



OUR MISSION IS YOUR SUCCESS.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR TRANSITIONING VETERANS

"Transitioning to civilian life was a challenge, and I want to share some lessons learned to hopefully make it easier for others."

John Buckley, Koch Military Relations Manager



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FOREWORD

Despite 33 years of service to our nation – including multiple combat and peacekeeping tours – my transition into the private sector was one of the most difficult periods in my life. As an honorable soldier though, I conducted an after action review to capture my lessons learned. A summary of my notes is presented in this transition guide so that you might benefit and enjoy an easier transition into your new career.

I began my transition woefully unprepared for the challenges that awaited me. I was wildly shooting resumes downrange in hopes of hitting an unseen target – a blind, Kentucky windage-style approach. I received no feedback in return. It wasn't until I put structure to my problem and began using military problem-solving tools that my performance and results improved. Sun Tzu, a military strategist and philosopher, became my guide:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”
– *Sun Tzu*

I realized to achieve success in my transition “battle” I needed to properly prepare for combat. So, I studied the “enemy” (the recruiter), their methods of war (the application process) and myself (by defining my own career interests). Soon, I stood victorious.

“I will never leave a fallen comrade!” – *Warrior Ethos*

The Warrior Ethos, the principles that define my values, was the driving force behind the development of this guide. I won my transition battle, and I knew I had to turn around to help the next transitioning military veteran. We hope these tips will help you endure the rigors of your transition and lead you to an overwhelmingly successful career in the private sector.

Charlie Mike,



John Buckley

Koch Military Relations Manager

PREPARE FOR COMBAT: FIND YOUR CAREER

So, you've kicked off your boots and you're ready to join the civilian ranks. Now what? Use the following tips to get prepped for this new challenge.

SELF-EVALUATION & CAREER RESEARCH

Before you apply for jobs, let us help you examine your passions, skills and goals to determine the right career fields for you to pursue.

1. Get To Know Yourself

This important step **seems so obvious** that you'll be tempted to skip it, but consider this: if you don't know who you are and what you want, how are you going to convince anyone to hire you? Get in touch with your passions, interests and goals so you can better sell yourself to potential employers in your [resume](#) and [interviews](#). Here are just a couple of the resources out there to aid in your self-evaluation:

- Take the [StrengthsFinder.com](https://www.strengthsfinder.com) test to determine your natural skills and abilities.
- Use the tools on the U.S. Department of Labor's website, [CareerOneStop.org](https://www.careeronestop.org).
- Do an online search for "career assessment" and utilize some of the tools you find, or visit your local library for more resources.

2. Translate Your Military Experience

It's important to determine where your passions and interests intersect with the skills, knowledge, abilities and attributes you gained in the military. Here are just a few online tools to help guide you:

- [O*NET Online](#): Crosswalk Search or Skills Search
- [Military.com](https://military.com): Military skills translator

3. Research Potential Careers

Results from a study at Syracuse University revealed that half of transitioning military veterans left their first job within one year, and nearly 75 percent within 18 months. Rather than jumping into the first job that comes your way, make it your objective to succeed in a private sector career that you will enjoy long term. Instead of asking yourself “what job could I do?” ask “what career will I pursue?”

REMEMBER: Identify career fields that would satisfy your passions and interests, and that will allow you to showcase the skills, knowledge, abilities and attributes you previously identified.

4. Ask The Pros

Once you’ve found the career(s) you might be interested in, gain insight into specific career requirements, work environments, challenges, lifestyle changes, advancement opportunities, required certifications and more.

- Connect with employers at job fairs and ask them honest questions about what their roles require.
- Create a profile on LinkedIn and make connections with people who work in areas of interest to you.
- Conduct informational interviews with professionals in the career field(s) you are considering to learn about specific requirements, work environments, challenges, lifestyle, advancement opportunities, required certifications and possible pitfalls.
- Read career advice articles in your area(s) of interest and research industry trends.

