

Out of Uniform: Resume Tips for Transitioning Military Professionals

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So you're leaving the service and are faced with the daunting task of developing your resume. No doubt your military career is studded with accomplishments, but even the most decorated veteran needs to figure out how to make the transition to a civilian position. Follow these tips to draft a high-impact resume that shows how your military experience is transferable to a civilian job.

Define Your Civilian Job Objective

You can't effectively market yourself for a civilian job if you don't have a clearly defined goal. Because so many service people have diverse backgrounds, they often make the mistake of creating resumes that are too general to be effective. Before writing your resume, do some soul-searching, research occupations and pinpoint a specific career path. If you are having trouble with this step, tap into your local transition office or solicit the help of a career coach. If you find that you are torn between two or more potential goals, set up different resumes

Create a Resume that Speaks to Employers' Needs

Now that your objective is defined, you are ready to create a winning resume. Consider a resume's purpose: To answer the employer's question, "What can this person do for me?"

A great way to start thinking about employers' needs is to research your target job. What types of skills and experiences are employers seeking? What aspects of your background are most relevant?

Any information that does not relate to your goal should be eliminated or de-emphasized, and this includes any unrelated military awards, training and distinctions. For example, that medal you won for rifle marksmanship doesn't belong on a civilian resume. This is often the hardest step for ex-military personnel, which is why it's so common to see military resumes span five pages or longer. As you make the decision about which information to include, ask yourself, "Will a potential employer care about this experience?" Only include information that will help you land an interview.

Assume the Hiring Manager Knows Nothing about the Military

Demilitarize your job titles, duties, accomplishments, training and awards to appeal to civilian hiring managers. Employers with no exposure to the military don't understand military terminology and acronyms, so translate these into "civilianese." Show your resume to several non-military friends and ask them to point out terms they don't understand. Use job postings as a tool to substitute civilian keywords for military terms.

Showcase Your Track Record of Accomplishments

Your military career has offered you excellent opportunities for training, practical experience and advancement. Tout your accomplishments so the average civilian understands the importance of your achievements and the measurable outcomes. Here's an example of a demilitarized accomplishment statement:

- Increased employee retention rate by 16 percent by focusing on training, team building and recognition programs. Earned reputation as one of the most progressive and innovative IT organizations in the Army's communications and IT community.

Here's an example of incorporating a military award so employers understand its value:

- Received Army Achievement Medal for completing 400+ medical evaluations and developing patient database using MS Access. The database improved reporting functions and tracked patient demographics, records, medication, appointments and status.

Show off Your Military Background

You might have heard you need to develop a functional resume format to mask or downplay your military experience, but the opposite is true. Your military experience is an asset and should be marketed as such. Many employers realize the value of bringing veterans on board. Attributes honed in the military include dedication, leadership, teamwork, positive work ethic and cross-functional skills. If you fear a potential employer won't realize the significance of your military experience, make sure your resume clearly communicates the value that you bring to the table.

If You Were in Active Combat, Leave out the Details

Defending your country and its interests is among the most admirable pursuits, but the sad truth is actual references to the horrors of combat leave many employers squeamish. While you might have worked in a short-range air defense engagement zone, this experience might not relate to your future goal. Tone down or remove references to the battlefield.

Test Drive Your Resume

For some veterans, developing a resume that works in the civilian world is an ongoing process. After you have polished your resume, start your distribution and keep track of your resume's response rate. Solicit feedback and listen carefully to suggestions for improving your resume, and continue modifying the document until it successfully generates job interviews.

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