

Job Searching for Veterans: Using Civilian Language and Conveying Transferrable Skills

As you make the transition from military service to the civilian workforce, it is important to look at your experience and find the transferrable skills that will be useful in a civilian job.

What are Transferrable Skills? Transferrable skills are versatile skills and qualities learned and developed over time that can be applied to many situations. Whether technical or social, hard or soft, they can help you navigate through life and are essential to career success.

“De-militarize” and “Civilianize” Your Language.

First and foremost, it is important for civilian employers to understand that your years in the service have prepared you well for the civilian world. However, if they have not served, it may be difficult for them to wade through a series of titles and acronyms they don't understand. It's important to translate your experience and skill sets into civilian terminology. A good test to see if your resume and cover letter are understandable is to have a civilian read them. If he or she can't understand what you did in the service, you need to spell it out more clearly. Ask one or more non-veteran friends or family members for their perspective on your resume and cover letter. Do they understand everything you did without needing more clarification?

Get Organized. The transferable skills you learned in the service are the foundation of your resume. One method to convey these skills is with a career summary on your resume that lists your skills, qualifications, achievements, and technical abilities. This will capture your reader's attention and convey the value you could bring to the organization.

Types of Transferrable Skills

Communication Skills

- Critical in conveying orders and information clearly, effectively, and persuasively.

Leadership Skills

- The ability to inspire, influence, motivate; assess situations, make decisions; take risks and determine goals; achieve results with resourcefulness, creativity, and teamwork.

Analytical Skills

- Used to evaluate data; research, compile, and interpret information; apply logic; handle numbers; and determine patterns.

Organizational Skills

- Includes time management; the ability to prioritize, disseminate and record data; generate accurate reports; manage resources; multi-task, administer, direct, and coordinate.

Technical Skills

- The application of practical know-how and hands-on proficiency with specific equipment and machinery, software and hardware, chemical substances, techniques and procedures.

Personal Qualities

- Having integrity, loyalty, resilience, character; self-discipline and control; the ability to adapt to new situations; being punctual, reliable, responsible, structured, resourceful, mission-oriented, with a can-do attitude.

Interpersonal Skills

- The ability to listen, follow orders, cooperate, supervise, negotiate, guide, and be a team member.

Make a List of Your Technical Skills. Some Military jobs are a fast track to a career in the civilian world. Computer technicians, mechanics, and engineers, for example, have skills that can be easily converted to civilian jobs. Even if you're not in a position that readily converts to a civilian position, much of your job training can be converted into civilian terms. Budgeting, for example, is a critical skill for managers in most civilian companies.

Make a List of Your Intangible Skills. Intangible skills such as leadership, discipline, strong work ethic, and teamwork are often cited by employment recruiters as desirable. Many service members have developed these skills to a degree often unmatched by other job seekers. Incorporating these skills into your resume will showcase them to potential employers. Military discipline, strategic thinking, personnel and organizational management skills can all be transferred to the corporate, educational, arts, technology, and government sectors.

Talk Up Your Experiences. Always remember that you are selling! Your years in the armed forces have given you specific skills, attention to detail, and an unparalleled work ethic that make you a desirable commodity in the civilian workforce. Understand and appreciate the value you bring to a prospective employer and communicate that value. By focusing on your character as well as your achievements, successes, and unique skill sets, you can show you are “the” someone who will make a difference at their company.

Helpful Online Resources to Translate Military Experience

- WOIS/Career Information System Military Occupation Index* - <http://www.wois.org/use/mil/> (*WOIS must be accessed by using a computer connected to the Clark College network or by visiting the Career Center.)
- My Next Move for Veterans - <http://www.mynextmove.org/vets/>
- CareerOneStop Military to Civilian Occupation Translator - <http://www.careerinfonet.org/moc/>
- Military.com Skills Translator - <http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/>



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College Central. (2012). Transferable skills: Military assets. *Career Central Advice*.

Recruit Military. (2012, October 8). *Resume best practices*. Retrieved from http://docs.recruitmilitary.com/pdf/Resume_Best_Practices.pdf