

Making the Leap:

A Crash Course for Veterans in
How to Land a Civilian Career



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For many of our nation's military members, the American Dream they fought to preserve is proving increasingly elusive.

Unemployment remains an epidemic among the veteran population, especially for recently separated service members returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and other points worldwide. Nearly a third of veterans ages 18 to 24 were unemployed in October 2011, about double the rate for civilians in that age group, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The rate of unemployment for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans was 12 percent, three points higher than the overall U.S. rate.

The harsh reality is younger veterans are coming home to an unwelcome job market and an uncertain future. At the same time, stigmas and misnomers about this dedicated and hard-working demographic abound. Veterans of all ages often struggle to translate their military service into marketable, practical skills fit for the civilian workplace.

We created this guide to help give veterans greater confidence in their ability to secure employment after serving our country. In it, we cover topics ranging from resume writing and interview skills to utilizing social media and developing powerful ways to sell yourself and your skills.

Invest in Yourself

Some military members enlist with the goal of making a career of serving in the Armed Forces. The 20-year fixed retirement pension remains an attractive benefit. But scores of others enlist and wind up on a different path for all kinds of reasons.

That's why it's important to develop a personal skill set while serving. One of the biggest challenges for veteran transition and job placement organizations like Hire Heroes USA is instilling confidence in recently separated veterans. Some may have planned for a military career but fell short. Others are ready to join the civilian workforce but unsure of how to start.

Veterans have some tools and educational opportunities at their disposal. Here's a look at a few:

GI Bill Education Benefits

Employers give your educational background a hard look. About 30 percent of veterans 25 and older obtained college degrees in 2010, compared to 36 percent of non-veterans.

Only 42 percent of veterans have a job a month out of service. In two years, that number finally rises above 80 percent. In that two-year time period, military members can use their GI Bill benefits to pursue an associate degree, which can earn them \$7,000 more and reduce the likelihood of unemployment.

The GI Bill can provide tuition and fee costs for resident students of public institutions or up to \$17,500 per year for private and foreign institutions. There are also benefits for apprenticeships/on-the-job training and flight training.

Service Members Opportunity Colleges

The Service Members Opportunity Colleges program works with 1,900 colleges and universities to help service members and their families achieve a degree. Because the colleges are partnered with the military, they are networked with each other to accept any transfer credits from each other. This way service members don't need to worry about the potential effects a PCS may have.

Formal Military Courses

Each branch of the military offers additional courses to supplement the military experience regarding leadership, foreign language, information technology, management and other skill-building programs to catch the eye of an employer.

Workforce Credentials

There are programs that [assist military personnel](#) in obtaining workforce certifications and licenses that may come in handy on a resume. You can search certifications by occupation as well as licenses for each state.

The Navy and Army have individual programs in Credentialing Opportunities Online (COOL) to help members bridge the gap between civilian and military experience.

Career Exploration

After years in the military, a service member may not know where and how to begin searching for a new career. Starting within can be the best approach and may narrow your research considerably.

[Hire Heroes USA](#) asks veterans to start by asking these simple questions:

1. Would you prefer working...
 - Indoors or outdoors?
 - With people, data or things?
 - In a large, medium or small company?
 - In a large city, medium city, suburban or rural area?
 - In a job that travels often, some or not at all?
 - With a lot, some, or minimal interaction with people?
 - Full or part time?
 - With varying or routine tasks?
 - With a high, slight or zero chance of relocation?
2. What do you like to do in your spare time?
3. Do you prefer being a team leader or member?
4. Where would you like to live?
5. What does your dream job look like?

Find Your Strengths

Another important area to look at is your strengths. For what did you receive praise during your service? What characteristics stand out to your friends and family? You can start searching for patterns and connections, but there are also online sources that may help. Consider:

- **StrengthsQuest**
After a 30-minute survey, [StrengthsQuest](#) will provide a report listing your top five talents as well as ways to use them for career, academic and personal success.
- **Literacy Works**
A less intense, free self-assessment from [LiteracyWorks.org](#) asks 56 questions to determine your strengths and interests.

