

Transition from Military to Civilian Life

“When shifts and transitions in life shake you to the core, see that as a sign of greatness that’s about to occur.”

Getting out of the military is probably as complicated as it is going in. It requires planning. If all you do is fill out a checklist and then go back to your hometown and think everything is just going to work out, you’re going to encounter a big surprise. There are some things you’ll want to think about before you get back home. Starting with what exactly you want to do when you get out of that uniform.

For starters, the military is designed to take care of soldiers and their basic needs so that they can focus on winning wars. They basically take care of food, housing, healthcare and guarantee a paycheck while serving. Returning and refocusing on those responsibilities when you return to civilian life, can present challenges that anyone would face in a similar situation.

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center, explains that military service is of course difficult, demanding, and dangerous, but returning to civilian life also poses challenges for those men and women that served in our armed forces.

The study indicates that 72% of the veterans report they had an easy time adjusting back to civilian life, but 27% have indicated it was a difficult process. This percentage jumps significantly (44%) for those who have served in the ten years since the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks.

This is a significant change that can bring uncertainty and frustration that inevitably leads to “decision fatigue”. Jumping from a structured military life to civilian life. It will – at times – feel like there is endless options, possibilities, and decisions to make. And when “mental fatigue” and frustration set in so does civilian stress.

Studies show there is a definite connection between the individuals that have a difficult time transitioning and whether they were exposed to an emotionally traumatic event during the time they served.

Serving in a combat zone can make it much more difficult to adjust to “normal” civilian life.

There are a few factors identified that make re-entry a bit easier for a veteran returning home:

- Commissioned officers are less likely to have trouble
- College educated veterans have an easier transformation
- One of the larger factors is religiosity and how often a veteran attended religious services

Some of the common challenges with transition include the following:

- Relating to people that have no idea how to understand or empathize what military personnel have experienced
- Reconnecting with family and re-establishing a role in the family as new routines have been in place while the veteran was not at home
- Joining a community is completely new, as during your service, the military assisted with your adjustments
- When entering a civilian work force, a veteran will need to translate and adjust his/her military duties into civilian terms
- Creating structure and even necessities (food, clothing, housing) are something the military handled for the veteran in the past and this change may be overwhelming

Having a plan to transition, will be key, but remember, you are good with plans – you are just making them yourself now. Here are 4 key tips for making the transition to civilian life easier and much more fulfilling:

1. Find a Support System. – Your military career was all about “community”, so you will want to immediately try to recreate that in some sense – other veterans, a church and/or some other community groups like Soldiers Angels. Community adds encouragement and sense of purpose.
2. Create a Routine. – Finding a routine that simulates some of your military environment will help. Exercising is critical for all it does, so I will put that at the top of the list: running, working out, cycling... whatever simulates your training. A nugget of consistency from your military life can be a boom
3. Blessing Others – Even though you sacrificed everything for our country, coming back you will find volunteering and blessing other people is a great way to put a smile on your face and make the transition easier. The key will be finding a way to bless and encourage others that fits your talents and your personality.
4. Remember: Civilians Do Not Always Understand – Being patient will be one of the hardest things you will need to do – with yourself; your family; your friends. Prepare for non-sensical and/or insensitive. The bottom-line is that readjusting to civilian life is a long process. It takes time out knowing what resources there are there for you.

There are various resources available to our well deserving veterans (these are only a few):

1. **Veterans Employment Toolkit**

<https://www.va.gov/VETSINWORKPLACE/veteranresources.asp>

This is a toolkit designed to assist veterans with finding employment

2. **Military Times Reboot Camp**

<https://rebootcamp.militarytimes.com/transition/>

Great resource for purchasing homes, tips for spouses and reducing stress!

3. **DANTES DoD VolEd Programs**

<https://www.dantes.doded.mil/About/index.html>

DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support) provides no-cost education and career planning programs for the US Armed Forces military members

4. **Military-Transition Org**

<https://www.military-transition.org/about.html>

This aids service members, veterans, spouses, and employers better understand and prepare for the military to civilian transition process

It is very important that the service members understand that this transition is also difficult for their spouse and family.

“God chose the strongest, the bravest, and the most courageous ...

and He made them military spouses.”

Further, there are also resources available for your spouse:

1. **Military-Transition Org**

<https://www.military-transition.org/spouse-resources.html>

Same website for veterans listed above but there is a special section for spouses, which identifies organizations to assist, tools & training, advice, and other info

2. **MyStep Military Spouse Transition Program**

<https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/portal/mystep/stepping-beyond>

Provides trusted and reliable information, videos, and links to assist your family and their transition

It is great to identify as a veteran, but since most vets leave the service at a very young age, it's important to remember that your life is just beginning. The military is not the only thing you're going to do with your life and it's not even the best thing that you will ever do. Plus, if your military training has taught you anything, it is you can handle just about everything.

That is what civilian life is - meeting your needs, managing your expectations, and setting your own priorities.

Enjoy the rest of your life as you deserve this opportunity and thank you again for your service, dedication and sacrifice that protect our freedoms.