5. Set Your Objectives

Think of this new potential career path not as a straight line, but as stepping stones on the path to success. Set a career objective, envision how you’re going to achieve it, anticipate some of the challenges you may face and how these can help you grow.

See this plan in action in our military relations manager’s [article](#), “Dance With the One Who Brung Ya.”

SEARCH FOR ROLES AT KOCH

Once you've determined which career field(s) you'd like to pursue by thoroughly evaluating your passions, interests, skills and qualifications, it's time to search for available roles. The Koch careers website is a great place to start! Follow these simple steps to browse open positions and opt in for alerts.

1. Visit KOCHcareers.com/veterans.
2. Create a profile and opt in for job alerts to be notified of open roles that match your interests:
 - Click **Open Roles**
 - Click **Sign Up for Job Alerts***
 - Enter your: **Personal information, areas of interest and alert preferences**
 - Click **Sign Up**

*You will automatically receive an email announcing newly opened roles that match your profile and interests.

3. Click **Careers** in the navigation bar to select a career field that best suits you. There are nearly 30 options. If you need help determining which career path suits your skills and experiences, see our [self-evaluation](#) page.
4. Click **Companies** in the navigation bar to search roles within a specific Koch company.
5. You can also further refine a search using one or both of the following:
 - **Keyword search** – Keywords are found in the title and body of the job description.
 - **Location search** – Be aware that not every city or state has the same roles or requirements.

DESTROY THE FIRST ECHELON: WRITE A RESUME

A solid resume could score you an interview for the job of your dreams, so make sure yours is well prepared using the following tips and tools.

SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

A resume is your chance to highlight your relevant strengths and accomplishments. Use the following examples and helpful tips to define your skills in terms a civilian recruiter will understand.

Weak: Hold a top secret security clearance.

Stronger: Integrity, trustworthiness and ability to manage information resulted in being given greater responsibilities, authority and access to highly sensitive data.

Weak: Prepared and disseminated daily activity reports to higher command.

Stronger: Enabled senior management to make timely decisions by increasing their awareness of the organization's overall performance by collecting relevant information, then drafting succinct reports.

Weak: Commendation Medal awarded by Major General _____, Commander of _____.

Stronger: Commended by the CEO for enhancing operations and increasing the team's efficiency while performing under pressure, and by meeting the needs of every customer through personal diligence.

Weak: Maintains accounting system associated with supply management.

Stronger: Enhanced management of critical supply chains by ensuring the continuous flow of essential information through successful operation and maintenance of an enterprise-wide information technology system.

Weak: Successfully planned current and future military training exercises for an organization in excess of 1,000 personnel.

Stronger: Expert in analyzing operations and individual performance to identify organizational and individual training needs. Developed multiple training plans and inspections, which improved and sustained the team's effectiveness.

Weak: Named "Best Leader" in a Company of 150 personnel during a live-fire training exercise resulting in the second highest score in a unit of more than 1,000 personnel.

Stronger: Critical thinking skills, risk management and safety program experience, and superb leadership led to being designated the top leader of 36 peers in the organization.

Weak: Supervises or performs duties involving request, receipt, storage, issue, accountability and preservation of expendable supplies and equipment.

Stronger: Improved the efficiency of several supply chains servicing multiple customers by identifying their particular needs and establishing priorities of effort. *(You could also be more specific by quantifying how many units or customers you served.)*

Leader vs. Manager: You "lead" people but you "manage" processes. Use "lead" or "led" when pertaining to people, but use "manage" or "managed" when referring to processes or programs.

MAKE IT RELEVANT

Want your resume to reach the recruiter? Customize it – for every role for which you apply. Then, double-check that your details are relevant to the job description using this easy exercise.

