

Setting a Course for Life After the Military

WHETHER YOU'VE SERVED THREE YEARS OR 30 IN THE MILITARY, THE TIME WILL COME TO TRANSITION INTO PHASE II: LIFE AFTER THE MILITARY.

At times, transitioning from military to civilian life might seem overwhelming. In this guide, transition experts offer ideas and action steps to help you make the journey to your post-military career, which, for many military officers, is the first time in their professional lives they're on a pathway without a known destination. Consider the following steps:

1. PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY.

The transition from military to civilian life can be filled with varied

and, at times, conflicting emotions, ranging from highs to lows of excitement, anxiety, happiness, uncertainty, adventure, and insecurity. While these emotions are real and valid, don't let them control you. It's important to prepare for this transition by focusing on your total well-being. As Ken Falke, founder and chair of Boulder Crest Retreat for veterans and family wellness says, "You can't transition when you're in pain." An important way to smooth your journey into Phase II, life after the military, is to take time to assess and improve your total well-being before leaving service.

2. ASK YOURSELF THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS.

For example: "Who matters in your life?" "What matters in your life?" "If

you painted a picture of you in Phase II, what would it look like?" "Who would be in the picture with you?" "If not constrained by income and family considerations, what would you be doing and where?" If you think about how and where you want the journey to end, it helps you visualize your route. Write down your thoughts and answers, and the path to your final destination will begin to take shape. The discipline of writing something down often is the first step toward making it happen.

3. GATHER TOOLS AND SUPPLIES.

Like other journeys you've taken, you'll need tools and supplies. Transition tools, such as networking résumés, LinkedIn profiles, elevator pitches, and interview and salary negotiation skills, will help you reach your destination successfully. But know these are just tools. You'll have to chart the course and make these career-building tools work for you.

4. STAY FLEXIBLE.

Along the way, there likely will be surprises — some good, some bad. The serendipitous can be capitalized on, and the bad events can be managed successfully while staying on course. Stay flexible enough to react to the unexpected.

5. WATCH FOR BEACONS.

Two important beacons will guide you on this transition journey: research and people. By continuously updating your research and building useful relationships with people who have transitioned successfully, you will become more focused on your career objectives and nonnegotiables, such as location, sector of employment, quality of life, salary, and impact, to name a few.

6. ESTABLISH “WAYPOINTS” TO STAY ON COURSE.

Transition waypoint examples might include developing your transition strategy, finalizing your separation date, adjusting your life insurance, updating your civilian wardrobe, developing your self-marketing tool kit (résumé, biography, business cards, LinkedIn profile, etcetera), attending job fairs and webinars, finalizing a location to live, and/or obtaining a degree or certificate. It's also very important to allow for other important life events in your transition timeline: graduations, marriages, vacations, and celebrations. You typically only separate from the military once, so take time to enjoy life and congratulate yourself and your family for years of arduous and honorable service.

7. THE FINAL CHECK — YOUR CREW.

The military is a team sport, and none of us serve alone. We also don't transition alone. Whether we are married, single, or divorced, our friends and family have loved and supported us throughout our military careers. Include those who supported you, especially your spouse and children, in planning this journey. Other family members also might merit careful consideration in a successful transition. Those closest to you will have their own emotions, dreams, and goals about the future, so take time to adjust the course with their ideas and input.

And when you're ready, begin your journey into Phase II: life after the military.

— Col. John Sims, USA (Ret), deputy director,
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