Once you gather insight and career field suggestions, you may want to do some research on those fields and the careers they contain. Your strength reports may explain fields with some detail, but you may want more. Searching online makes it easy with sites like [CareerExplorer.net](#) and [NYCareerZone.org](#).

Read through the descriptions and try to mentally place yourself in the career. What do you like? What do you dislike? Is it one worth pursuing? Ask questions until you determine one to gear your efforts toward. That way, you can have expectations and a focus when you're writing your resume and preparing for an interview.

Writing a Resume

Military members may not get a lot of exposure to writing and viewing resumes, so a basic writing refresher may be appropriate. It's also important to keep your audience in mind. Military service comes with its own language and acronyms, all of which will mean little to prospective employers.

Before attempting a resume in one go, you may want to approach it by section. Here is some advice broken down by category:

Contact Information

The opening section of a resume is quite simple but serves as a significant point-of-contact for potential employers. Be sure to include:

- Full name
- Address street, city, state and Zip code
- Phone number, including area code
- Professional email address

Summary of Qualifications

Hire Heroes USA encourages veterans to summarize their qualifications into a concise, complete section. You have the option of writing out skills or listing them in bullet form.

If you prefer sentences to bullet points, aim for no more than eight lines. Broadcast your qualifications and provide support with quantifiable evidence. Military members have many routes to take when it comes to numbers: people managed, size of teams, value of machinery, years in service, clearances, awards, languages spoken and many more.

And if you're more of the bullet-point type, shoot for five to eight well-crafted lines:

- Team Building
- Scheduling/Planning Operations
- Team Management
- Performance Evaluation
- Risk Assessment

Take note of the language. As difficult as it is to convey the meaning behind all the military jargon and acronyms, it can be just as tough to leave it behind, especially when it comes to your resume. Use clear terms that are relevant and make sense to the average citizen.

Leader with six years of experience in team building and operational management in the United States Marine Corps. Proven ability to perform in extremely stressful circumstances. Extensive application of calm judgment and mature decision-making in more than 150 force protection and security missions in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. Demonstrated ability to independently lead 13-man teams in mission planning, complex operations and the successful achievement of time-sensitive company goals. Excellent interpersonal and training skills with the ability to foster and sustain mutually beneficial relationships.

Source: Hire Heroes USA

Work Experience

There is some flexibility in how you format the look of your work experience section, but the basics to include are:

- Company, Unit
- Dates in Position
- Title of Position
- Location (City, State)
- Responsibilities of Position

Veterans often struggle to see the true value or civilian equivalency in their military experience. Here's an example from a Hire Heroes workshop where an employee tried to help a veteran recast his military work for a civilian job market:

"What did you do in the service?"

"I just shot guns."

"And how much was each gun worth?"

"X dollars."

"How many were you responsible for?"

"X amount."

"So you were in charge of X dollars worth of valuable equipment. "

His response was a grin.

This is an incredibly important and often challenging aspect of building a solid resume. The key is to integrate skills into your position's descriptions. Here are some suggestions:

- [RealWarriors](#) recommends a sharp shooter emphasize the skills of leading small teams and carrying out significant tasks in high-pressure situations.
- An infantryman should skip the tank and weapons details and instead list the experiences with supervising, training and supporting of fellow military personnel. Responsibility for high-priced assets is another skill to add.
- Military members who worked with explosives for the majority of their military career can reword their skills to a less-intimidating, civilian level. Focus on leadership, attention to detail and risk-taking skills learned.

COMMON MILITARY SKILLS FOR INTEGRATION

Interpersonal Skills:

You work with a lot of different people with different backgrounds and rank. You have to learn proper ways to communicate and interact with a multitude of personalities, giving you an appreciated skill in the civilian workforce.

Leadership Skills:

Many veterans worked their way up in the ranks and acquired the responsibility of leadership and/or supervisor. Employers like to hire people they can trust to do their job and step up as a leader if necessary, so be sure to emphasize any leadership experiences.