1. Make a photocopy of the worksheet on page 7, or simply make your own version using a blank sheet of paper.

2. On the left, list the specified, implied and essential daily tasks from your job description analysis.

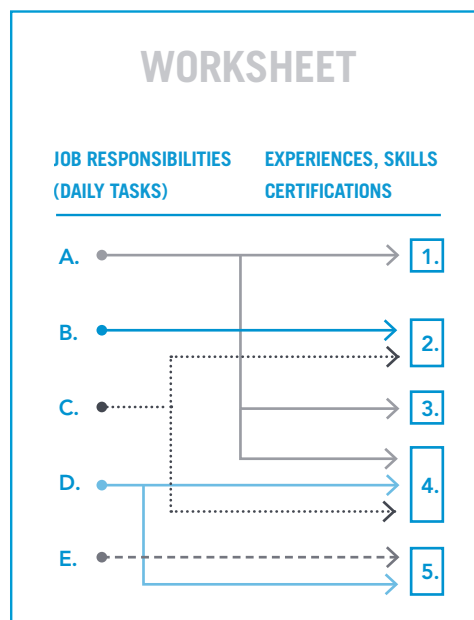
Learn how to analyze a job description in the "Using the Job Description to Your Advantage" section in this guide.

3. On the right, list the experiences, skills and certifications you detailed in your resume.

4. Connect the daily tasks on the left to your qualifications and experiences listed on the right.

5. If something on the right doesn't connect to the left, you should probably remove it from your resume.

Exceptions: Retain quality comments that can quantify the value you created in leadership, management, risk management or diversity.



Takeaway

- On a solid resume, the job's daily tasks on the left will connect to a personal skill or experience you've listed on the right. Remember that these skills and experiences came directly from your resume. If they don't match up, you might not be qualified for the job.
- There should be little or nothing in your resume that doesn't have a line going back to the job description. This ensures that you don't conceal your relevant strengths with a lot of unnecessary verbiage.

WORKSHEET

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES (DAILY TASKS)

EXPERIENCES, SKILLS, CERTIFICATIONS

A.

1.

B.

2.

C.

3.

D.

4.

E.

5.

F.

6.

G.

7.

H.

8.

I.

9.

J.

10.

15 TIPS

Use the term translator and these helpful tips to define your skills in terms a civilian recruiter will understand.

1. Write to the job. Every job description is unique, so each resume should also be unique.
2. Eliminate the "objective" paragraph to give the recruiter more time on the body of your resume. If required, craft one specific to the essential daily tasks listed in the job description.
3. Your resume should not look like an efficiency report. Rather than duties, highlight accomplishments – show how you added value to your organization using quantifiable and measurable terms.
4. Never allow the recruiter to assume what skills you acquired through your experiences. Instead, clearly state them.
5. Write straightforward, active statements that showcase your **relevant** skills, experiences, accomplishments and certifications for all of the daily tasks listed in the job description. Provide the specifics of your accomplishments and how they contributed to the success of your previous organization. Quantify them if you can.
6. Don't oversell your abilities. Just because you worked on a high-level staff does not mean that you are an executive leader.
7. Do include specific and relevant leadership and management experiences, especially if you are applying for a leadership or management role.
8. Limit your professional skills – also referred to as core competencies, areas of expertise or strengths – to four to six. Specialize and focus these to the job description, so the recruiter sees that your strengths are suitable for the daily tasks spelled out in the job description.
9. Servicemen and servicewomen are comfortable with diversity in the workplace and are uniquely educated and qualified to work on or lead diverse teams. Highlight any education, teamwork or experiences pertaining to diversity.
10. Highlight your risk management experiences and concentration on safety, emphasizing compliance and your ability to hold yourself and others accountable.

11. Mention teamwork, cooperation and collaboration – soft skills for which the business will most assuredly be looking.
12. Be concise. Easy-to-read resumes get read. Reduce the amount of text on the page.
13. Do not hide your military experience, but outside of job titles remove every military reference including ranks, organization names, titles, school names, equipment titles and other jargon.
14. Know your audience. Use words that are understood in the private sector or the specific business: enterprise, supervisor, director, manager, employees, etc.
15. Never use "I."

Though this list is not all encompassing, it was gathered from the experiences of one military recruiter and verified by numerous other hiring managers and recruiters.

TRANSLATE YOUR MILITARY SKILLS

Swap military jargon with universally understood words using this easy tool.

