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BUSINESS NETWORKING FOR VETERANS

A GUIDEBOOK FOR A SUCCESSFUL
TRANSITION FROM THE MILITARY
TO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE



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FOURBLOCK
VETERAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Transition from the Military
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**Michael P. Abrams
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Andrea R. Nierenberg**

**with a guest chapter
by Stephen L. Faulkner**

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VETERAN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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This book is dedicated to all of the service members who have been killed fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. We owe it to each one of these men and women to ensure we make a successful transition back home and live productive and fulfilling lives.

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Table of Contents

Foreword	xii
Preface: How to Use This Book	xix
Introduction: What You Need to Know Before Transitioning	1
No One is Going to Give You a Job!	1
Focus on Taking the “High Ground”	3
Find Strength in Serving Others	4
Choose to be Successful	5
Chapter 1 Understand Why Networking Is So Important to Making a Successful Military Transition	9
So What is Networking Exactly?	13
How Does Networking Help You Land a Job?	16
How Does Networking With Veteran Employees Increase Your Chances of Getting an Interview?	17
Summary	21
Chapter 2 Prepare Yourself for Networking Situations	23
The Five Stages of Networking	25
Stage 1: Meet People	26
Stage 2: Listen and Learn	26
Stage 3: Exchange Contact Information	27
Stage 4: Follow Up	27
Stage 5: Stay in Touch	27
Be Prepared to Talk About Yourself	28
Be Careful Using “Military Speak” Around Civilians	30
Should You Tell War Stories?	32
Give Yourself Permission	33
Have a Business Card	34
A Warm Smile is Better Than a Great Opening Line	34

	Do Your Research, and Know Something About the People You're Meeting	36
	Have a List of Get-To-Know-You Questions Prepared	36
	Wear a Lapel Pin	36
	Have an Exit Strategy and Follow-Up Plan	37
	Summary	40
Chapter 3	Begin Making Connections.	41
	Network with Your Friends and Family	42
	Stay Connected with the Veterans You Served With	43
	Volunteer with a Local Nonprofit Organization	44
	Summary	46
Chapter 4	Characteristics of Great Networkers	47
	Civilian Translations.	49
	Bearing	49
	Tact	49
	Unselfishness.	50
	Initiative.	50
	Enthusiasm	51
	Courage	51
	Summary	54
Chapter 5	Target the Right People.	55
	Point 1: Create an Initial Target List	56
	Point 2: Identify Open Positions That You Are Interested In.	58
	Point 3: Identify and Reach Out to Veteran Employees at Each Corporation	60
	Utilize Your Professional Contacts.	60
	Visit the Company's Website	60
	Look Up a Veteran Employee on LinkedIn.	61
	Point 4: Secure a Job!	62
	Summary	65
Chapter 6	When Networking Doesn't Come Easily.	67
	The Introvert's Networking Advantage	68
	Thoughtful Listening	68

Techniques for Better Listening	70
First Listening Technique: Playing Back	70
Second Listening Technique: Summarizing	70
Third Listening Technique: Reflecting Emotion	70
Be Passionate	71
Eleven Networking Techniques for the Quiet Networker	71
1: Have an Objective	72
2: Take Baby Steps	72
3: Begin with a Compliment	74
4: Use a Script	74
5: Work on Making Eye Contact	74
6: Attend Events and Then More Events	75
7: Attend Events with a Purpose	76
8: Set Up One-on-One Meetings	76
9: Do Your Networking at Your Highest Energy Level Time of Day	76
10: Set a Time Limit	77
11: Recharge and Reward Yourself	77
Networking on the Internet	77
Summary	81

Chapter 7 Expand, Organize, and Keep Your Network

Growing	83
Organizing and Keeping Track of Your Network	84
Find Out the Best Way to Stay in Touch	85
Note Important Dates, Birthdays, and Anniversaries	85
Family, Interests, and Hobbies	86
Ways to Keep in Touch and Show Appreciation	86
Handwritten Notes	86
Thank-You Notes	86
Other Notes	87
“The Power of Three” Note Plan	88
Take Full Advantage of Email	89
Send Gifts to Show Your Appreciation	89
Follow-Up: The Key to Keeping Your Network Alive and Growing	90
When Should You Follow Up?	90

	Become a Resource for Others	91
	Face-to-Face Time.	92
	Plan How to Keep in Touch with Everyone in Your Growing Network	93
	Summary	97
Chapter 8	Networking Etiquette	99
	General Rules for Networking Events, Meetings, or Other Events	100
	General Rules for Meals at Large Events or Private Functions	101
	Making Introductions.	102
	Email and IM Etiquette	103
	Phone Etiquette	104
	The Right Way to Ask for a Favor.	105
	Following Up	105
	Networking at a Nonnetworking Event	106
	Keeping Score	107
	Networking Competition	107
	Summary	110
Chapter 9	Social Media: A Focus on Strategy to Support Your Personal Networking (By Stephen L. Faulkner).	111
	What Is Social Media?	112
	The Functioning of the Parts is Determined by the Nature of Social Media	113
	Who Uses Social Media?	113
	Social Networking and Employment	116
	Digital Communications Last Forever!	117
	Social Media Isn't for Everyone.	118
	Is Social Networking for You?	118
	Connecting With Veterans and Organizations.	122
Chapter 10	Tying It All Together	123
Appendix A	11 General Orders of Networking	127

Appendix B Event Checklist..... 129
 Before You Go 129
 During the Event..... 133
 After the Event..... 135

 Resources..... 137

 Index 141

Foreword

In 2009, I retired from the United States Marine Corps after 20 years of active duty service. My own transition from the military was full of good fortune. I was lucky to have a mentor like former National Security Advisor General Jim Jones, who took a very special interest in my search for a second career. I was lucky to have a network of close friends who had successfully made their own transitions from the military to the private sector. And I was lucky to be hired by an organization like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce with President and CEO Tom Donohue, who understands and appreciates the value of hiring a veteran.

Many younger veterans are not that fortunate. Last year, the jobless rate for post-9/11 veterans was 50% higher than the national average at 12.1%, and veterans under the age of 25 faced a staggering 29.1% unemployment rate. This data is even more concerning given the additional one million service members who will be leaving active duty over the next five years.

In light of these challenges, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and National Chamber Foundation launched Hiring Our Heroes, a nationwide campaign to help veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment after serving our nation. With an aggressive goal of hosting 500 hiring fairs in its first two years, Hiring Our Heroes is the largest scale effort of its kind and was founded on the premise that transitioning military families often pursue career opportunities based on where they want to establish roots, versus what their best job prospects might be.

