

# Deployment to Employment

*A guide for military veterans  
transitioning to civilian employment*

RUSS HOVENDICK

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*Deployment to Employment*

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## DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this book to the late Lt. Col. Mark Weber, whose passion for life, his family, and his military community serves as a shining example of how to live with purpose and find fulfillment.

Back in December 2012, I was introduced to Mark and approached him about writing the foreword for this book. “What the hell,” he said. “Sure, bring it on. But you better hurry, as my clock is running at mach speed!” Unfortunately, Mark’s clock wound down far faster than anyone would have wished. He died on June 13, 2013.

I was privileged to know Mark for only several months, yet he had a profound influence on me and my efforts to help vets. For him, motivating veterans was personal. He was noticeably frustrated, even angered, that too many veterans had given up on finding jobs. In every conversation we had, I felt his explosive energy. If he could take every unemployed veteran who had lost hope and scream at them until they realized they had what it took to succeed, he certainly would have tried.

*Deployment to Employment*, borne out of my desire to contribute something vital and meaningful to our nation’s military veterans, is a product of Mark’s influence on me. He once pointed out my tenacity in lifting up veterans. “I admire your pluck,” he once wrote to me.

At the time, I didn't know what he meant, so I looked it up. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as “courageous readiness to fight or continue against odds: dogged resolution.”<sup>1</sup>

My sincere thanks to you, Mark, for your tremendous contribution to my life and to this book. Through your writing and speaking, you allowed all of us bystanders to see life through your eyes. You faced death with grace and an open heart and continued to fight for veterans in your last days. That took an enormous amount of pluck.

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<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluck>.

## BOOK REVIEWS

I've been a federal veterans service representative, VA military service coordinator, and U.S. Marine. Not only have I've personally gone through the rough transition from military service to private sector employment, I've also seen dozens of others going through it. Russ has produced a tool that bridges the “misunderstanding gap” between private sector employers and military veterans. This is a tremendous resource, needed by every transitioning veteran. I recommend reading this book with a pen and paper on standby.

— Nolan Ruby, former Marine Corps sergeant

I can relate to the obstacles of transitioning after a long career in the military. Those of us that have served in the armed forces for over twenty-five years have centered our lives on military philosophies and work ethics. We strive for integrity, honor, and courage, and we commit each day to the uniform. This is an excellent resource, and I highly recommend this book to all service members transitioning to civilian life.

— Derek L. Hayes, retired Marine Corps master gunnery sergeant

This is an awesome resource. I wish I would've had this book when I first started looking for a new job. In thirty minutes of reading *Deployment to Employment*, I learned what took me months to gather and learn from multiple seminars, resources, business coaches, and others. If you consider yourself a military-minded person, this book

was written for you. It gives you the secrets of the civilian way of thinking and teaches you how to translate your military skills to the civilian world. This book should be required reading for all service members approaching their post-military chapter of life.

— Rob Nielsen, former Marine Corps company commander and platoon commander

This book is an invaluable resource for service members transitioning from active duty. I am one year out from my own exit date and already starting to feel apprehensive about it. This book has provided useful exercises and tools to help me prepare for my civilian career.

— Jon L. Carrico, Jr., Army Reserve lieutenant colonel

The first book in the Directional Motivation series was a magnetic read. It caught me and held me throughout. I even began carrying it as I traveled, offering it to friends at very high levels of authority. The second book, *How to Interview*, and now the third, *Deployment to Employment*, have made a greater impact on me. It is clear that the author has an unwavering passion to help military veterans. As a former Marine who spent several decades educating and empowering veterans, I believe this book gives its readers the gift of explosive potential for success.

— Ron Tottingham, Major General SSC – Former Marine

One thing I didn't know leaving the military was how to transition myself into the civilian world. My only battle plan was to keep moving forward. This book gave me a more solid battle plan through positive reinforcement and concrete advice—exactly what I needed.

— David Gould, former Army first sergeant, platoon sergeant

Wow, what can I say, this book is excellent! It's a must-read for military personnel and veterans seeking to significantly increase their odds of landing a great job.

The author not only lays out a clear process for job seekers—he also provides the underlying psychology that drives the process. Even better, the author offers tools for implementing and leveraging each step along the path. As icing on the cake, this book has a warm, down-to-earth quality, which makes it extremely easy to read and follow.