JOB TITLES

Military	Business
Commander	Director or Senior Manager
Executive Officer	Deputy Director
Field Grade Officer	Executive or Manager
Company Grade Officer	Operations Manager or Section Manager
Warrant Officer	Technical Specialist or Department Manager
Senior NCO	First-Line Supervisor
Infantry	Security Force
First Sergeant	Personnel Manager
Squad Leader	Team Leader or Team Chief
Supply Sergeant	Supply Manager or Logistics Manager
Operations NCO	Operations Supervisor

GENERAL TERMS

Military	Business
AI	Additionally skilled in
Combat	Hazardous conditions
Company	Company, department or section
Medal	Award
Military personnel office	Human resources
Mission	Task / function / objective
Military occupation specialty / classification	Career specialty or career field
Squad or platoon	Team or section
Reconnaissance	Data collection and analysis
Regulations	Policy or guidelines
Security clearance	Ability to manage sensitive data
Service members	Employees
Subordinates	Employees or direct reports
TAD or TDY	Business trip

DEFEAT THE SECOND ECHELON: APPLY FOR JOBS

You've matched your qualifications to the perfect civilian role.
Now, it's time to confront your next challenge – the online job application.

UNDERSTANDING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Every job listing has a unique job description. Consider it your “mission from higher headquarters,” because as with any mission, you must have a full understanding of what's expected of you to apply for the right job, write your resume and get an interview.

PURPOSE OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

Job descriptions outline the main duties and responsibilities involved in a job. They are written by the company's hiring manager with assistance from the recruiter and HR personnel, and the purpose is to:

- Specify necessary skills and abilities to perform the job successfully within certain environmental conditions (your task, conditions and standards).
- Aid in the development of reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.
- Describe legitimate minimum qualifications (specified and implied tasks).
- Serve as a reference guide for determining salary.
- Fulfill the needs of several HR processes, including recruitment, selection and appraisal, and job evaluation and training.

Did you know that job descriptions can be used to your advantage on your resume and application?
Learn how on the next page.

USING THE JOB DESCRIPTION TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

WHEN YOU FIND A SUITABLE JOB, IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE WHY YOU ARE INTERESTED.
LET'S BREAK IT DOWN SO YOU

JOB DESCRIPTION SAMPLE

JOB TITLE

When searching for a job, remember that military and civilian job titles are similar, but the requirements could be vastly different.

LOCATION

Consider where the job is located and determine if you are willing to relocate there.

COMPANY OVERVIEW

This is where you learn more about the company and its culture. Is this a place where you could see yourself?

JOB OBJECTIVE

Imagine yourself in this role and determine if it will be personally and professionally fulfilling.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This paragraph is sometimes titled, "A Day in the Life Typically Includes." This is your list of specified tasks. Review them and analyze your ability to perform them – to standard. (Note that this is where you identify your specified, implied and essential tasks.)

BASIC & PREFERRED REQUIREMENTS

Basic requirements are non-negotiable – you must meet them all – but with preferred requirements, you can meet some or all and still compete for the job.

APPLY BUTTON

Do not push this button until you have taken the two-step test.

Learn how to translate your military skills in the "Write a Resume" section of this guide.

In your resume and during your interview, you must be able to show competency in the tasks outlined in this section. To learn how to incorporate this into your resume properly, review the "Make it Relevant" section in this guide.

Review the next section in this guide titled "The Application" to better appreciate the importance of these requirements when applying.

Two-Step Test

1. Review the Basic Requirements listed in the job description and ask yourself: "Do I meet 100 percent of the requirements?"
 - a. If you do not, then you should start looking for another job.
 - b. If you do, move to Step 2.
2. Review the Responsibilities. Then, ask yourself: "Do I have the skills and experiences to do everything that is expected of me on a daily basis?"
 - a. If not, you may still apply, but chances are you won't get called for an interview.
 - b. If the answer is yes, you should get to work on your resume.

THE APPLICATION

Applications are an important step in the official selection process, and your participation is absolutely required – no matter how badly a company desires your expertise.

