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**TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY OPERATIONS
RESEARCH OFFICER TO DEFENSE CIVILIAN: PART 2
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Upon my military retirement, my neighbor told me it was not unusual to have three different jobs in the first five years after retirement. I said, “Not me! I plan to be with my new company until I retire for good.” Well, we were both wrong, but his estimate was more accurate. I retired from the military in May 1999, and in my first five years I held five different jobs at three different companies. In one of those jobs, I was the head of military recruiting where my primary sourcing channel was former military. Even though I was recruiting for over 90 different positions, my focus was for Project Managers, Operations Managers, Modeling and Simulation Specialists, Statisticians, Business Analysts and Operations Analysts. During my time as a recruiter, I reviewed thousands of resumes, conducted hundreds of interviews, participated in several job fairs and employer panels, and presented transition advice seminars. In fact, I still volunteer to review resumes and work at job fairs, offering advice to candidates.

This article provides advice from the perspective of a five-time candidate, as well as from the “other side” – that of a recruiter.

PART I: THE CANDIDATE’S PERSPECTIVE

I started my transition from the military fifteen months prior to retirement by attending job fairs and participating in informational interviews, then started interviewing in earnest about a year before I left the Navy. My goal was to find and accept a position about five to six months before I retired. During this time I had over 70 interviews with sixteen different companies. In my four subsequent experiences as a candidate, I ranged from one interview with one company (twice), to twenty interviews with four companies. In all as a candidate, I have participated in over 100 interviews with over twenty companies. In this first part of the article, I will provide

recommendations based on my candidate experience, including some ideas from my transition course, and advice on getting your resume to companies, on preparing for the interview, on capturing your thoughts afterwards, and on the timing when evaluating offers.

Transition Seminar Recommendations

When I started my transition, I learned what types of jobs were available for someone with my experience by attending job fairs and participating in informational interviews. This provided me the opportunity to practice selling myself. At a senior retirees' transition seminar, the instructor recommended we create a "30-second commercial" about ourselves, because often candidates have only 30 seconds to talk to a recruiter. This is also called an "elevator speech," since 30 seconds is the equivalent of an elevator ride. Many job fairs will attract hundreds of candidates. With typically long lines at the company booths, you may only have a few minutes with recruiters. For that reason, the 30-second commercial is perfect for job fairs.

Another recommendation from the transition seminar was to tailor your resume to the type of position you are considering. Based on my experience and interests, I developed four different resumes: one as a project manager and analyst, one as a training analyst, one as a pure operations analyst, and one general version. I ended up using all four versions.

Getting Your Resume to a Company

You've practiced your 30-second commercial and have your resume ready to present to companies where you would like to interview. How do you submit your resume? Maybe a better question is, where do companies get resumes? Companies use several sources such as internet career sites, internet resume databases, their own website, placement services, job fairs, and networking.

Many companies use internet career sites, such as www.monster.com and www.careerbuilder.com. Before posting your resume on these websites, consider the following: while you may be contacted for interviews by companies you haven't considered or researched,

and one of these opportunities could be that dream job you are looking for, you may not be contacted by the companies you are interested in. So, don't get discouraged. Most companies use internet career sites, but do not spend a lot of time or effort with them, as compared to other sources. They conduct key word searches and if your resume doesn't contain *their* key words, it is unlikely that they will find your resume.

Another type of website where companies find resumes are Internet resume databases, such as The Destiny Group (www.destinygrp.com) for prior military. On this type of website, you can post more than one version of your resume, and there are fields to enter other detailed information. Companies will still conduct key word searches for resumes, but with the ability to post more than one resume and enter additional data, you can increase your chances that more companies find your resume.

Companies often find resumes by using their own websites. You can apply for any posted job you are qualified for. recruiters will review your resume to see how well you match the job description. This is a good way for the companies you are interested in to receive your resume.

Some companies use placement services, such as The Lucas Group and Career Development, to find candidates. There is no fee for the candidate, but the hiring company pays the placement company a percentage of the starting salary when the candidate is hired. Placement companies work hard presenting their candidates to companies, but not all companies use them. As a result, placement companies may work hard presenting you to companies you may not have considered.

