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CAREER & EMPLOYMENT

5 Things I Wish Service Members Knew Ahead of Their Civilian Transition

By **Lawren Bradberry, MBA, retired Army NCO & Senior Manager of Military Programs at Galvanize**

I remember how confident and prepared I felt when I transitioned from active-duty service. But as soon as I put away my uniform, it hit me: I needed help navigating the difficult and oft-talked about transition to civilian life.

Connecting with other Veterans and Veteran service organizations helped me navigate life after military service. So much so, in fact, it motivated me to focus my career on transitioning service members and Veterans.

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Unfortunately, many veterans I wound up working with struggled to adjust to civilian life more than they expected. Many were unaware of the resources available to help them find their way after military service.

Each day, more than 500 service members will start their transition. To them, and the thousands more who will eventually make the very same transition, I offer five pieces of proactive advice from my own personal experience:

1. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR EDUCATION BENEFITS AND CAREER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

Veterans can use their education benefits to pay for training programs, so you should be sure to look into ways to maximize what you're getting out of benefits. Keep in mind, however, that not all programs are covered in the same way, and not every program includes the same type of training or extra resources to aid you throughout your process. Since 2009, 773,000 veterans and their family members have utilized these funds for programs ranging from technology to entrepreneurship to foreign affairs and so many more, so do your homework and research your options before making a decision.

2. REMEMBER THAT EVERY TRANSITION STORY IS DIFFERENT.

While there are certainly some commonalities, no veteran goes through their transition in the same way — each person has their own strengths and faces their own unique challenges. There is no right way to execute your transition and there's no need to rush, so take all the time you need to adjust and find your new routine. One thing that took me a while, as silly as it might seem to some, was figuring out what to wear! I wore a uniform every single day for years, so I never

even stopped to consider the endless options of what I could wear to work as a civilian, and what message that might communicate.

3. TAKE PRIDE IN WHAT YOU BRING TO THE TABLE.

By the time you reach the end of your commitment, you may have led teams into life-or-death situations, made high-level decisions or

cultural norms, so make sure your future workplace stands for values and ethics that align with your own.

5. CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY AND PEERS.

If you need help, ask! The process can be long, confusing and intimidating, but it's important to know that there are people and organizations out there who want to help



managed millions of dollars in equipment. Even though you may be starting your career later than your civilian peers, your experiences are unmatched in comparison. Learn to tell your story with confidence in a way that demonstrates the skills and experiences you gained in the military, and how they translate to future opportunities.

4. KEEP YOUR PERSONAL VALUES IN MIND.

Just like the different branches of the military, every organization has its own unique culture. As you search for employment, take the time to learn about the mission and values of the organizations you're interested in. Veterans often return home with a very specific set of core values and ideals, and it's hard enough to make the transition to a different industry with its own

and have dedicated their own post-service careers to doing so. Just be careful to keep in mind what I mentioned earlier and to not measure yourself against others — everyone's experience is different.

By doing each of these five things, I am confident that as service members work to close one door — at their own pace, of course — they will simultaneously open another full of security, opportunity and continued success.

Lawren Bradberry, MBA is a retired Army NCO and the Senior Manager of Military Programs at Galvanize, the nation's leading provider of software engineering and data science training. More than 700 active-duty military and Veterans have used Galvanize training to get post-military tech jobs. For more information, visit Galvanize.com.

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