In close collaboration with a host of government, nonprofit, and veteran service organizations, the strength of Hiring Our Heroes has been our ability to forge strong public-private partnerships and positively influence the employment of veterans and military spouses in hundreds of communities across America. Working with the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, the American Legion, the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, our grass-roots efforts have helped 10,000 veterans

and military spouses find jobs at more than 200 hiring fairs over a 15-month period starting in March 2011.

Beyond our efforts to create a movement to address veteran unemployment at the local level, we must tackle the systemic issues facing our nation's veterans before they leave the military and search for a second career. We must do a better job of helping transitioning service members prepare for the civilian workforce and make informed decisions about employment in the private sector.

For starters, we need to show veterans where the jobs are, what industries and sectors are hiring, and how to use their educational benefits to gain specific qualifications so they can land one of the two million well-paying jobs that President Obama mentioned in his 2012 State of the Union address. It is unconscionable that our newest generation of veterans is struggling to find work when millions of jobs go unfilled because we lack a trained workforce.

With that in mind, Hiring Our Heroes and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University launched a program called Fast Track. Designed to show the critical paths to meaningful careers in growth sectors such as energy, health care, information technology (IT; including cyber security), transportation, and infrastructure, Fast Track helps veterans and transitioning service members make informed decisions about the use of the GI Bill to gain targeted employment opportunities. The program maps the 100 metropolitan areas with the fastest-growing job markets, and is populated with the educational and credentialing pathways to well-paying, highly skilled careers.

To be clear, Hiring Our Heroes is not about charity. Companies that hire veterans gain a competitive advantage, and our nation should view the imminent drawdown of our armed forces as an opportunity. After World War II, millions of veterans reentered the workforce, and the massive infusion of talent helped the manufacturing sector to grow and America's economy, as a whole, to thrive. As we come out of this recession, transitioning post-9/11 veterans can help growing industries expand further and our economy prosper.

Veterans must also do their part to better market and brand their unique skill sets so they stand out in a tough job market. There are no handouts,

and veterans must compete just like they did in uniform—on the rifle range, in the classroom, and in the field. Even with advanced technical skills, leadership experience, unparalleled discipline, and the ability to work well in teams, veterans cannot expect employers—and human resources managers, in particular—to understand their military background without a clear and concise explanation.

Personal branding is one of the biggest obstacles facing newer veterans. Few transitioning service members have developed a strong “elevator pitch,” and I have witnessed many fail when they stepped in front of employers for the first time at dozens of Hiring Our Heroes fairs. Building a personal brand is not just about translating military occupational skills (MOS). Many pundits throw this idea around as the “big fix,” but it’s more than that. When veterans have less than 90 seconds to convince a company to hire them over someone who went straight into college after high school, a strong brand is critical. By focusing on intangible traits and using plain language to describe personal awards, deployments, schools, and leadership billets, veterans can demonstrate why they stand head and shoulders above their peers.

After seeing hundreds of younger veterans struggle through interviews at its hiring fairs, Hiring Our Heroes joined forces with Toyota and Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer to create a personal branding guide that is being distributed to tens of thousands of veterans nationwide. In addition to being shared at Hiring Our Heroes events, the guide is available online as part of a personal branding toolkit that contains unique advice for members of the Marines, Army, Navy, and Air Force. Working alongside a company like Toyota that understands brand development and one of our nation’s most recognizable younger veterans, Hiring Our Heroes’ aim is to help transitioning service members tell a compelling story about their military service to potential employers and turn their next interview into a job.

Even with the necessary tools to build a personal brand and make an informed decision about employment, veterans must develop a strong network once they leave the military if they want to land their dream job. Networking is the connective tissue for any successful career search. Without mentors and a network of friends and associates in the private

sector, veterans will enter the civilian workforce blindly and often times will run into a series of dead ends.

Given today's widespread use of social media, there is no shortage of opportunities to build an effective network. Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn can be launchpads to connect with business professionals from specific industries who have prior military experience and have made difficult transitions themselves. In addition to providing networking opportunities at hundreds of hiring fairs across America, Hiring Our Heroes looks to these technologies and others as the glue for Fast Track and the Personal Branding initiative.

Business Networking for Veterans serves as an effective guide to help veterans make strong first impressions, build those initial connections into professional relationships, and finally turn interviews into job offers. This book is a great tool to prepare for and take advantage of programs like Hiring Our Heroes and hundreds of others around the country that are making a concerted effort to connect veterans with meaningful employment.

—Kevin Schmiegel, executive director, Hiring Our Heroes

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This is the hardest page for us to write. There are so many people who we want to thank personally and give credit for making us better networkers, and more importantly, better people. For Andrea, this book has been a work in progress for nearly 20 years. For Dr. Michael Faulkner, it's been 40 years in the making since struggling and successfully overcoming the challenges of his military transition during the Vietnam War.

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Andrea would like to give a special thanks to Trudy and the late Bill Mitchell. Bill was a World War II veteran who earned the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his actions. He went on to become an oil entrepreneur and philanthropist to Deaconess Hospital and the University of Southern Indiana, in addition to many other charities and organizations. Trudy and Bill have also been large supporters of the Wounded Warriors. They are two of the most special people on this earth, and Trudy continues to carry on with the work of her wonderful husband after 68 years of wedded bliss.

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Thanks to all for your help, support, and friendship.

About the Authors

Michael P. Abrams joined the Marine Corps following the September 11 attacks, serving on active duty for eight years and deploying to eastern Afghanistan with an infantry company as the artillery forward observer. After leaving active duty, Michael attended New York University's Stern School of Business, graduating with an M.B.A. in Finance and Entrepreneurship & Innovation. Michael founded a nonprofit that provides military-to-corporate leadership education to transitioning veterans and connects them with internship opportunities and entry-level positions at Fortune 500 companies (www.fourblock.org). He is also an adjunct professor at Fordham University.

Dr. Michael Lawrence Faulkner is a U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam veteran who served from 1964–1970 and rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant. He spent 30 years in a variety of leadership and management (“coaching”) positions with Dun & Bradstreet, the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), and entrepreneurial start-ups. He also helped run the family business before moving into the academic world. Today Michael is a professor at the Keller Graduate School of Management at DeVry University. He is a member of Mensa, a former two-time national champion of Athletic Dueling, and an International Rotary Fellowship award winner. He has been published in peer review journals, dozens of magazines, newsletters, websites, and blogs, and he has written half a dozen white papers, including one that was circulated to all elected members of Congress and the major media outlets. He has written or coauthored nine books and two one-act plays, which were both performed in regional theaters.

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Preface: How to Use This Book



When I transitioned off active duty, I was completely unprepared. I had no idea what I wanted to do, had no understanding of the opportunities that were available to me, and thought I was entitled to a job. Seriously, I'm a combat Marine—not only am I endlessly more qualified than any nasty civilian out there, but I also served my country during a time of war. I should be able to land a job wherever I want, right?