Many companies attend job fairs, such as the Corporate Gray Job Fairs (www.corporategray.com) and the Service Academy Career Conferences (see the service academy alumni website career pages) for prior military. Participating companies are usually listed on the job fair websites. At job fairs, you have the opportunity to talk to recruiters at many different companies. I recommend going to their websites to research them prior to attending and then go to the specific booths which interest you. For most job fairs, you have to submit your

resume early so that the companies can “look at” the candidates prior to the job fair. Even so, you can (and should) provide an updated version when you talk to the companies at their booths.

Finally, networking is another opportunity to get your resume to companies you are interested in. Many companies encourage this source by using employee referral programs which award some sort of bonus to their employees when a referred candidate is hired. How do you network? Three possible ways are: (1) send your resume to a friend who works at the company you are interested in and ask them to officially submit it; (2) send your resume to friends who know people at the company you are interested in and ask them to forward to their contacts to officially submit it; and (3) consult the alumni business resource directory from your college. Some alumni organizations (e.g., the Service Academy Business Resource Directory, SABRE) have directories which may be used for career contacts, and are indexed by industry and geographic location (city, state, etc.). Some directories record the company size, type, location, and list contact information so that the graduate can contact that specific company. They are a business-to-business directory designed for alumni to help fellow alumni. Networking increases your chances dramatically that your resume will be reviewed by the “right people” in the companies you are interested in.

Of the six different types, I recommend using as many sources as you feel comfortable with, thereby increasing the chances your resume will be reviewed. With that said, for my 100 interviews with twenty companies, I used all sources except for placement companies. I received an offer from one of the companies as a result of attending a job fair (The Service Academy Career Conference), while the rest of the company interviews and subsequent job offers were the result of networking. Since the goal is for both the employer and prospective employee is to find a good match, both parties benefit from using personal connections.

Preparations: Company Research and Questions to Ask

Once you've submitted your resume via several sources and have been contacted for interviews, what should you do to prepare for the interviews? Obviously, you would like to make a good first impression. While I have never been asked specific questions about a company or their performance, in preparation for an interview I did review their website, especially the most recent press releases and any sections that applied to the department(s) for which I was being interviewed. This research was not so that I could answer questions from the interviewers as much as it was so that I could evaluate the company and develop questions to ask my interviewers. Remember, you are also interviewing the company. You will want as much information as possible so that you can make the right decision about which company to select from the many available to you.

When you ask questions, you may get different answers depending on the interviewer's perspective – are they recruiters or are they business personnel working in similar jobs for which you are interviewing? When they introduce themselves, they should tell you what they do. If not, be sure to ask. You should direct some of your questions to recruiters (i.e., benefits, sign-on bonuses, vacation, etc.) and some to business unit personnel (i.e., travel, flex time, promotion opportunities, etc.).

The questions you ask should be questions that provide you decision-making information. I tried to ask questions which would also help me discriminate among several offers. Examples are:

- Is the balance between work time and family time considered? If so, how?
- Is flex time a possibility? If so, what are the options?
- What kind of travel is involved – how often and where?
- What amount of vacation, floating holidays, and sick time is available?
- What are the promotion and advancement opportunities?
- What are the educational opportunities and available reimbursements?

- What happens if I am hired for a contract and the contract ends? Does the company reassign me or do I have to look for another job?
- Do you charge hours to various projects?
- How are projects assigned?
- Are there out-of-department or professional growth opportunities available? If so, what are some examples?
- Does your company have a mentoring program? If so, how is mentoring done?
- Is there any requirement to bring new business in to the company? If so, what are your expectations?
- Is there any requirement to publish papers? If so, by when?
- How are employees evaluated? How often are they evaluated, and how does the process work?
- What is the office dress – business formal, business attire, business casual or casual?
- Does your company support attendance at Military Operations Research Society (MORS) functions? If so, how much support can you expect?

While salary is not usually mentioned in the early interviews, you may be able to read a salary range on the job posting, the recruiter may provide one, or your friend at the company you sent your resume may be able to tell you. If not, it is helpful to determine your salary “break even” point. I contacted my accountant and had them compute what salary I needed to obtain the same take home pay I received while in the Navy. This computation took into account my retirement pay and the tax rates for a couple of different locations. This helped me evaluate offers, once we reached that part of the recruitment process.

