The United States Army as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has an active role in providing transition assistance programs to discharged or retired service members. The information often presented includes a full range of briefings concerning VA, education, career transition and vocational rehabilitation benefits available. The reality, however, is that although these services are offered to transitioning service members, they are offered during an extremely stressful period in their life. This high level of stress is not the most conducive environment for retaining information. Therefore, many leave these services with unanswered questions and uncertainty. This is where the role of the civilian career specialist/counselor becomes vital.

Culture Shock
Changing careers is a taxing experience, perhaps even more so for those leaving military service after many years. He or she will be moving from a culture that is regimented to an unstructured environment that focuses more on individuality. They also encounter a shift from heavy restrictions to having more freedom in their career choices as well as in the everyday details of their lives. These are individuals who have worked for many years to achieve a certain rank or grade, but upon leaving the Army, he or she leaves this rank behind and with it, a large portion of his or her identity. As a career counselor/specialist, it is important to recognize and maintain awareness of the potential for identity loss or extreme stress from culture shock.

Some helpful coping skills that will aid in lowering the stress and anxiety associated with the transition process include:

- Working through the grieving process
- Developing an individualized transition plan: assessment, exploration, skills development, support
- Actively using resources: various agencies on and off base provide transitioning services for Army personnel; enlisting the aid of others will provide positive opportunities for encouragement.
Transferable Skills and Occupational Translators

It is important to remember that the individual may experience difficulty in identifying marketable skills for the civilian job force. As the counselor, you can help them by discussing transferable skills. Not only do service members possess specific job training and expertise, they also often possess high levels of self-confidence, leadership and initiative that are very attractive to many civilian career fields.

Building on the service member's military training and experience is vital to a successful transition. The language used in military occupational titles can often be easily transferred into specific civilian job titles. Navigating the transferable skills and identifying how they may or may not relate to a potential career option can be overwhelming for the client. Luckily, there are numerous websites available that will do the work automatically. These skill translators allow the client to translate his or her military occupational specialty (MOS) or field designator into civilian terms. This provides the opportunity for them to learn more about comparative civilian job titles, required civilian training for jobs, hiring plans and salary information. The following websites provide useful skills translators:

- www.SkillScan.net
- www.vetsuccess.gov/resources/milskills/

Exploring the Market

Identifying transferable skills will help your client to set realistic career goals. A guided process of assessing skills and competencies, exploring career options and planning skill development activities to keep pace with the changing work demands will go far in opening the eyes of the client to the civilian job market. Listed below are resources that are useful to the exploring phase:

- www.military.com/careers/home
- Military Civilian Job Fairs
- http://www.dod.jobsearch.org/
- www.cpol.army.mil

Many consulting agencies specialize in military transition jobs. They match transitioning military officers, enlisted leaders and warrant officers/technicians with top companies interested in recruiting candidates with developmental potential. Usually the placement teams of these organizations are prior service members who offer a unique perspective to transitioning military members. They will work personally with candidates and client corporations. Soar Consulting is one of the most recognized companies that actively works with transitioning military: www.soarcareers.com.

When working with transitioning Army personnel, maintaining awareness of the dichotomy between the military and civilian worlds will encourage better chances for a successful transition. Understanding the potential stumbling blocks will assist the career counselor/specialist in working with the individual to prepare a cohesive and effective individualized transition plan.
When these individuals transitioned from the Army, they completed a DD Form 2648 Pre-separation Counseling Checklist at an Army Career and Alumni Program Center (ACAP). This form would be a good starting point for discussion. It provides substantial feedback on areas that have been previously covered or assessed in the transition process. Another good tip would be to become familiar with the ACAP website. Some services offered through the site will always be available to former service members. Another important form for review would be DD Form 2586: Verification Document. This form provides a comprehensive listing of the individual's military experience and training. This proves to be most useful in developing resumes and cover letters.

No matter what the need in the career development process, there are specific resources available to help counselors/specialists prepare themselves to better assist this population.

Resource:

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