Technical Skills:

Whether you dealt with telecommunication, mechanical, financial or healthcare technology, you have skills to boast about. In this technological age, any experience is appreciated.

Education

Starting with the most recent education attained, list the degree, name of institution, and year of completion. Typically employers will be looking for college degrees, but as discussed in the “Invest in Yourself” section military members often join young and separate from service ready to work.

In this situation, veterans can list any certifications obtained as well as continuing education courses they’ve completed. There is also the option of utilizing a “Training and Certifications” section listing any training/certifications, course name, location and year. Some examples of military courses and certification listings include:

- Certification: COMPTIA Network: Network+Certified Technician (COMP001006489934)
- Certification: NCSA: Windows XP Professional Certified (2109456)
- DOD ID Certification 8750.1 (Network+), US Army Kaiserslautern, Germany 2007

Awards

It’s probably best to eliminate or downplay military awards that don’t relate directly to the job you’re seeking. For example, if you won an award for rifle marksmanship but are applying to be a teacher, that particular distinction may not serve in your best interest.

But sometimes awards can help build your skill set. The Army Achievement Medal is a simple example. Provide a quick explanation for its presentation and move on. If you have questions about what to include or exclude, ask non-military friends and family to look over your resume to ensure they understand all that is listed and why.

Resume Tools

Hire Heroes maintains helpful resume templates and tools

<http://hireheroesusa.org/images/stories/resumes/blank-resume-shell.pdf>

Using LinkedIn to Network



With more than 19 million users, [LinkedIn](#) is one of the most prominent social and business networking sites today. Veterans can use this as a resource to build relationships, obtain recommendations and look for job openings.

What it is

On LinkedIn, you can create a profile that summarizes your accomplishments in order for colleagues and employers to find you.

What are the Benefits

LinkedIn allows veterans to:

- Brand themselves
- Be found by recruiters and employers
- Find and network with others
- Learn from and share information with others
- Join groups to relate and connect with others
- Be plugged into current technology

How it Differs from a Resume

With LinkedIn, you can go beyond the two-page limit of a resume by adding more sections to help you stand out. You can provide your LinkedIn URL on your hard copy resume and upload your resume to your online profile.

You can add a Q-and-A section, discuss hobbies and interests, explain achievements and awards or whatever else helps you stand out. Resumes are meant to be tailored to show an employer why you're a good fit for a specific job. LinkedIn allows you to show an employer or recruiter who you are as a person and your qualifications in a broader sense.

How to Get Started

When you go to the LinkedIn website, the first page will prompt you to “Join Today,” and you can sign up for free.

The site will take you through a set-up process in which you will have to enter an email address. Be sure to put one that you check often because it will be your main source of updates.

After the account is set up and verified, you can start to personalize your profile. Be sure to use a professional-looking photo. LinkedIn will also have a “Profile Completeness” status bar to indicate how information you have supplied.

You can link your Twitter or other websites to your profile, but be sure they do not work against a professional image.

LinkedIn Advice from Fellow Veterans

Veterans on the [LinkedIn Veterans page](#) offer newcomers advice and tips for getting the most out of their profile. Here are some common tips:

- As discussed in previous sections, list your transferable skills that pertain to a civilian career. As one veteran commented, “Being a marksman with an M-16 has little applicability to supply-chain management.”
- Remove military language from your writing, since most who view your profile will not understand.
- Maintain military connections to get advice or leads for employment. You may also use them as a source for recommendations. You can keep in contact with those you served with and use groups like [U.S. Veteran](#) and [U.S. Military Veterans Network](#).
- Expand beyond the military community. Try to join groups related to the field you’d like to work in. The top veteran-employing industries are listed later in the guide and can serve as a starting point.

Interviewing

A sterling resume help you wedge a foot in the door, but odds are you won't close the deal without an impressive interview to match. Crafting solid interview skills takes commitment and dedication. Walking into a job interview cold isn't recommended.

Be sure to learn as much as you can about the company, from its history and mission to management and market position. Generate thoughtful, clear questions that show you spent time and effort digging into your potential employer. And come prepared to explain why you're a perfect fit and how you will positively impact their business.