The Interview

To learn from each interview, I took notes and recorded data into a spreadsheet to help me narrow down the companies I was interested in. In my experience, this was especially important because I had over ten interviews with two companies. Besides using my data to grade the companies in various areas, I recorded as much information as I could recall after the interview in case I was called back. I recorded the following:

- Every contact. The name of the individual, the date, the method (e.g., in person, on the phone, in an e-mail, etc.), and a brief summary of the contact.
- What I wore. I didn't want to wear the same outfit twice, especially if I was called back a fourth or fifth time.
- The person I met with. This was helpful not only when sending a follow-up thank you note, but also allowed me to provide names if a follow-on interviewer asked who I interviewed with previously. At least three subsequent interviewers asked me this question.
- What the interviewers asked, and how I responded. I wanted to provide consistent answers from interview day to interview day. What was asked depending on what type of interview was conducted (to be discussed later in this article).
- What I asked, and how the interviewers responded. The primary reason I did this was to record basic information to support my decisions, but I also wanted to ensure I didn't ask the same questions each time, because the interviewers will compare notes.
- Summary comments. My overall summary comments – e.g., how the day went, what I thought the next steps would be.

Timing of Evaluating Offers

If your timing has been good and all your offers have arrived at about the same time, you can use your notes to efficiently evaluate your offers and make a decision with confidence. If they don't all arrive at about the same time, and you would like a response from one or more companies you are really interested in before proceeding, what can you do? Most offers come with a response date – a date when you have to let the company know if you are going to accept or reject their offer. For the companies which haven't yet extended offers, you can call your point of contact in their recruiting department to inform them you have received offers from other companies and need to make a decision by a certain date. Companies understand you are interviewing with their competitors– some may even ask you about this during the interview process. If they are really interested in you, the recruiter will work with the Hiring Manager to send you an offer in time to make an informed decision.

Due to thorough preparation, I met my transition goal. The offers from my candidate companies all arrived at about the same time, and I accepted an offer about five months before retirement. Interestingly enough, I went with a company I had visited at my first job fair ten months previously to *practice* my 30-second commercial. I guess my elevator speech worked! I started with that company the day after my retirement as an operations analyst, and about eighteen months later I became the head of military recruiting.

PART II: THE RECRUITER'S PERSPECTIVE

Now that I've passed on some lessons learned while I was a candidate, I offer some impartial advice from a former recruiter. The bottom line is that you have to know what you want, and you have to be comfortable with how you present yourself, both in writing and in person. In this second part of the article, I will provide recommendations from the recruiter's perspective on writing your resume and understanding the interview process.

Resume Review

In the preceding section, you learned there are different sourcing channels recruiters use to find resumes. For each of these sources, there is an associated cost – be it external (internet career websites, internet resume databases, placement services, and job fairs) or internal (company's websites and employee referrals from networking). The main metric the recruiter uses is minimizing the overall cost per hire. The amount of time and budget dedicated to each of these sources depends on the number of quality hires. While employee referrals from within the company present a better opportunity for the resume to be reviewed, it's the quality per dollar of the hire that is the primary consideration. The amount of effort companies dedicate to each channel are often very different. That is why I recommend using as many sources as you feel comfortable with.

Recruiters search for resumes that appear to be matches for their open positions. Therefore, your goal in writing your resume is *to get you an interview*. Many recruiters receive over 100 resumes a day, and can only read the first half of the first page. If you do not capture

their attention, all you'll get is a "thank you for contacting us" note. While you don't want to bore the recruiter with a lot of details, you do want to catch their eye so they'll read further *and* contact you for an interview.

The first point to discuss is a functional versus chronological resume – which one is preferred by recruiters? At my transition seminar, the instructor recommended a functional resume. However, like a vast number of recruiters, I recommend a chronological resume. Recruiters are looking for consistency from job to job, and they want to determine how long you demonstrated certain specific skills.

In the first “Transitioning from MOR Officer to Defense Civilian” article, Touggy Orgeron recommended using RESUMIX for government civilian positions. RESUMIX is great for those types of jobs, but I would not recommend using it for defense contractor or commercial operations analyst positions. The format is too long and too detailed for these types of positions, and the recruiters will not read beyond your first half page.