YOUR OBJECTIVE: To officially announce your desire for employment in a specific open role.

THE BUSINESS' OBJECTIVE: To make a legally defensible listing of the applicant's employment history, educational background, degrees, qualifications, references and more. Most companies use online applications to streamline and simplify this data collection process.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS: Last year, nearly 30 percent of military veteran job seekers were disqualified because they did not provide proper responses to **pre-screening questions**. Avoid this stumbling block by following these simple rules of thumb:

1. Basic Requirements: You must meet them all.

During the application process, you will be asked to identify whether you meet the basic requirements listed in the job description. Do not apply if you do not meet every basic requirement exactly as stated in the question. Your application will be automatically rejected. No one will ever review your file or resume, and no one will ever pick up the phone to speak with you.

2. Preferred Requirements: You can meet some or all.

You will also be asked to identify whether you meet the preferred requirements listed in the job description. Apply, even if you don't meet them all. Though you might be competing at a disadvantage, you could get the opportunity to speak to someone and overcome any professional deficiency identified with your answer.

APPLY FOR JOBS

APPLICATION TIPS

1. Start applying for open positions three to five months prior to your availability date.
2. Before you apply for a role, verify your qualifications by taking the Two-Step Test under the "Using the Job Description to Your Advantage" section in this guide. Keep in mind that some military and civilian job titles are similar, but the requirements could be vastly different.
3. Adjust your resume to emphasize your skills and qualifications that relate to the daily tasks included in the job description.
4. Apply directly to that role.
5. You may apply for multiple roles, but it's best to apply for roles within your specific area(s) of expertise.

BEFORE YOU HIT SUBMIT

- Don't forget to thoroughly review your application, ensuring that you completed all required fields.
- Attach your most updated resume.
- Alert each of your references.

ENGAGE THE THIRD ECHELON: PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS

You've conquered the job search, and you're ready to face the front line. Proper preparation is the key to triumph in the final, most intimidating battle – the interview.

BEWARE OF PRECONCEPTIONS

As a veteran interviewing for a civilian role, your skills could be misinterpreted based on your delivery and demeanor. The following are common perceptions and some tips to keep in mind:

STRENGTHS

Critical and creative thinking skills – Veterans often demonstrate these sought-after skills, which also offer a strong baseline for entrepreneurship.

Compliance – Top companies look for candidates who can balance requirements versus risk and have the ability to hold themselves and others accountable.

Sense of urgency – This is a strength, but do be careful. When overplayed, it can be perceived as too intense.

Compassion – Leaders and managers who exhibit compassionate leadership traits enable their team to reach self-fulfillment.

NEUTRAL

Keep in mind that though you have strong attributes, broad experiences and valuable skills, you may be lacking experience in one or more critical areas.

WEAKNESSES

Flexibility – Relax. Stiff posture and short responses feed the stereotype that military veterans are not flexible.

Humility – Rather than stating that everything you do is a success, show your dedication to truth, a willingness to listen and learn, and the ability to sincerely seek criticism.

Change – Be open to change. Military veterans are viewed as checklist-oriented, afraid of having their ideas challenged or challenging the ideas of others.

Emotion – The civilian world wants you to show a passion for your work and in the pursuit of your goals.

Word choice – Eliminate military words and titles, also known as jargon. This helps avoid confusion and delivers your message or point more clearly.

Control – Exhibiting controlling leadership qualities feeds the perception that military veteran leaders are “drill sergeants.”

Intensity – Military leaders and managers can be stereotyped as “blindly charging the hill.” Be open to challenge and listening to the ideas of others.

INTERVIEW POINTERS

Remember that the purpose of an interview is two-fold. First, it gives the company an opportunity to assess if you're a good fit. But it also gives you the opportunity to assess if the company is a good fit for you. Take advantage of this opportunity with questions.