When the author's ingredients for success are mixed together, the result is a powerful message that represents the wisdom of experience. Simply stated, to *get* the right thing, you must *do* the right thing, and to *do* the right thing, you must *know* the right thing. Without a doubt, this book will help you do that.

— Mikel J. Harry, Ph.D., co-creator of Six Sigma

Dr. Harry has been widely recognized as the principal architect of Six Sigma and the world's leading authority in business management. His book *Six Sigma: The Breakthrough Management Strategy Revolutionizing the World's Top Corporations* was listed on the national best seller lists of the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and *Business Week*. He has been a consultant to many of the world's top CEOs such as Jack Welch, former CEO and chairman of General Electric Corporation and Robert "Bob" Galvin, former CEO and chairman of Motorola. Dr. Harry has also been a featured guest on popular television programs such as the premier NBC show *Power Lunch*.

Russ Hovendick has taken his considerable recruiter experience and combined it with a deep personal commitment to understand the true

challenges veterans face. Especially unique is his understanding of “who these men and women are” and the challenges they face. Russ provides the reader with action items for their development – key to their understanding “who they are”. The importance of this effort is documented in the Preface by Colonel David F. Smith U.S. Army (retired). Every transitioning military person can benefit from the deeply personal, revealing and valuable comments David shares. Russ also brings the perspective of the employer to the transitioning military personnel. I like the focus of the book, its understanding of the veteran and the experienced mentoring Russ offers the reader. I highly recommend this work to every man and woman transitioning from a military career to a purposeful civilian life.

— **Michael E. Echols**, Ph.D. Executive Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and the Human Capital Lab, **Bellevue** University

Author “Your Future is Calling, A Practical Guide to the Education You Need to Have the Future You Desire” [www.LearnProsper.com](http://www.LearnProsper.com)

Leader: Veteran Initiative for Advancement (VIA) at Bellevue University [www.corporatelearning.com/veterans](http://www.corporatelearning.com/veterans)



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

From the moment I decided to write this book, I knew that if it didn't speak to the millions of unemployed military veterans and soon-to-be ex-service members, the book would be useless. So my team and I reached out to unemployed veterans and active service members of all types to get a clear understanding of their struggles and the internal blocks holding them back. We also reached out to many ex-military folks who had successfully landed civilian jobs and had valuable insights on their transition.

As I delved deeper into the military mindset, I became more effective at designing job search solutions specifically for ex-service members. Thank you to those from the service who shared your personal stories and life lessons. By helping me gain a deeper understanding of the military experience, you played a major role in the making of this book. I offer a huge thank you to David Smith, a retired colonel from the Army who contributed a deeply personal and inspiring message in the foreword.

My sincere thanks to Millie Lapidario for the countless hours of research and editing to make this book a reality. A special thank you to my son, Darin, for making the book a truly multimedia experience and for your continuing efforts in marketing the book. Darin, you've developed a knack for knowing what's going on in my head and you always manage to help me bring those thoughts to life.



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## FOREWORD

Last year marked the end of my thirty years of service in the U.S. Army. As I approached my ETS<sup>2</sup> date, I reflected on my journey, rising from Private E-1 to Colonel.

I recalled my hunger to move up the chain of command. I was definitely proud of my accomplishments, yet more conscious than ever of the sacrifices I had made over three decades. I had pursued multiple opportunities that required me to uproot my life, including a three-year deployment in Egypt in the 1990s during a particularly violent insurgence. I had missed multiple holidays with my family, loved ones' birthdays, even my daughter's birth.

So I figured I deserved to take time off. Before retiring, I told my wife my plan: *I would be a stay-at-home dad for our two kids for six months, then put my résumé together and ease into a job several weeks after starting my search. With my extensive experience in military and civilian logistics and force management, it wouldn't take much effort for a guy like me to land a job offer.*

Well, as you might've guessed, things didn't go as planned. Call me naïve, overly optimistic, or out of touch with the economy. Whatever it was, I was wrong.

Six months after leaving the military, I started my job search. My regrets quickly set in:

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<sup>2</sup> Expiration, term of service

- I hadn't taken advantage of the employment assistance programs offered by the Army and numerous service organizations. I figured I'd been there, done that.
- I hadn't contacted a single recruiter for assistance.
- I hadn't even picked up a book to research job search strategies, despite having been out of the job market for thirty years.