I couldn't have been more wrong.

I really thought that employers would jump at the opportunity to hire a service member. But they didn't. I applied unsuccessfully to dozens upon dozens of online job postings. I was spraying my resume everywhere and praying to get a response. I received nothing back except automatically generated rejection emails. I was confused and frustrated, and I even began to think that getting off active duty was a big mistake.

I was absolutely ashamed to ask people for help, so I continued to try to figure things out on my own. I bought a couple of military transition books, visited every military recruitment website that I could find, and even tried working with a few headhunters. The more I looked for easy answers, the more frustrated I became with my transition.

Looking back, my big mistake was to believe that I could make a successful transition on my own.

If it wasn't for the support of my family and the many veterans in my community who took me under their wings, I don't know where I'd be right now. They taught me that the only way to figure things out was to get out there and talk to people. They showed me that there was a huge network of former military veterans and civilian professionals who were willing to sit down and assist me in making the right career decision; I just had to ask them. I learned that sitting down and speaking with a veteran or civilian professional about a career that I was interested in was much more helpful and informative than reading a book or visiting any number of websites.

This book isn't going to provide you with any easy answers. There is no secret step-by-step guide that, if followed exactly, will lead you to a six-figure salary. Rather, this book will teach you how to develop relationships with the people in your community who are the most willing and able to help you figure out the best next step in your life and career and then help you get there.

Nothing of value in life is ever quick and easy. Transitioning back home and starting a new career isn't going to happen overnight. In fact, it took me two years after transitioning to settle into a job that I genuinely enjoyed. I firmly believe that effective networking, building, and

sustaining personal and professional relationships is the key to making a successful military transition. I want to show you how networking has worked for me, my veteran buddies, and my civilian friends. I hope you will enjoy, use, and most of all, profit from these words.

—Michael Abrams

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Introduction: What You Need to Know Before Transitioning



Courtesy of Joshua Wartchow.

No One is Going to Give You a Job!

In the corporate world, transitioning veterans are not that special. It doesn't matter how many combat tours you completed, how many medals you received, or whether you were in the infantry or aviation supply. Most employers look at us like we're all the same because they don't really know what service members do on a day-to-day basis.

Remember that less than 1% of the U.S. population has served, so their knowledge of the military is limited to Hollywood movies, cable news, and the exaggerated stories they hear third-hand from neighbors or coworkers. Think about it—can you speak intelligently about what a defense lawyer does other than what you see on *Law and Order*? It's the same thing with us, so don't think that you're going to throw your military resume downrange and have dozens of companies fighting to hire you.

The truth of the matter is that America isn't at war: The military is. And the military doesn't explain that to service members. We think that everyone back home knows exactly what we do and understands how our skills translate to the corporate world. But they don't. As a result, the corporate world views veterans as a commodity rather than as individuals with specific and varying skills and experiences.

When you finally land that first job, you probably won't be in charge of anyone. You won't be mentoring other colleagues, influencing operations, or frankly, have responsibility for much of anything except yourself. You'll most likely be the low man on the totem pole so you can learn and acquire the technical competencies of your new job. Don't get down on yourself if you end up being a 28-year-old intern, or if perhaps your new boss is several years younger than you are with considerably less leadership experience. Be prepared for this, and don't take it personally. You have to pay your dues and learn the trade, just like you did in the military.

In the military, there is no skipping rank. You have to earn each stripe with hard work and experience. Could you imagine if the Army took the honors grad at boot camp and made him your squad leader in Afghanistan? There's just no way that would happen. So why would a company do the same thing with you? It's okay if you have to take a few steps back in order to take a thousand steps forward. Rarely will a veteran land a civilian job that is equivalent to the responsibility, authority, and compensation that she had in the military.

This is why it's so important to search for a career and not just settle for a job. If you choose to pursue a job because it pays well or comes with an impressive title, chances are you won't find the work very fulfilling and may end up quitting after a few months. Then you'll be back to square one again. But if you network with people, do your research, ask questions, and make an informed decision about a career that you genuinely enjoy, regardless of the starting pay or job title, you'll be a happier, harder working person. And in no time, your salary and responsibility will catch up to the value you bring to the company. Don't let your ego dictate your destiny.

Focus on Taking the “High Ground”

In 2006, in the midst of our nation’s two longest wars, Generals David Petraeus and James Amos took the hard lessons we’ve learned to date in Iraq and Afghanistan and rewrote the Army and Marine Corps’ counterinsurgency manual. The revised manual outlined a new strategy for how to fight and win an insurgency in the twenty-first century.

But the new strategy centered on a familiar principle that transcends centuries of war: winning the high ground.

In previous wars, such as World War II, the high ground, or the most advantageous place to be on the battlefield, was an elevated piece of terrain such as a hill or a mountain from which a unit could best defend themselves, build up their forces, and then advance to the next objective.

But the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are anything but conventional conflicts. We can’t battle Al Qaeda the same way we did the Germans—sitting on top of a hill with superior firepower is no longer an advantageous position. In fact, it’s actually counterproductive when fighting an insurgency or an enemy that blends in with the local population. Generals Petraeus and Amos argued that the “high ground” in this type of asymmetric conflict is really the indigenous people.

To win this “terrain,” we have to come off the hill and immerse ourselves in the community. We need to create relationships with the local people, understand their fears and needs, provide security, and show them that working with us is more prosperous than siding with the insurgents. We have to win their hearts and minds. It’s personal. It’s face-to-face combat. The only way to win the war is to create one positive relationship at a time.

Your military transition resembles fighting an insurgency. You can’t just sit at home behind a computer and fling email at people. Nor can you depend solely on the traditional “formal” tools of job hunting, such as answering ads, posting resumes on electronic job boards, hiring personal career coaches, signing up with recruiters or placement firms, and going to cattle call-style job fairs. There is overwhelming evidence that demonstrates that “informal” tools such as networking are far more effective in the job search. You have to get out there and build relationships with the people in your community, ask questions, discover new

opportunities, learn about different careers, and figure out how you're going to continue to live a life of service and honor.

The “high ground” in your military transition is the people in your community. Win this terrain, and you'll have the information and opportunities you need to figure out the best next step in your life and career.

Find Strength in Serving Others

When the going gets tough, we have a saying in the Marine Corps: Don't go internal. When you're in an uncomfortable or painful situation, it's only natural to focus on the discomfort you're experiencing and begin to feel sorry for yourself, like when it's 0300, you've been up for 35 hours straight, you're soaking wet, and the mission is a total cluster. Instead of staying focused on the mission at hand, you begin to let your discomfort consume your thoughts and you say things to yourself like, “Man, when will this damn patrol be over so I can get out of these wet clothes and go to bed?”