- For situational-based questions, the interviewer is assessing your performance in the situation. Avoid answering in the typical military, "bottom line up front" method. Instead, briefly describe the situation, then address your actions, the response to your actions, your counter-action and the end result. Conclude with a positive takeaway.
- Don't be afraid to discuss your weaknesses, mistakes or failures. These can show honest self-reflection, humility and self-improvement.
- Avoid rambling responses. Instead, provide specific answers to the questions asked of you.
- Come prepared with well-thought-out questions. Recruiters report that veterans often don't ask questions, even when given the opportunity, feeding the perception that the veteran is unwilling to learn.
- Prepare examples that describe your experiences for every daily task listed in the job description in the situation-based format.
- The interview is not the place to negotiate, but do be prepared to provide a salary range appropriate to the value you think you will create for the company.
- Think of the interview as a conversation, creating give-and-take with the interviewer.
- Know the company's general business situation. What service or product do they provide and for whom?
- Understand the company's culture and values. Show how your qualifications and experience contribute and add value to their business needs, and how your character aligns with their culture.
- Turn off your phone. Better yet, leave it in the car.

NEGOTIATE AN OFFER

You nailed the interview, and you're waiting impatiently, hoping to hear an offer. When that happens, the company will expect you to negotiate. So, let's make sure you're fully prepared for this critical step in your transition.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Defining your negotiation strategy should actually begin long before you receive an offer – during the self-evaluation and career research phases of your transition. Use this time to reflect on your needs, wants and your worth so you're prepared to receive, analyze and negotiate any offer that comes your way.

Evaluate yourself.

- Know your current compensation package, and determine what you need to retain your current quality of life.
- Define the minimum salary you need to maintain that quality of life.
- If relevant, know the value of your retirement paycheck.
- If relevant, know the value of your Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation package.
- If relevant, study the TRICARE retiree health and dental insurance programs – you can compare these to what the company offers.
- Learn if your final move benefit is still available.
- Be sure to include “higher household authorities” in your negotiation preparations.

Evaluate the company and location.

- Learn the impact of state taxes on your total income, including any retirement pay.
- Learn what the cost of living is in the employment area.
- Research what similarly skilled workers make in the employment area.
- In a humble way, assess what your worth will be to the company – how much value you can create for them.

PREPARE FOR NEGOTIATIONS

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Ask questions to help you better understand the role requirements and duties and how it fits into the company's vision. This will help you to assess the value you will create for the company, the biggest determining factor in offer negotiations.
- Ask questions to help you understand potential growth and advancement opportunities. This will help you assess if this job will be professionally fulfilling.
- Waiting for a job offer can be a stressful period. Put yourself at ease by asking the recruiter about the company's selection timeline.

REVIEWING THE OFFER

Once you've secured an offer, ask for time to review and consider it. Salary is not the only thing to consider – review the entire deal.

Compensation packages may provide programs that will strengthen the financial offer and may also be negotiated, sometimes more easily than salary alone. They might include:

- Vacation and personal days
- Differential pay and authorized time off to enable service in the reserve components
- Medical and dental insurance, as well as vision assistance programs
- Life insurance
- Relocation support
- Investment programs with corporate matching
- Retirement plans with corporate matching

To reinforce the salary, companies may provide bonuses as an incentive for value creation and retention:

- Spot bonuses for accomplishments
- Variable bonuses for performance
- Annual compensation adjustments for performance and perceived increased value
- Annual review for increased salary

PREPARE FOR NEGOTIATIONS




Two often-overlooked but critical items to consider with any offer are:

- Adding to your portfolio definitely increases future compensation.
 - Does the company provide for developmental or “broadening” experiences, including credentialing, and additional training and education?
- Progressing in the company will increase your responsibilities, authorities, experiences, and pay and benefits.
 - Will the company offer advancement opportunities?

DURING THE NEGOTIATION

Companies develop their offers to be competitive in the market, to incentivize performance and are based on their expectation of the new hire’s value creation. Keep all of this in mind, and:

- Be reasonable
- Be knowledgeable
- Be flexible
- Be enthusiastic
- Avoid ultimatums, unless you will refuse the offer if the company does not meet your particular demand(s)

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