Here are some other key aspects of job interviews to consider:

Talking About Accomplishments and Achievements

Anticipate being asked in some form about your achievements and accomplishments. It may be a problem solved, initiatives you managed or directed, a negotiation, an award, a speech, a degree, an affiliation or countless other things. Some suggestions from Hire Heroes USA:

Helpful Areas for Veterans

- Training standards you implemented or enforced
- Implemented changes to standard
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Extraordinary missions you participated in, planned or commanded
- Military decorations and awards
- Increased performance of a unit due to your leadership and direction
- Increased or accelerated productivity
- Deliverables
- Cost reduction
- Increased efficiencies
- Enhanced service
- Increased competitiveness

How to Respond with Accomplishments

It's not enough for an employer to hear that you've led a unit overseas; they want details and specificity. Hire Heroes promotes what it calls the S-T-A-R Method to help veterans verbalize their achievements in an effective way.

An employer may ask something like, "Can you tell me about a time when you exhibited teamwork?" To prepare for these types of questions, take a run through the S-T-A-R Method:

- What was the **Situation**?
- What was your **Task**?
- What **Action** did you take?
- What was the **Result**?

Value Proposition

This phrase is often used when talking about businesses and products. But people can have value propositions, too, which are basically succinct summations of the benefits and skills you provide. This can cover job aspects from experience and skill sets to work ethic and attitude. It's a simple yet powerful way to market who you are, what you're good at and why you will be an asset to an organization.

When should it be used?

A value proposition isn't just for job interviews. It can also be used when networking online or having a conversation with a potential employer. It's nice to keep it in the back of your mind as you make your way into a professional setting.

It can also be included in your resume's "Summary of qualifications" section as well as

your application cover letter to give a quick view of what values you can offer the company.

How can it help?

Creating a value proposition demands an honest evaluation of your knowledge, skills and abilities and allows you to sell your best attributes in a short and concise format. It can increase confidence in a sense of personal value and, most importantly, differentiate you from the competition.

BUILDING A VALUE PROPOSITION

Here are some of the steps you can take to create your own value proposition:

- **Identify Your Skills**

Make a list of skill areas in which you've had experience. Some examples include administration, aviation, budgeting, conflict resolution, management, marketing/sales, human resources, inventory control, construction and public speaking. If you need more ideas, consider using the Internet to search [lists of skills](#) to get you going.

- **Identify Awards and Recognition**

Think of any degrees, certifications, awards, special recognition or honors you have received. Some examples include: ASE certification in automotives, hazardous material handling, security clearances and branch-specific awards.

- **Quantify Your Values**

Choose a few to highlight and, similar to the transferable skills on your resume, put your skills, knowledge and accomplishments into quantifiable statements.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Did you make or save money?
- How many people were involved?
- How many people did you train?
- What was the value of the equipment for which you were responsible?
- Was there a percentage of difference from before?
- What technology do you know?
- What was the total budget you managed?
- What languages do you speak?

- **Put it All Together**

Craft a clear and comfortable proposition that sells your value. It's best to memorize your statement so you can use it whenever the opportunity arises.

Here is an example of a value proposition provided by HireHeroesUSA. (Feel free to shorten or lengthen yours to fully hit your main points):

"My name is John Smith and my values consist of leadership, team building, problem solving and quality assurance. Most recently I was a sergeant in the Marine Corps, where I independently led teams up to 12 personnel in security operations in Afghanistan, resulting in a 60-percent decrease in violent activity in my area of responsibility."

