

5 Tips for Military in Transition to Ace Their Interviews

By Diane Hudson Burns

If you are retiring from the military in your early to mid-forties, then you may have never experienced an interview before, ever. You may be nervous, unprepared, or perhaps quite confident.

Here are a few tips to help you prepare for a solid interview experience:

1. Understand the interview components:

If you are in an interview, then your resume has validated your expertise, and/or, you were referred by another colleague/contact.

Together with your resume, the potential employer recognizes that you possess the skills required for the position.

Consequently the components of an interview include:

- Personality

90% of an interview, including how you are dressed (suit, shoes, jewelry), personal hygiene, type of purse/briefcase you are carrying, eye contact, firm hand shake, general confidence, initiating questions, speaking ability/clarity, and body language all count for personality—creating a first impression.

- Motivation

Why do you want the job: To suit your own needs or those of the company?

- Technical Abilities

Are you familiar with the position, the company, its services/products, mission, and competition? Do you possess the technical requirements for the job? Is the job a good fit for your credentials and skill sets? You may be asked to take a test to prove technical abilities.

- Competency

The interviewer wants to hire a competent employee...someone he can trust with a new position and authority to fix the problem. It costs a company \$10,000+ in unproductive costs to hire and bring on a new employee...through interviewing and training...thus they want to hire someone who is competent, serious about the job and the company, and looking to stay on board for a while.

- Education, Employment Record, and References

Solid references are critical. Your education and employment record will be verified and references will be contacted.

2. Change military speak to corporate speak:

- Sir and Ma'am are required protocol in the military; but in the non-military work world, those greetings can be considered too formal. Always take the lead of your interviewer, i.e., if he says, "Hi, my name is Joe," then you can call the person Joe. If the interviewer says, "Hi my name is Mrs. Jones," then call the interviewer Mrs. Jones.
- Unless you know for certain the company you are applying to uses military time, change your language to "corporate time"; and confirm an interview for two-o'clock PM, instead of 14-hundred hours.
- Avoid using ranks, military acronyms, and other military jargon. Learn to translate military language before the interview. For example, instead of saying, "I was the Strategic Planner, Strategic Planning & Policy Directorate, U.S. Pacific Command, Camp Smith," try saying, "I was the Strategic Planner and Advisor to the CEO & VPs regarding multinational issues and policy development."
- Do not wear any military attire. Do let your hair grow out a bit (for men). Dress appropriately for the job and the company culture. Do not carry a government pen. Do carry a briefcase or pad-folio for your resumes and reference lists. (more in the "Dressing for Interview Success" article).

3. Qualify and quantify military terms to help the non-military interviewer understand your credentials:

- If you say "Battalion," quantify it as "a large organization with XXX personnel in XXX geographically separated areas" or what ever is appropriate.
- Change "Commanded" or "Commander" to "Senior Military Leader" (qualify: CEO, COO, CIO, Executive Vice President).
- Instead of saying "I was MOS 351M / Military Occupational Specialty," qualify it as a career field and say, "My career field or area of expertise is Human Intelligence Collection Technician."
- Avoid confusion by translating rank: Captain (Navy) or Captain (Army, USMC, USAF) translated as senior officer or junior officer.

4. Develop scripts and practice interviewing:

Write scripts for the questions that may cause you discomfort, i.e.,

- Tell me about yourself?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you know about our company?
- What salary are you seeking?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- How do you manage conflict?
- What is your leadership style?
- What is your management style?
- What are your top three hard skill sets?

- What are your top three soft skill sets?

Then, write stories in the CCAR format (Context, Challenge, Actions, Results) format, for five to 10 of your most significant career achievements. Practice mock role-playing interviews with a colleague, on the phone or in person, to help you "get a feel" for the interview process.

You can never actually prepare for the exact questions that will be asked of you in an interview, but these preparations will aid in helping you glean from the example stories you created.

5. Carry a reference list

- Prepare in advance of the interview, a list of references including names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, time zones, appropriate times to contact via telephone, and a short bullet indicating your association, i.e., "Mr. Smith was my supervisor from 2007-2009 in Korea."
- Carry the reference list with you to interviews, so you can offer it to recruiters or hiring managers, when they ask you for the list.
- Be sure to ask your references for permission to use their names, and thank them when you start your new job.
- During your military service, keep in close contact with solid references by sending an email annually to update contact information.

Bottom Line

As a member of the military, you learned the importance of planning and preparation and probably developed good skills. Apply what you learned to the civilian world, and you will succeed.

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