When you begin to feel sorry for yourself, or “go internal,” you allow yourself to become weak and you put others around you at risk because you're focusing on the discomfort you're feeling instead of what you're supposed to be thinking about.

Much like your time in service, your military transition isn't going to be a rose garden. In fact, at times, it's going to be pretty unpleasant. But the thing that got us through the hard times during our military service was our commitment to putting the welfare of others ahead of ourselves. Think about it: Whenever we go internal, whenever we start thinking about ourselves, we get weaker. But when we think about the mission and focus on serving and helping others, we get stronger—and when that happens, nothing can get in our way.

The military is perhaps the most diverse organization in the world. And it's the ability to harness this diversity and channel it toward a common goal that makes us the greatest fighting force on the planet. And there's one common denominator that all service members share: a desire to serve something greater than themselves. This is our strength. This is what separates us from most of the 99% who chose not to serve our country.

It's extremely easy to go internal when making your transition. Trying to figure out what career to pursue or what you want to do with your life is a daunting task. It's overwhelming, and it's exacerbated by the fact that you no longer have your buddies around to kick you in the butt when you start to feel sorry for yourself.

When you start to get discouraged and frustrated during your transition and you can begin to feel yourself going internal, draw strength and direction from your inherent desire to serve something greater than yourself. Ask yourself:

- How can I make a positive difference in the lives of others?
- What kind of service can I provide to my community?
- What can I do to make the people around me better?

Service is your guiding principle through your transition. When you joined the military, you raised your right hand and swore to serve the nation. When you left, no one told you to put your hand back down. You never stop serving; you're just choosing to serve in another capacity.

When the going gets tough, don't go internal. Focus your energy on becoming an asset to your community, and you will find your way.

Choose to be Successful

When you decided to join the military, you chose to be successful. You chose to hold yourself to a higher standard and to take the road less traveled. Your military transition presents another opportunity for you to choose whether you will have maximum control over your own pathway to life's success or not.

Let's be clear about one thing—you have not been chosen by some cosmic alignment or identified in any way as someone extra special. While individually you are unique and special because you are a member of one of the world's most respected clubs—U.S. military veterans—everyone, including nonveterans, will have the same opportunity to take control of their success at some point in their lives. Unfortunately, and this is where you can begin to separate yourself, the majority of people will not recognize this moment of opportunity when it comes; therefore,

they will not get the same benefits that you will if you make the right choice. What separates you from them is that you are reading this book and opening your mind to the possibilities that await you.

The reason this missed opportunity is unfortunate for others is because this is one of the few egalitarian moments in life when individuals such as you will have the opportunity to experience near-perfect equality of opportunity for your own future.

Psychologists call this belief in self-empowerment an *internal locus of control*. Skeptics and doubters are those who prefer to live their lives among flocks of others like themselves, who tend to dress alike, look alike, talk alike, work alike, think alike, act alike, believe alike, and like as well as dislike alike.

These people want you to believe life has a kind of predestined pathway. They believe life is a linear path in which certain things are expected of you at certain times and certain things either come your way or they don't. In other words, they want you to believe that you have no control over your life.

SELF-CONCEPT THEORY (SCT)

Many psychologists believe in the *self-concept theory (SCT)*, which states that many of the successes and failures people experience in their careers and lives are closely tied to the way in which they view themselves through their relationships with other people, including of course their parents, teachers, fellow veterans (including officers and noncoms), spouses, partners, bosses, managers, and supervisors.

There are three critical points to the SCT. First, the self-concept is learned; we are not born with it. We learn it through repeated experiences and our expectations about the outcome of those experiences, particularly with persons in powerful or influential roles. Generally, a person's military experiences are an affirmation of the SCT. It is natural for U.S. military personnel to feel that they are a cut above because of their unique experiences.

Second, the self-concept is organized by our minds. We organize and then use as necessary the appropriate feelings, beliefs, and world view of self-empowerment because we generally desire order and harmony in our lives. Lastly, the SCT is dynamic, meaning that the individual views

the world not in isolation, but rather in relation to one's self-concept, which is subject to continuous reevaluation as one attempts to assimilate new ideas and get rid of old ones. Individuals will attempt to maintain their self-concept regardless of how helpful or damaging to themselves or others it becomes. Some individuals who sacrifice physical and financial comfort, and even their own safety, for emotional satisfaction to avoid change, display this truth.

Individuals experience anxiety because of a loss of self-esteem, and anything that negatively affects self-concept risks depleting self-esteem. U.S. military veterans can make the SCT work for them or allow it to work against them. Most importantly, it is within each person's control. Some people accept this while other people reject it. If you accept it, you exercise an internal locus of control and are ready to make the right choices to control your own life.

There are some people who believe life is full of unexpected randomness and troubles that will continually "pop up," negating any preparations or plans we make. These people believe that the best we can do is manage these problems and obstacles and live with whatever the outcome may be.

We have examined and experienced the solutions for dealing with a wide range of issues that we are sure you have thought about or have been struggling with in your life: how to adjust to civilian life; which of your military experiences and skills will be helpful to you in looking for a job and building a career; how to overcome obstacles and problems with living and working in the civilian community; dealing with your fears, loneliness, and career aspirations; trying to cope with concerns about job search issues; worrying about how to meet people; managing your fear of public speaking; how to make new friends; and many, many other life issues that were not part of or were not prominent in your military life.

Most of these issues and problems you are thinking about don't have to be faced alone. In fact, you should not face them alone. If Chesty Puller had a Sergeant Major to help him get through the day, what makes any one of us think we can handle life by ourselves? Do not be afraid or

egotistical or too wrapped up in trying to prove you can be tough and resourceful to think you don't need the help of other people. You do. Only a fool believes that he can succeed alone.

Personal networking is, without a doubt, the most effective technique and tool used by the most successful individuals in all walks of life, regardless of gender, religion, industry, or profession, and at every age, in every social situation, and in all geographic areas.

Your invitation to self-fulfilling empowerment will be automatic once you learn about the power of personal networking and then decide to embrace its techniques. This isn't the tool of a secret society. Just about everybody has the opportunity to choose to learn the techniques and take up the tools of networking for success. However, experience and history have shown that only a few will take the path.

1

Understand Why Networking Is So Important to Making a Successful Military Transition



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Was there ever a time when you went on a combat patrol by yourself? Of course there wasn't. Anytime you left the wire, you were with your squad—or in other words, you were with a network of soldiers who looked after one another. Why? Because you were stronger together than you were individually. It's common sense, right? To be successful back here at home, you also need a squad of people who will have your back. The only difference is, back here at home, you have to create your own squad. No one is assigned to have your back anymore. In this chapter, we discuss the foundational elements of how you can begin to create a professional network that will support you in making the right decisions for a successful transition back home.