Here’s my recommended outline for a resume:

- Objective: State with what you are looking for in a maximum of 2 lines. You can tailor this statement for each company that you send your resume to.
- Profile. Summarize your qualifications in three or four brief bullets. Provide details further into your resume.
- Education. Either include this after the profile, or put it at the end of the resume. Include your degree, area of concentration and school; the year is optional. On the year of completion, some recommend including it if within four years, otherwise do not.
- Work Experience. List your work experience in bullet or paragraph form for the last ten years.
- Related Work Experience. List relevant work experience prior to the last ten years.
- Other. This is where you include information on clearances, computer skills, community work, and other outside interests.

In the work experience section, start with highlights of your job responsibilities in paragraph form, then list bullets with your major accomplishments. Use action verbs and italics to start your bullets. Include numbers wherever possible (e.g., *saved* company \$2 million, *reduced* training cycle by 15%, etc.). In the related work experience (greater than ten years ago), include just a listing of dates, organizations and commands, and positions held. Be ready to discuss these jobs during interviews, but do not devote a great deal of scarce resume space to them. My overarching advice is to include things you are comfortable with and can speak to.

Here are some other important considerations about resumes. First, many recruiters print out hard copies of your resume, so ensure your contact information and page numbers are on every page. Sometimes recruiters can mix up your resume pages with pages from other candidates, and its easier for them to restore order with contact information and page numbers on every page. Second, white space is better than density, so opt for less text. Also, don't use a small font to put more information on the page, as that will make the resume harder for the recruiter to read. Third, recruiters forward your resume to hiring managers who are looking for individuals with your skills, and they frequently do this using e-mail. Therefore, it's easier for recruiters and hiring managers to review your resume if it was built in Microsoft Word, which is prevalent in most companies. Finally, a cover letter is optional. If you send your resume by e-mail, the body serves as your cover letter, and you do not need a separate attachment.

The Process: Interview Types and Interviewers

Your resume matched the job description, the recruiter read beyond the first half page and they were interested enough to contact you to schedule an interview. The purpose of the interview is to get an offer; therefore, during the interview you need to sell yourself. What types of interviews could you be subjected to and who could potentially interview you?

First, the types of interviews companies conduct can vary from one or two short discussions to multi-day events. Some potential types of interviews you can experience are:

Resume Walks: The interviewer walks you through your resume, asking you questions about it.

Discussions: The interviewer asks some basic questions, such as “What are your concerns with your transition from the military?”; “What do you see yourself doing in the next few years?”; “What job was hard to do, but you did it anyway?” and “Why are you changing careers?”

Behavioral Interviews: The interviewer describes a basic situation:

- Getting people to do things for you that don't work for you
- Not seeing eye-to-eye with someone in your organization
- Working on a hard project, liking what you did, which resulted in a good outcome
- Process improvement
- What you did when you were on an inefficient team

They then ask you to explain a similar experience from your career. The interviewers are trying to learn if your skills are transferable to the job you are interviewing for.

Sell Interviews: The interviewer, company, and hiring manager already know you and your capabilities. They basically spend the interview “selling” you on their company and the position they want to hire you for.

Case Interviews: The interviewer asks you to work out a mathematical problem in front of them using pencil and paper or on a white board.

Written Tests: Some companies require tests (quantitative and critical thinking).

Now that you've learned the types of possible interviews, who are your potential interviewers? Here are some individuals you could meet and talk with during your recruiting

process, depending on the size of the company and the recruiting department's organization (not every company will have all of these positions):

Sourcing Specialist: These are the individuals who search for applicants across all sourcing channels. After finding potential candidates, the sourcing specialist may contact them for some additional basic information, such as their interest in a particular position within the company, location preferences, date available, ball park salary expectations, education verification (sometimes including GPA), and resume clarifications. If the company does not have Sourcing Specialists, then these functions may be accomplished by Recruiting Coordinators or recruiters.

Recruiter: After the basic information is obtained from the Sourcing Specialists, a recruiter may conduct a phone interview (resume walk, discussion or behavioral interview) or may refer them to a Recruiting Coordinator to schedule an on-site interview. recruiters also consolidate and summarize all the interview results to present to the Hiring Manager. Based on the Hiring Manager's decision, the recruiter will contact the candidate to make an offer, schedule another round of interviews, or decline the candidate.