Attire

Attire varies among companies and career fair events, so doing some prior research is heavily recommended. There are also different classifications of dress and attire, which can get confusing in a hurry. Here's a chart to help:

	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	FOR MEN	FOR WOMEN
<p>MOST FORMAL</p>  <p>LEAST FORMAL</p>	Business Formal	One step down from tuxedos and gowns. Most of the time business formal is used for award dinners, political events and business events that do not require black tie.	White shirts with French cuff style, cuff links, silk tie and pocket squares	Skirted suits, hosiery and closed-toe/closed heel pumps
	Business Traditional	The next step down is business traditional.	Business suits, dress shirts, dress shoes and ties	Skirted or tailored pant suits, closed toe/closed heel shoes, socks or hosiery
	General Business	A small step away from business traditional is general.	Tie, dress shirt, tailored sport coat and dress trousers	Tailored pantsuits, businesslike dresses or coordinated businesslike separates. If wearing separates, tailored jackets are required.
	Business Casual	Popular for career fairs, business casual is the last level of business wear.	Men have both high- and low-level business clothing. High-level business casual includes suits worn with dressy sports shirts or knits and tailored separates (dress trousers, collared sports shirts, sweaters and sports coats.) For low-level, it includes khakis, chinos and knit golf shirts. Leather belts and shoes are appropriate while sandals and sneakers do not fit into business attire.	Pantsuits, tailored separates like skirts, slacks, blouses, sweaters and jackets. Closed-toe/closed heel shoes or slingbacks are encouraged.

Source: *Casual Power.com*

Tips on Body Language During Interview

People often form a first impression based on body language alone. There's limited time to make a great impression during most job interviews, and that first one is always key.

Timing Affects Body Language

Be sure to arrive with enough time to walk into an interview calm and collected. Rushing to make it on time or showing up late can make you come off flustered and affect how open your body language feels. Be sure to arrive early, but not so early that you feel nervous or restless. A clammy handshake is not a good start when the goal is to make a strong first impression.

When it comes to the handshake, be patient enough to allow the employer to initiate. Thrusting a hand forward can reveal nerves and discomfort. Grasp with a firm, confident shake and make eye contact when doing so.

Posture

Military members are quite practiced when it comes to proper posture. But it can be a bit different in a civilian job interview setting.

Sit up straight with your back against the back of the chair. Slouching shows disinterest while remaining on the edge of the seat can make it seem like you're tense and uncomfortable. Feel free to lean forward at times to show excitement when the conversation is especially engaging.

Place your hands in your lap or on the armrests. This will open your body and keep your hands ready to gesture. Sitting on your hands or crossing your arms can work against the image you want to convey.

Gestures

When listening to the interviewer, it's OK to tilt your head a little or nod to show you value their comments. When it comes to hands, gesture with them in a way that indicates you're at ease, but don't go overboard.

PRACTICE INTERVIEW RESOURCES

There is no such thing as walking into an interview too prepared. Monster.com provides 100 potential interview questions broken down by the purpose of the questions. Here are some examples:

Basic

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What attracted you to this job/company?

Behavioral

- Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.
- If you found out your company was doing something against the law, like fraud, what would you do?
- Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?

Salary

- What salary are you seeking?
- If I were to give you this salary you requested but let you write your job description for the next year, what would it say?

Career Development

- What are you looking for in terms of career development?
- How do you want to improve yourself in the next year?
- What kind of goals would you have in mind if you got this job?

Getting Started

- How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?

MORE ↓

A good way to figure out how much is too much is to pay attention to interviewers. Mimic some of their movements and gauge how often and at what points of the conversation their gestures occur.

Try not to engage in nervous movements such as shuffling your feet, bouncing a leg, kicking your foot, tapping fingers or clicking pens.

Eye Contact

Maintain eye contact when your interviewer is speaking. Looking away can serve as a break in the conversation, but don't look down or away as the conversation proceeds. There may be more than one person interviewing you, so make your rounds when talking. Gesture toward everyone as you speak and try not to focus too much on one person.

Tips on Speaking

As we mentioned earlier, developing a value proposition is a key part of preparing for a job interview. But putting words down on paper is one thing. Delivering them in a sometimes intimidating setting is another.

Vocabulary

It's easy to automatically use the military jargon that's been ingrained during your years of service. Fight the urge or impulse. Employers want to gauge how well a job applicant will fit into their environment. You don't need to pretend to be someone else. Instead, look for ways to translate your background and unique skill set into language anyone can understand and appreciate.