There is a great deal of research and empirical evidence that proves something you probably know intuitively: Networking works for those who choose to network. It is, by an enormous margin, the single most effective technique for effective and productive job hunting (even during an economic downturn).

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that more than 70% of all newly created jobs in the past decade were never posted or announced anywhere. Furthermore, more than 60% of replacement jobs were handled in the same manner. These jobs were not posted on any website, advertised on a classified page, or listed with any headhunter or recruiter. These jobs were filled by professional acquaintances in the hiring manager's network.

We have seen this issue discussed in other research, in other studies, and by other authors. Depending on the study or book one is quoting, the percentage of jobs filled by networking varies from 60% to 85%. The exact number is not the issue. The important issue is simply that an overwhelming number of jobs in America are filled through the process of networking. If you do not use networking skills, you surrender many job, life, and other opportunities to people who do embrace networking. As a post-9/11 veteran, you deserve to gain the benefits of networking, but you have to reach out and take them. No one is going to network for you.

Some economists believe that unemployment will be a societal problem in America for years to come. Networking could be the difference between being part of the pool of military veterans working in low-level, unsatisfying jobs and those who move their careers along regardless of the state of the economy.

Not only is the process of networking the way most people are hired by employers, but interpersonal traits (networking skills) are among the top characteristics sought after by employers. In a number of research studies conducted over the past ten years, senior managers at a wide range of businesses were asked about what they were looking for in recent college graduates.

The following is what these managers said they value most in terms of skills, traits, characteristics, and talents:

- Good communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Ability to find and fix problems
- Enthusiasm
- High energy level
- Strength of character
- Self-confidence
- Motivation
- Leadership skills
- Quick adaptability to change and uncertainty
- Commitment to lifetime learning
- Commitment to excellence
- Being a team player
- Willingness to take some risks
- Willingness to face self-assessment
- Ability to lighten up (to not take oneself too seriously)

In 2011, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Labor, surveyed Fortune 500 firms to determine what skills employers want. Here are the responses, displayed in the order of importance to employers.

THE TEN SKILLS MOST DESIRED IN JOB APPLICANTS BY FORTUNE 500 FIRMS

1. Teamwork
2. Problem-solving
3. Interpersonal
4. Oral communication

5. Listening
6. Creative thinking
7. Leadership
8. Writing
9. Computation
10. Reading

Still not convinced? In December 2006, Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted a comprehensive study of employers and recent college graduates for the Association for American Colleges and Universities. The study found that a significant majority of respondents cited skills learned and perfected in networking as the most important skills to look for in new hires. These skills, and the percentage of respondents reporting them as the most important skills, are shown in Chart 1-1. The skills are teamwork (44%), critical thinking (33%), and oral/written communications (30%).

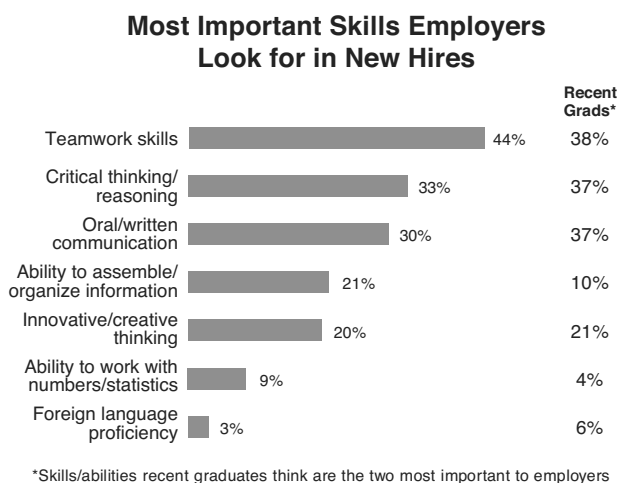


Chart 1-1 Which two of the above skills or abilities are most important to you?

Hart, P. D. 2007. "How should colleges prepare students to succeed in today's global economy" Washington, DC: The Association of American Colleges and Universities, p. 5.

There are scores of other studies that have produced similar results. But let's take a step back and apply some common sense to all these studies. What is it that employers really want in a candidate? The bottom line is that people prefer and want to be around and work with other people whom they know and like. This is not a mystery of the universe or a great discovery of science; it is simply human nature. Think about it, and it will make sense. A manager will spend eight to ten hours a day with an employee, and there will probably be hours of time spent in travel or social time. The manager will want to know that she will be able to enjoy this time spent with the employee. In addition, the manager will want to be certain she can trust the employee.

Trust and reciprocity are traits and talents people bring with them to the job—they can't be taught. Managers can teach employees the job requirements, but they can't teach new employees to get along with others, to unilaterally find and fix problems, to have good interpersonal skills, to be adaptable to change or uncertainty, or to be willing to take risks.

These kinds of traits and talents are found in people whom managers find from their own networks. If the hiring managers cannot find someone they know and like, they will reach out to their personal network of contacts and ask whether they know anyone who could fill the position.

People put great stock and trust in their contacts' networks. If their contact knows and likes someone, that candidate has (unbeknownst to them) already made a great first impression on the hiring manager. If the hiring managers cannot find candidates whom they know or whom a network contact knows, the traditional job-hunting approaches and tools are put to work to search for prospects with the necessary experience, who will hopefully become someone the hiring manager will come to know and like.

So What is Networking Exactly?

Networking isn't supposed to be difficult. In fact, it should just occur naturally. Think about how your relationship with your best friend or significant other developed. You met somewhere, discovered that you shared a common interest, exchanged contact information, and then

hung out again. It just sort of happened. You didn't know it, but you were networking. You connected and developed a mutually beneficial relationship with someone. It wasn't an event that you planned. You didn't get out of bed and say, "Today I'm going to make a friend." Networking is something that can happen anywhere. There is no specific time or place. Just like there is no specific time and place to watch your buddy's back. You are continuously doing it.

But let's be honest: Networking doesn't come naturally to many people. At first, you may feel like a phony, as if you're trying to "suck up" to people. You may not like the thought of meeting people so you can somehow use them to advance your career. Perhaps the words *manipulation* and *coercion* come to mind, along with the notion that people who network are people who get ahead because of *who* they know, not *what* they know. Could it be that you believe there is something inherently sinister, bad, or unfair about leveraging personal contacts to help you get ahead?