Recruiting Coordinator: These individuals work with the candidate to schedule on-site interviews. They coordinate necessary travel, organize the interviewers, and send out the required pre-interview paperwork for you to complete. They perform all the administrative functions for the recruiter. If written tests are required for your positions, the Recruiting Coordinators normally will administer these tests.

Business Unit Personnel: These are interviewers from the business units in similar roles to which you are interviewing for. Depending on the coordination with the recruiter and Recruiting Coordinator, they conduct resume walks, discussions, behavioral interviews and case interviews. They submit their comments and results to the recruiters and Recruiting Coordinators.

Hiring Manager: Like the Business Unit Personnel, they can conduct any type of interview, including the sell interview. They also submit their comments and results to the recruiters and Recruiting Coordinators. They listen to the consolidated results and make the decision to make an offer, bring the candidate back for more interviews, or reject the candidate.

We used the multi-day interviews at the firm where I worked in Recruiting. The Sourcing Specialists contacted the candidates to answer the basic questions, the recruiters conducted an initial behavioral interview, and then the Recruiting Coordinate scheduled the candidate for an on-site interview. When candidates interviewed on-site, they took two written tests (one quantitative and one critical thinking), performed several case studies, and participated in additional behavioral interviews. Based on discussions at the end-of-the-day consensus meeting, the Hiring Manager made the decision to hire, request a return visit, or decline the candidate. If the candidate was an employee referral and the resume was received via networking, the performance of the employee who submitted the resume was sometimes also discussed. At times, the employee was also requested to make comment (written or verbal) on the candidate.

One thing to remember about your interview day is that you are onstage all day. At the end of the day, interviewers get together to discuss each candidate. The individuals that are part of this consensus meeting are the recruiter, the interviewers from the business units, the receptionist and the people you had lunch with. Be ready before getting out of your car - some companies even watch the parking lot! Don't be the candidate who is late for an interview and cuts off a car for a parking space. The person you cut off may be one of your interviewers and they *will* remember you (this, unfortunately, is a true story). *Every* person gets a say in whether you're offered a position or not.

The three biggest things I try and pass along to everyone before interviewing are (1) be yourself, (2) don't lie (they'll figure it out), and (3) relax. Before going into an interview, remember the Boy Scout motto and be prepared. Know your objectives, your 30-second commercial, your location preferences, your willingness to travel, and when you're available to start work. You should have researched the company so that you are ready to ask them some questions as well. After all, they are not only interviewing you, you are also interviewing them!

Finally, be patient on your interview day. Most of your interviewers are not recruiters; they are individuals from the business units that need candidates with your skills. They have other jobs, and are usually busy. Some have to drive to the recruiting spaces from other offices and they may be late. If your interviewers are consistently late, you may want to record that in your interview notes and take that into consideration when you are comparing company offers. Also, don't be surprised with your interviewer's attire. Many companies have gone to a business casual dress, and only require coat and tie for meetings with customers. I wore coats and ties my last three years in the Navy (due to my position in OSD), and I thought I could use them after I retired. Unfortunately, I never did. All three companies I have worked for wear business casual every day.

SUMMARY

This article provides advice from both sides of the fence – from a candidate and from a recruiter. As a five-time candidate who has participated in over 100 interviews, my recommendations included:

- Tailor your resume to the job
- Submit your resume to many sourcing channels, especially via networking
- Research your companies to develop discriminating questions to ask your interviewers
- Take notes after the interview to use to compare companies

In addition, as a recruiter with experience in reviewing thousands of resumes and conducting hundreds of interviews, I also offered advice from the “other side.”

- Write your resume in chronological format, highlighting consistency from job to job
- Understand the interview process, including potential types of interviews and interviewers
- Remember, you are onstage all day while at the on-site interviews
- Be yourself

The bottom line is that it's your transition, your resume, and your interview – you have to feel comfortable with what you present both verbally and written. The purpose of your resume is *to get you an interview* and the purpose of your interview is *to get you an offer*. Once you get the interview, you have to sell yourself. How's your *30-second commercial*? Are you ready?