Tone and Volume

Keep your personality in your voice. It's OK to show some of your cultural background in a way that helps you stand out. Keeping a stiff, monotonous tone may seem appropriate for a professional conversation, but in the hiring process interviewers want to see who you are. Volume is another instance where you can mimic the interviewer. Obviously you don't want to be screaming, but don't let your voice get too soft and risk your interviewer missing important responses.

PRACTICE INTERVIEW RESOURCES *CONTINUED*

- How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?
- What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?

More About You

- What are your lifelong dreams?
- What is your personal mission statement?
- What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?
- What negative thing would your last boss say about you?
- List five words that describe your character.
- Who has impacted you most in your career and how?

Brain teaser Questions:

- How many times do a clock's hands overlap in a day?
- How would you weigh a plane without scales?
- Why is there fuzz on a tennis ball?
- If you could get rid of any one of the U.S. states, which one would you get rid of and why?

Now that you have an idea of some of the questions you'll face, take the time to practice responding to them. Here are some resources to consider:

- A trusted friend or family member
- Hire Heroes offers a [mock interview workshop](#) specifically designed for veterans
- Look at local universities for interview workshops. Often times there are mock interview events for undergraduates and graduate students throughout the semester
- Use sites like [Careers.org](#) to search for career resources centers near you

Tips to Remember

Veterans are transitioning from the “We” mentality associated with the military into a more private “Self” world. Many veterans feel uncomfortable talking about themselves. When it comes to securing a job, interviewees have to sell themselves, which means it’s OK to think about the “me” component.

Here are a few other tips courtesy of Hire Heroes USA:

Stay Connected

While conducting a job search, check your email frequently in the event a potential employer is trying to communicate with you. For example, an employer may need additional information or want to set up an interview. Answering emails in a timely manner lets the employer know that you are both interested and responsible.

Phone Facts

A ring-tone choice and your voice mail message recording both influence employers’ first impression of you. Record a professional voicemail response and select a standard ring tone.

Email Addresses

Like your resume, an email address offers a first impression. To ensure a professional and polished first impression to potential employers, create an email address for business communication that contains your name. For example, if your name is John Smith, shoot for johnsmith@aol or john_smith@gmail (although if your name is John Smith, you might need to get a little creative).

Emerging Industries to Consider

Military skills can translate into certain industries better than others. Hire Heroes USA has seen the most success with shipping, logistics, security and warehouse managing. Veterans also have success in technical fields. Here are some to consider:

Aerospace Industry

This industry looks for military personnel to fill positions such as aerospace engineers, operation technicians and aviation project engineers. Salary pay comes in at an average of \$64,000, according to SimplyHired.com

Weapon and Security Companies

Veterans are an obvious choice for this field. Common job titles are Support Technicians, Electronic Technicians and Human Resources Generalist. The pay range tends to hover around \$68,000 across the industry.

Government Agencies

A host of government agencies turn to the veteran work pool for help. Jobs and pay can range greatly.

Information Technology

Experience with some of the most advanced technology in the world qualifies many veterans for this field. Computer scientists and IT specialists are in high demand and can receive an average salary of \$72,000.

Police Officer

The qualities that make up a good police officer are often found in military members. The high demand in the police force and its appreciation for veterans may also provide certain perks upon hire. Average pay is about \$35,000 a year.

Math or Science Teacher

Veterans can use their experience with discipline hard work to their advantage when applying to teach students. There is a [Troops-to-Teachers Program](#) that assists veterans in obtaining teaching positions. While the pay may not be as high as the other industries, there is a benefit of summers and holiday vacation (which may take a while for soldiers to get used to again).

Social media news hub Mashable put together a stellar infographic on veterans and tech jobs. You can [check it out here](#).

Final Words

Veterans United created this guide to help veterans gain a better footing on the path to employment. This resource is by no means exhaustive and does not contain every route to employment.

Contact Hire Heroes USA [online](#) or at 866-915-HERO to learn more about veteran unemployment or seek assistance with job placement or job training.