You'll soon figure out that networking isn't about finding opportunities for you or "sucking up" to someone to get ahead in life. It's about finding opportunities to help others. Remember what we said earlier: Find strength in service. And service is the secret to networking. You want to join as many "squads" as possible rather than trying to find people to join yours. Instead of seeking out and just connecting with people who can somehow advance your career, begin looking for people who you are able to help in some way. Helping others is an inherent trait in most veterans. We don't have to think about it; we just do it. If you think of networking as an opportunity to help others, you will naturally develop a network of people who will also have your back.

Here's another way of looking at the process of networking: If you're a guy and see an attractive woman at a bar, you wouldn't just walk up and ask her to marry you. She'd think you were desperate, and it would immediately turn her off. You'd be much better off playing it cool. You want to walk up to someone with confidence, introduce yourself, and begin a simple conversation to see whether there is any chemistry between the two of you. The goal of the conversation is to get the

woman's number so you can meet up at a later time, when you have her undivided attention, and can begin to build a relationship.

Networking for professional advancement is the same thing. You wouldn't want to walk right up to someone you didn't know and ask for a job. Just like in dating, there's a courting process involved. When you meet a professional acquaintance, the goal is to obtain that person's contact information, in many cases a business card, so you can follow up at a later date, when you have the person's undivided attention, and can begin to build a professional relationship.

Networking is simply making friends and building trust. That's all it is. If you were given a bunch of free tickets to a Yankees game (okay, some of you would flush them down the toilet, so insert your favorite sports team here), you wouldn't give them away to strangers. You would give them to your friends and family. Why? Because you know that you'd have a good time with them and eventually they'd return the favor. If you gave those tickets to a bunch of strangers, you wouldn't be able to predict whether you'd have a good time or if they'd ever return the favor.

The same thing occurs with professional opportunities. When a manager at Company ABC needs to hire an account executive, he is first going to see who in his professional network may be interested in the job before telling strangers. Why? It's because he already knows and trusts the people in his network. Thus, he is able to reasonably predict how well someone will perform in the specific position. It reduces the risk and the cost of hiring an incompetent person, just like bringing your friends to a baseball game reduces the risk of having a bad time.

Networking leads to opportunities that most people wouldn't get. It's having the inside track and the ability to get the full and undivided attention of decision makers. Networking gets your foot in the door—it gets you a solid look and maybe an interview. But remember that it does not get you a job. Do not expect to be given or handed anything just because you know someone. You will still have to make your case, but you've already won half the battle by putting yourself in the position to be considered.

How Does Networking Help You Land a Job?

Let's take a look at how people are generally hired at corporations. It's actually not entirely different from how we are processed into the military, except there are no physical fitness tests in corporate America.

Let's say, for example, that the senior vice president (SVP) of advertising sales at Company ABC wants to grow his business and is looking to hire additional employees. The SVP is equivalent to a full-bird colonel or regimental commander in the infantry. He is extremely busy trying to manage and grow his business, so he doesn't have time to search for candidates, just like regimental commanders don't have time to go to high schools and recruit more soldiers for their units.

Similar to how the military has recruiters and administrative personnel to locate and process new soldiers, the SVP has a Human Resources (HR) department to search for candidates. The mission of the HR department is to locate qualified applicants based on the hiring criteria given to them by the SVP, conduct initial interviews, whittle the applicant pool down to the best four or five candidates, and then present these candidates to the SVP for the final decision.

This is where many veterans get stuck. The job market is extremely competitive right now. HR personnel have to review dozens and sometimes hundreds of resumes for one position. They have only 30 seconds, at most, to look over a resume and determine whether the person is qualified for the job. And because most HR recruiters haven't served in the military, they don't fully understand our skills and experiences. Therefore, more times than not, our resumes get thrown in the "no" pile and are never considered by the hiring manager.

The trick is to get yourself past HR and in front of a hiring manager (in our example, the SVP of ad sales)—the decision maker—so that you can verbally make your case for the position. That's the goal! HR personnel can say "no" to a candidate, but they cannot actually hire anyone. That final decision lies with the hiring manager. If a hiring manager already knew you and thought you'd be a strong candidate for a certain position,

he would tell HR that he'd be interviewing you, and HR would coordinate and process the appropriate paperwork.

Let's look at this personal example. Last fall Mike was searching for a job. He applied to 34 positions through various companies' online job forums. In 16 of the companies, he was unable to network with a veteran or an employee who worked there. Out of these 16 companies, he received no callbacks for interviews. In fact, automatic rejection emails started trickling in.

For the remaining 18 positions, he was able to connect with a veteran employee at each of the corporations, who was then able to help "refer" or recommend him for the position. (We'll talk about how he did this later in the book.) Mike ended up getting called back for ten interviews! Veteran employees conducted two of the interviews, and he was subsequently offered positions at both companies. Employees with no military experience conducted his remaining eight interviews, and he received only one offer.

Isn't that amazing? Networking with a veteran employee increased Mike's chances of getting an interview from 0% to more than 50%! And both veteran employees who interviewed him subsequently offered him positions at the company.

How Does Networking With Veteran Employees Increase Your Chances of Getting an Interview?

Many firms and organizations are not good at assessing individuals' talents—an applicant's recurring patterns of thought, feelings, actions, and behaviors that naturally equip the individual to excel in a job. Therefore, the applicant, using networking and communications skills, has to take charge and be able to demonstrate her talents and how she will benefit the employer (Gallup, 2009).

What exactly do job applicants have to do? They need to demonstrate that they will or can do these things:

- Reduce the cost of the hire and lower the employee turnover
- Rate and improve interpersonal relationships with other employees
- Adapt quickly to change, be easy to manage, and be quicker to learn roles and therefore have a shorter learning curve
- Be more productive, more precise, and more consistent, missing less work, producing higher quality work, making fewer mistakes, reducing management's anxiety and stress, and exceeding expectations
- Produce greater customer satisfaction, greater customer retention, and higher profits

To explain all this and make your case, you need the undivided attention of the decision maker. You can't communicate on your resume that you can do all these things. Let's go back to the main question from our example: Why did networking with veteran employees increase Mike's chances of getting an interview by more than 50%? It was because other veterans could adequately assess his military skills and talents. They fully understood his experience and knew that he possessed the interpersonal skills, intellect, and work ethic to excel in the position. He hadn't even met these veterans, but they already were in his professional network and willing to give him a shot because they had served in the military and understood Mike's capabilities. The question now was whether they wanted to work with Mike for eight to ten hours a day.

Conversely, employees with no military experience could not adequately assess Mike's military skills and experiences, so they were less likely to give him a chance and instead went with a candidate whose experiences and talents they understood better.

Does all this make sense? If not, go back and reread this chapter. Understanding why networking is important and knowing the foundational principles of successful networking are crucial to getting the most out of the rest of this book.

VETERAN PROFILE ANDREW S. ROBERTS



Courtesy of Andrew S. Roberts.

