook with you at all times. When you learn things in a meeting or on a phone call, write down what you discovered while it's still fresh in your mind.

Help others, and they'll help you

The best networkers aren't just takers—they're givers too. Find ways to help others, using whatever you have to offer. This instinct often comes naturally to veterans who have spent the past several years in service to others. As you've no doubt learned while serving, the more you give, the more likely you are to receive. All your strengths and skills can be put to work networking. It doesn't have to be just handshaking and smiles. Networking, when done right, can be a meaningful and productive experience for all involved. The key is remembering that you're trying to build relationships.

Be active to open more doors

Get out there and do things. Coach a sports team. Volunteer at a community organization or charity. Not only will this keep you sane during your job search, but every time you get out and meet people, you'll be expanding your network.

Practice

Think of networking as a military skill that needs repetition—you need to develop the muscle memory. Try to do at least one thing every day that involves networking. Reconnect with a former colleague or mentor. Start a conversation with someone new. Show an interest in other people. Ask for advice. The more effort you put into building relationships, the better you'll get.

Follow up

From the business card you got at a military job fair to the name you got from that friend of a friend, the key to successful networking is hard work. That means requesting an in-person meeting when possible. Use phone calls as a backup, and use emails only when absolutely necessary.

Learn more at www.upsjobs.com/military



Make the most of professional recruiters

Your military career might have started the day you sat down to talk with a recruiter. Now, your civilian career just might begin that way as well. Here's some advice on how to make it happen.



Polish your resume

You want to be ready when a recruiter calls. Take a good look at your military career, including your job skills and responsibilities, your education and professional training, and your accomplishments. Be sure when you write your resume that you are using language a civilian recruiter can understand. (Consider using the Resume Engine tool by Hiring Our Heroes that will create such a resume for you for free: resumeengine.org.) Give them what they need to effectively shop you around. Show your resume to a friend or family member who doesn't have a military background. If they don't understand it, keep working.



Define your career goals

There's a good chance that as you transition into civilian life, you won't necessarily want to do the same thing you did in the military. You need to do a little research to make sure you understand what career opportunities are available and how they may or may not match the skills you developed in the military. Once you identify a job you are interested in, a recruiter can help you understand what the career path looks like and what experience is needed to qualify. They can make you aware of any training available and connect you with the right opportunities.



Get LinkedIn

If you're not a member of LinkedIn (linkedin.com), sign up now. It can be a powerful online tool for job seekers in many ways, including finding and interacting with recruiters. You can join groups of veterans, you can follow companies you are interested in working for, and generally you can build a growing network of professional contacts. When you come across a recruiter you think may be able to help with your job search, you can reach out to them on LinkedIn. Don't be reserved. You may not feel comfortable at first networking on your own behalf, but now's the time to "toot your own horn" a bit. Remember, recruiters are there to find people to fill available positions. By working to get noticed, you're actually helping them do their jobs.

To help veterans with their job searches, LinkedIn has created a Veteran Mentor Network (VMN) Group where you can discuss your transition and career plans in a community of veterans. You can also view tips for veterans on how to most effectively use LinkedIn's services, including LinkedIn's advanced job search tools. You can get started at veterans.linkedin.com.



Attend career fairs

There's nothing more effective than a face-to-face meeting, and you have a great opportunity to spend time with recruiters at career fairs. You're probably aware that recruiters regularly attend fairs on military installations. Recruiters also attend fairs that are held by organizations that support specific occupations and groups—for instance, the National Association of Safety Professionals. Be sure you're prepared with copies of your resume, plus pens and paper to take notes and write down contact info. Get a fresh haircut before the event, and dress professionally. First impressions are critical.



Prepare your elevator speech

When it comes to recruiters, your job is to show them how their company can leverage your skills. Explain what you want to do with your career. Be able to do this verbally, quickly and effectively. When you have this well practiced, you will do great talking with multiple recruiters at job fairs, and you'll never be taken by surprise when a recruiter calls. You'll be able to send short and effective emails in response to a recruiter's inquiry.



Search for recruiters online

Seek out recruiting firms in your desired industry. They are out there. And quick Google searches can turn up a long list of them. They are all in the business of helping veterans and will be happy to assist you at no cost. Individual companies often have their own recruiters, so be sure to visit the websites of companies you are interested in. Let everyone in your Facebook and Twitter networks know you are actively looking for career opportunities. It may turn out that you are your best recruiter.

Learn more at www.UPSjobs.com/military



How to get ready for a career fair

To make the most of your face time with potential employers, have a plan of attack



Choose the right fair

Every state has job fairs throughout the year. Some fairs target specific groups, such as recent college grads, veterans or active duty military. Make sure you find the right fair for you. Job fairs that target the military are usually sponsored by either nonprofit groups or government agencies. That's good news for you because those sponsors are actively trying to get you a job. Browse the Web for job fairs in your area, keeping in mind that you may have to travel.



Gather intel

Treat a career fair like a mission. Develop a strategic plan, identifying which companies you want to target, and then gather as much information about those companies as you can. Career fairs usually have a website for job seekers and employers to register. Browse the list of companies that plan to attend and see what interests you, then gather research about each one. Check out various websites such as glassdoor.com to find reviews about the culture at the companies, though keep in mind that they each represent individual perspectives. Visit the companies' websites or search online for recent news. Find out as much as you can—their mission statements, any recent work or awards, the number of employees, etc. At the fair, show the employers you have done your homework. Have a few good questions ready. This shows you are dedicated and committed to the company, and that's extremely important to hiring managers.



