

CAREER SEARCH AMERICA

CAREER TRANSITION TOOLBOX WHITEPAPER

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MILITARY SPOUSE'S CAREER TRANSITION:

A BIG-PICTURE REVIEW OF THE MILITARY TO
CIVILIAN TRANSITION PROCESS



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INTRODUCTION

Many of the folks that CSA has worked with over time come to us still having a few years before they plan to leave the military. Essentially, this is when they first start talking about the transition. Their timing is smart, because they can take the time that's necessary to make informed decisions and really follow a process to make their transition easier and more successful.

When a member of the military – in particular someone who has served for quite some time and has made the military a focal point of their life in so many ways – begins to contemplate a life away from the military, that person goes through a very real change of mindset. And that change of mindset often means the person is now beginning to make decisions about what he or she wants to do and where they would like to take their life.

GROWING A GARDEN: A METAPHOR FOR THE TRANSITION PROCESS

To help make sense of their career transition, we teach individuals to think of their process as planting a garden. Tending a garden is no easy task, but can reap great rewards and personal satisfaction. But before the would-be gardener can think about the harvest, he or she has to decide. “Am I going to do this, or am I not?” A “yes” answer to this question means that the person has taken the first step in the transition process, and begun to change his or her mindset. In many ways the earlier a person answers this question, the better. That's because when people come to us early, they have more of an opportunity to really take the whole process in small steps. Taking small, purposeful steps enables them to wrap their heads around each little piece of the process to make the transition a smooth one.

It's also important to note that just because your spouse has only recently decided to begin his or her transition process doesn't mean that he or she can't make a successful transition. It simply means that, because they will leave the military in a short period of time, they may have a few more stumbles along the way because they haven't been able to really think through and get their heads wrapped around each little piece of his or her transition.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE BEGINNING

Now, returning to our garden metaphor, if your spouse has decided to transition out of the military you have to start making the next decisions: where to put the garden and what to plant. In other words, “Where do I want to put down my roots?” The answers to these questions - and the ones that follow - will help your spouse move forward comfortably and confidently by breaking the process into manageable steps.

MAKING IT THROUGH THE SOMETIMES-DIFFICULT MIDDLE

Of course, choosing where to put down roots, and knowing skills and talents that your spouse can utilize are essential to the start of a successful transition, but now your spouse will have to “turn up the dirt.” What we mean by that is the networking and the informational interviewing part of the process. Next, comes the “planting of the seeds.” Essentially, this means your spouse will need to get out there and talk to people - network. Any good garden needs water and fertilizer, so your spouse should expect to talk to a lot of people, often. This is the part that can become discouraging. Your spouse will have some doors closed on him or her. It's nearly unavoidable. But over time, as he or she talks to more potential employers and continues to network - more water for the garden – he or she will suddenly start to get feedback. And feedback is exactly what you want.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END: NARROWING THE FIELD, MAKING CHOICES

After your spouse has been interviewing and meeting various people for a while, you'll probably notice that the crops in the "transition garden" are starting to grow now. There may even be a lot of exciting ideas and potential opportunities coming in all at once. At this point, your spouse will have to make decisions about selection. This could be called a pruning phase, because your spouse is deciding, "Am I going to talk to this employer or that employer?" and "How should I make my decisions?"

Your spouse can't respond to everything, and probably isn't the best fit for every opportunity, so he or she will pick out a few to save, and a few to let go. In letting some opportunities go, your spouse is able to devote more attention to the saved ones, so leads get stronger and reflect a better fit for your spouse's interests and talents. Essentially, the crops get bigger and stronger and the person is getting closer to his or her final goal of that new position, or the new career, or dream job.

Of course one day the crops must be harvested. Typically this means accepting an offer from a new employer, or taking a step out to create a small business, often a result of the many contacts and relationships fostered earlier in the transition process.

CONCLUSION

This is an abbreviated take on the transition process. There are many smaller steps in between the ones discussed above, but we think it's helpful to break the transition process down a bit for clients. Seeing the whole picture enables those in the midst of a transition to see the reason for sticking to the plan and all of its pieces. Often times this gives individuals we work with a better feeling for the whole process itself from start to finish, and makes them more likely to succeed in the end.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- More time often means greater success for career change transitions
 - Break the transition process into smaller pieces and work on them individually
 - Network, network, network. You never know how you'll find the next opportunity
 - Be prepared for setbacks, and turn them into useful events by gathering feedback to apply to later interviews or meetings
 - Take the time to find the right opportunity, which isn't always the first one to come your way
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