NAME: Andrew S. Roberts

TITLE: Director of the Office of Military and Veterans Liaison Services for the North Shore LIJ Health System

SERVICE: United States Army, Iraq Veteran

I served in Iraq as an artillery battery commander. Our mission was turned upside down in 2003 after the initial invasion. My unit ended up providing a wide range of services, from patrols and checkpoints to civil affairs and training the Iraqi security forces. As the enemy activity increased around me, so did my anxiety. By the time I came home a year later, I was suffering from a pretty decent case of post-operational stress, although I didn't quite realize it at the time.

The stress and anxiety that lingered with me after my return didn't exactly help my job search. I was still in somewhat of a combat mode when I got back, and I really didn't care what I did for a living. I was just focused on "getting a job." I accepted the first offer from the first company that called me. It was with a home builder in California. It was a great company with a lot of room to grow, but I hated it. I quit after six months because I was not fulfilled. I felt I had no purpose, which I have since learned is extremely common among returning veterans.

A year later I moved closer to friends and family in New York, which was helpful for my stress. I was living at home with my mom and dad and realized I really needed to get out of this rut and get my independence back. I still didn't know what I wanted to do but thought that maybe I could get a job in New York City in commercial construction. So I wrote about 15 letters and sent them to 15 people from construction companies in New York that sounded important. (I looked at their websites.) I wrote and commented on the specific qualities or projects each company was working on, explained my situation, and asked them for an interview. I also enclosed my resume. To my surprise, three companies called me, two interviewed me, and two offered me a job. I accepted a position and was really happy to get my independence back. I was working in construction again, but this time working on hospitals. It felt a little more fulfilling; at least this job was going to help people someday. I can admit now, though, that I knew in my heart this still wasn't the right job for me.

I spent every free minute I had reading about Iraq and Afghanistan. I read the newspapers, watched news shows, and was very interested in government and politics. I thought about it constantly. I felt for the men and women still fighting. I was passionate about the struggles recently returned veterans were having. And in a truly serendipitous moment I learned that the director of a major veteran's organization lived on my street in New York City. I called the organization and started volunteering immediately.

It was like true love: "When you know, you know." I knew this was something special. After six months of volunteering, I let them know I was available full time. They interviewed me and then offered me a job at about \$20,000 less than what I was currently making. It was a big shock

to me. Was I willing to give up a good salary for basically a terrible one, just to do something I cared about?

The answer ended up being yes, and I look back at that decision as one of the best I've ever made. The job itself ended up not being the best one for me, but I was now 100% fulfilled, and I was in the right field. What a great feeling to wake up every day loving what you do!

As I entered the field of "veteran's advocacy" I began interacting with many other people working on similar projects. I worked hard, but I also kept my eyes open. I soon learned there was a job available with the government that was paying nearly \$40,000 more than I was currently making, and it was a leadership role. It sounded too good to be true. I applied for the position, and because I now had relevant experience, I was hired.

My initial cut in pay got me into a field that I love and enabled me to earn a good salary. Since working in this field, I have met many people from a variety of walks of life who all have a shared interest: veterans and their families. I've joined groups and volunteered for causes I care about, all in connection to this cause. The people I've met are my network. They have helped move me ahead in life.

I've since moved on to an even more fulfilling job at an even better salary. There were two keys to this: finding a field I cared about, and making connections with others who had the same passion. I made the connections because I wanted to help as many people as I could, and in turn they helped me. They have supported my mission, helped me find new career opportunities, and mentored me to heights I didn't know I could achieve.

Summary

The biggest takeaway from this chapter is to understand how important networking is for a successful military transition. You can't do it on your own. Ask any veteran who is now in the civilian world, and he will tell you a story about how someone along the way, usually another veteran, extended a helping hand or provided a crucial introduction that resulted in a job opportunity. Ask for help! You're going to need it.

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A

acronyms, 31
actions after events, 135
actions during events, 133-134
active listening, 69
American Legion, 44
American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), 11
Amos, General James, 3
anniversaries, 85-86
anxiety, 23-25
appreciation
 gifts, 89-90
 handwritten notes, 86
 notes, 87-88
 thank-you notes, 86-87
asking for favors, 105

B

bearing, 48, 49
become a resource for others, 90
birthdays, 85-86
branding, personal branding, xiii
business cards, 34, 100
business space, 101
Byrne, Gerry, 53

C

characteristics of great networkers, 48
choose to be successful, 5-6
Clark, Stephen, 109-110

clothing, 31
communication
 email, 89
 email/instant messaging, etiquette, 103-104
 face-to-face time, 92
 finding out preferred methods, 85
 follow-up, 90
 handwritten notes, 86
 notes, 87-88
 thank-you notes, 86-87
company websites, visiting, 60-61
competition, 107
compliments, 74
comprehension, 69
confidence. *See* bearing
congratulation notes, 88
connecting
 with friends and family, 42
 with those you served with, 43-44
 through nonprofit organizations, 44-46
 through social media, 122
contact information, exchanging, 27
contacts, professional contacts, utilizing, 60
courage, 48

D

daydreaming, 69
demographics, users of social media, 118-119
digital communications last forever, 117-118

digital networks, 78
Donohue, Tom, xi
dress code, 31
 lapel pins, 36-37
drinks, 101
Drucker, Peter, 115

E

eating while conversing, 101
email, 89
 etiquette, instant messaging,
 103-104
emotion, reflecting emotion,
 listening, 70-71
emphatic listening, 69
employment, social networking and,
 116-117
energy levels, networking during
 highest energy level time of day,
 76-77
enthusiasm, 48, 51
etiquette, 99
 asking for favors, 105
 competition, 107
 email, 103-104
 follow-up, 105-106
 instant messaging, 103-104
 introductions, 102-103
 keeping score, 107
 meals, 101-102
 networking at non-networking
 events, 106-107
 phones, 104-105
 rules for networking events and
 meetings, 100-101
events
 actions during events, 133-134
 after the event, 135
 preparations before you go, 129-133
 techniques for, introverts, 75-76
exchanging contact information, 27
exit strategies, 37, 134
eye contact, 73-75, 100

F

face-to-face time, 92
families, 86
 connecting with, 42
favors, asking for, 105
focus, 30
follow-up, 27, 90
 etiquette, 105-106
 plans, 37
 when to follow-up, 90
food, as a gift, 89-90
food and drink, 101
 meals, etiquette, 101-102
Four Block, 56
friends, connecting with veterans and
 organizations, 42
Friszell, Jesse, 39-40
FYI (for your information), notes,
 87-88