Have your resume ready

Employers will expect to see your resume to review your experience and education, as well as to gather contact information. Prepare your resume by catering to the interests you discovered while doing research. If you're looking at multiple job fields, be sure to make different versions of your resume. Also, make sure your resume is up-to-date, and take a few copies for every employer who you plan to visit at the fair. Ask for a business card after giving a resume to a potential employer so you can follow up with a phone call or email. And bring supplies such as pens, a notebook or a smartphone. You don't want to have to ask an employer for something to write with.



Dress to impress

First impressions are key, so try to look the part. Neatness and good hygiene are a must. It seems obvious, but you'll be surprised by what you see when you look around at job seekers at a career fair. It's OK to overdress for a fair, but never underdress. Men: A neat haircut is just as important as what you wear. Try to wear a conservative suit and tie, a neutral dress shirt, dark socks, and dress shoes. Limit your jewelry to a watch. Also, go easy on the aftershave. Women: Try to wear a neat hairstyle and limited makeup. Aim to wear a conservative dress or suit, a coordinated blouse, light-colored leggings, and dress shoes. Some jewelry is OK, but don't overdo it.



Practice your speech

You'll impress potential employers by knowing what you plan to say before you say it. These employers will have a number of job candidates to speak with, so be short and get to the point. The elevator speech is one useful approach to say a lot in a limited amount of time—it's what you can communicate to someone during a short elevator ride. Your speech should mirror your resume. Summarize your career objective, experience, education and any other skills you may have. But the key is to be succinct. Give employers enough to spark their interest, but leave them wanting more. Leave them wanting to call you in for an interview. Practice, practice, practice your speech. Then practice it some more. Do it in front of family or friends until you're not at all embarrassed or hesitant. Practice until you can get through your speech with a relaxed smile on your face. Then you'll be ready for the career fair. Last thing: Be sure to show up early.

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Keys to a successful interview

By knowing the answers to these questions, you'll be prepared to stand out to a civilian employer

1. What should I wear?

It's a tricky question, because the answer is different depending on where you are interviewing. The best rule is to dress like the boss, which means a bit overdressed for the position you're seeking. In traditional offices, that means a suit. At an ad agency, it could mean pressed jeans, a tie and a jacket. Do some research online. You can often see pictures of employees at work on a company's website.

2. What should I bring?

Several hard copies of your resume, of course, but also materials related to major projects you've worked on, like training plans or budgets—anything that can reinforce your quality of work. Use the materials when appropriate. Even if you don't use them, just having them will show you've done your homework, and showing them to the interviewer will help that person better understand your military background. Last, be ready to ask the interviewer at least three questions.

3. Should I approach a civilian interview as I would a military board?

There are important differences. In a civilian interview, employers want to listen to you talk about your experiences, and from that, they will learn important things about how you approach your work and how you interact with others. You want to smile and engage with your interviewer. Being rigid and too brief with your answers will not help your cause. There are some similarities in the experience—you want to look people in the eye, answer honestly and stay "on" until you are well away from the room.

4. What should I avoid doing?

Try to talk in civilian terms, avoiding military speak. Avoid being too modest. Your military training may say otherwise, but in a civilian interview, you need to be ready to speak up for yourself. Talk about accomplishments, problems you solved, etc. An interview is a two-way exchange, so be engaging and enthusiastic, and

ask questions. Don't be overconfident and make the mistake of not preparing. Show them you have done your research and that you are taking the opportunity seriously.

5. What are good ways to talk about my military service?

What you know as military training, civilians recognize as professional certifications. Talk about specific skills you've developed, be they in information technology, logistics or engineering. All these translate into civilian needs. More battle-related experiences are better discussed as dealing with difficult circumstances, without going into too much detail. Speak in terms of being a problem-solver and be ready with some good examples. Discuss attributes such as leadership, teamwork and working with diverse groups of people, because these are all qualities that you've honed in your service, and they are valued in the civilian world.

Even if you're not a high-ranking officer, your service has given you management-type leadership skills and experience. You've been responsible for other personnel or equipment. You've influenced or improved processes. You've led projects. You've also already undergone training on performance reviews, counseling or corrective actions. You've been tested and found a way to use limited resources to achieve a goal. Emphasize all this.

6. What's the best way to handle questions about combat?

Civilian interviewers can be very curious about a topic like this. It's best that you don't answer with too many specifics. Instead, turn it into a positive. For example, if asked about combat, say "It taught me a lot about how well I can respond to challenging circumstances. I'm looking forward to putting that skill to work here."

7. Are there any other questions I should be prepared for?

Many interviewers like to ask what you think your weakness is—or some variation of that. So

come ready with an answer. If you're candid and explain what you have done to improve in that area, that will impress the interviewer. Also, have a story ready that illustrates that you've demonstrated leadership in a situation, or how you solved a problem.

8. I'm in the National Guard. What if they ask about missing work or future deployments?

It's a good idea to convey that you'll go above and beyond what is required in the position and that you understand you'll have to juggle your responsibilities with Guard duties. Assure the employer that you will provide your training schedule for the entire year ahead of time and will notify them of any changes to the schedule or an upcoming deployment as soon as you know, so they can plan accordingly. Then, explain to the interviewer that subordinates who will fill in for you will have career advantages others don't: Those colleagues will be trained by you to take on more responsibility, which helps create a deep reserve of talent for a company.

9. How can I tell if the company will be supportive?

You can ask how many service members the company hired last year and how many veterans work there overall. Does it have a page on its website devoted to hiring veterans? Those answers could give you insight into how experienced a firm it is in understanding vets. Also, read reviews about the company. Websites such as glassdoor.com provide anonymous ways for employees to describe a company's culture.

10. How else should I prepare?

Once you've done the necessary intel and you have your resume and other materials ready to go, then practice, practice, practice. Have someone you trust observe your mock interview and tell you how to improve. Then practice some more. Like any skill, interviewing is something you can learn and employ.

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