G

get-to-know-you questions, 36
gifts, 89-90

H

handshakes, 100
handwritten notes, 86
Hansman, Jason, 120-121
high ground, 3-4, 124
Hiring Our Heroes, xi-xii
hobbies, 86
hooks, 29

I

IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan
 Veterans of America), 120
identifying, veteran employees, 60-62
identifying open positions, 57-59
important dates, 85-86
Indeed.com, 57

initiative, 48, 50-51
instincts, social media, 117-118
Institute for Veterans and Military
Families, xii
interests, 86
internet, tool of networking, 77-79
interviews, increasing chances, 17-21
introductions
etiquette, 102-103
personal introductions, 28
introverts, 68
listening, 68-69
networking on the internet, 77-79
passion, 71
techniques for, 71-72
attend events, 75-76
attend events with purpose, 76
baby steps, 72-74
compliments, 74
eye contact, 74-75
network during highest energy
level time of day, 76-77
objectives, 72
one-on-one meetings, 76
recharging and rewarding
yourself, 77
scripts, 74
time limits, 77

J

jobs
landing by networking, 16-17
securing, 62-64
Jones, General Jim, xi

K

keeping in touch, 27-28
creating a plan, 93
email, 89
gifts, 89-90
handwritten notes, 86

notes, 87-88
thank-you notes, 86-87
with those you served with, 43-44
keeping score, etiquette, 107

L

Lang, Johnathon, 80-81
lapel pins, 36-37
leadership traits, 48
bearing, 49
courage, 51-52
enthusiasm, 51
initiative, 50-51
tact, 49-50
unselfishness, 50
Lincoln, Abraham, 51
LinkedIn, looking up veteran
employees, 61-62
listening, 26-27
active listening, 69
emphatic listening, 69
introverts, 68-69
poor behaviors, 69
tips for better listening
playing back, 70
reflecting emotion, 70-71
summarizing, 70

M

managers, skills they value, 10-11
manners. *See* etiquette
Marine Corps League, 43
meals, etiquette, 101-102
meeting people, 26
Meijer, Peter J. F., 95-96
Meyer, Dakota, xiii
military occupational skills (MOS), xiii
military speak, 30-32
millennials, social media, 115
Miners, Rick, 44
MOS (military occupational skills), xiii
must-follow-up situations, 90

N

name tags, 100
National Chamber Foundation, xi
networking, 13-15
 to land a job, 16-17
 veterans, increasing interview chances, 17-21
networking at non-networking events, 9-10, 106-107
networking databases, setting up, 84
networking on the internet, 77-79
networks, organizing, 84-85
 family, interests, hobbies, 86
 important dates, 85-86
nonprofit organizations, volunteering, 44-46
notes, 87-88
 "Power of Three" note plan, 88-89

O

objectives, techniques for introverts, 72
one-on-one meetings, 76
open positions, identifying, 57-59
open-ended questions, 35, 74
opening lines, 35
orders of networking, 127
organizing networks, 84-85
 family, interests, hobbies, 86
 important dates, 85-86

P

parts, of social media, 113
passion, introverts, 71
people
 meeting, 26
 researching, 36
permission to network, 33
personal branding, xiii

personal introductions, 28
personal space, 101
Petraeus, General David, 3
phone etiquette, 104-105
plans for keeping in touch, 93
playing back, listening, 70
poor listening behaviors, 69
"Power of Three" note plan, 88-89
preparation
 get-to-know-you questions, 36
 talking about yourself, 28-30
preparations before attending events, 129-133
professional contacts, utilizing, 60
punctuality, 100
Putnam, Robert, 113

Q

questions
 get-to-know-you questions, 36
 open-ended questions, 35, 74

R

rapport, 92
reaching out, to veteran employees, 60-62
reciprocity, 13, 78
reflecting emotion, listening, 70-71
relationships, trust, 79
researching people, 36
Reserve Aid, 44
resources, being one for others, 90
resumes, etiquette, 100
rewarding yourself, 77
Roberts, Andrew S., 20-21
rules for networking events and meetings, etiquette, 100-101

S

Schulz, Lauren, 46
scripts, tips for introverts, 74
SCT (self-concept theory), 7
securing a job, 62-64
self-concept theory (SCT), 7
service, 4-5, 125
skills, valued by managers, 10-11
smiling, 34-35, 73
snap judgments, 73
social media, 112

- connecting with veterans and organizations, 122
- instincts, 117-118
- parts of, 113
- users of, 113-116, 118-119

social networking, 78

- employment and, 116-117

social space, 101
speaking

- military speak, 30-32
- war stories, 32-33

speech rate, 69
stages of networking, 25-26

- exchanging contact information, 27
- follow-up, 27
- keeping in touch, 27-28
- listening, 26-27
- meeting people, 26

staying in touch, find out preferred methods, 85
strategic thinking, 115
strong networks, 28
success, 5-6
summarizing, tips for better listening, 70
support groups, 43

T

tact, 48-50
talking about yourself, preparation, 28-30
Tapscott, Don, 115
target lists, creating, 56-57
targeting people, 56

- creating a target list, 56-57
- identifying and reaching out to veteran employees, 60-62
- identifying open positions, 57-59
- securing a job, 62-64

techniques for introverts, 71-72

- attend events, 75-76
- attend events with purpose, 76
- baby steps, 72-74
- compliments, 74
- eye contact, 74-75
- network during highest energy level time of day, 76-77
- objectives, 72
- one-on-one meetings, 76
- recharging and rewarding yourself, 77
- scripts, 74
- time limits, 77

text messaging, etiquette, 103-104
thank-you notes, 86-87
time limits, 77
tips for better listening

- playing back, 70
- reflecting emotion, 70-71
- summarizing, 70

Toyota, xiii
transitioning off active duty, focus, 30
trust relationships, 13, 79

U

- unselfishness, 48, 50
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce, xi
- users of social media, 113-116, 118-119
- utilizing professional contacts, 60

V

- veteran employees, looking up on LinkedIn, 61-62
- veteran profiles
 - Byrne, Gerry, 53
 - Clark, Stephen, 109-110
 - Frizzell, Jesse, 39-40
 - Hansman, Jason, 120-121
 - Lang, Johnathon, 80-81
 - Meijer, Peter J. F., 95-96
 - Roberts, Andrew S., 20-21
 - Schulz, Lauren, 46
 - Wilkens, Christopher, 64
- veterans
 - identifying, 60-62
 - networking with, 17
 - increasing interview chances, 17-21*
 - staying in touch with those you served with, 43-44
- veteran's advocacy, 21
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), 43
- VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars), 43
- volunteering, for nonprofit organizations, 44-46

W-X-Y-Z

- war stories, 32-33
- weak networks, 28
- websites, company websites, visiting, 60-61
- Wilkens, Christopher, 64