These regrets weighed me down for a long time. But nothing hit me as hard as the realization that I had no idea what I truly wanted to do. Before leaving the military, I had never taken the time to think about what kind of position would fulfill me personally and professionally. I hadn't thought about what I could offer a civilian employer or how I could express my value in terms a civilian would understand. I didn't know myself or my worth like I thought I did.

I struggled with putting my résumé together. It took me more than a month of writing and rewriting to demilitarize my résumé to a point where the average civilian employer would understand what I did in the Army. Once I had my résumé right (or at least what I thought was right at the time), I started doing all the things “they” (you know who “they” are) said you should do: I posted my résumé on popular job sites, applied for jobs online, set up online profiles on social networking sites, and started making connections.

This was about the time I first met Russ Hovendick, author of *How to Interview: What Employers Want to Hear in Today's Competitive Job Market* and *How to Get a Raise: The Correct Way to Ask for an Increase in Salary and Wages*.

At this point, I had applied for about thirty positions, received two phone calls, and zero face-to-face interviews. My first conversation with Russ lasted almost an hour. This is how it started:

“So what do you want to do?” he asked.

“I don’t really know,” I replied. My answer probably surprised me more than it did him. I realized that the only thing I was sure about was what I *didn’t* want. During my time off, I had decided that I didn’t want a fifty-to-sixty-hour workweek with long commutes. I didn’t want a rigid schedule that required me to be at the office at 0800 sharp. I wanted flexibility on hours, days, and even location.

Unfortunately with my background, I discovered that finding a job or second career that fit my ideal scenario would be tough. I felt that all my experience and training pointed me toward senior manager, director, or similar job titles that would inevitably result in fifty-to-sixty-hour workweeks, long commutes, and strict schedules.

After several conversations with Russ, I spent the next three months preparing and searching. My perspective changed dramatically. I realized that the civilian sector (unless you pursue a defense contractor position) is an unmarked minefield. Civilian employers who have no military background speak a different language. They have different customs and etiquette. Their environment is 180 degrees from military service.

Adjusting to those differences is not unlike deploying to a foreign country—except in the military, we had references, interpreters, intelligence, and yes, were heavily armed.

Unlike many books I’ve seen on résumé writing, interviewing, and networking, Russ has made the extraordinary leap of asking veterans to know the enemy and know themselves. It reminds me of the timeless quote from General Sun Tzu:

*If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles.*

*If you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one.*

*If you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.*

I'm not saying that hiring managers are "the enemy"—and neither are recruiters like Russ—but you have to be prepared. In this book, he poses a challenge to you transitioning military veterans out there: to know yourself and your "enemy."

In my case, the enemy was me. I knew what I *didn't* want, but not exactly what I *did want* or how to get there.

So I decided to do the FAAB+ exercise in this book, which is a step-by-step worksheet to get you to identify what you have to offer. It wasn't easy at first. I don't know anyone that is military (active, reserve, retired) that isn't somewhat humble. In my case, I had a hard time talking about and putting my accomplishments in writing.

Eventually, I got tired of analyzing whether or not something was too inconsequential or nothing more than routine to add to my worksheet. When I forced myself to be honest, writing down my accomplishments, attributes, and all I had to offer became easy.

If you think about it, we consider so many military demands—like overtime, relocating, and personal sacrifice—to be "part of the job." And when you really get down to it, that commitment is exactly what makes us exceptional candidates for any employer. Let's face it: civilians expect extra pay or time off for meeting requirements like the ones I mentioned.

Bottom line: *never* underestimate your military experience. Yes, our time in the military has made us a different breed of employee. Use that experience to give yourself a competitive edge over the



scores of other applicants who have never come close to your level of responsibility.

Not one veteran I know would enter the area of operations without intelligence and air support backing them up. Let this book be your intelligence source, reference, interpreter, patrol bag, and on-call air support rolled into one. Take full advantage of the sample questions, worksheets, anecdotes, and examples. They're tailor-made for ex-service members like you and me. The time to put these tools to use is now.

I am personally putting this book to the test in my job search. And I hope you do the same.

I wish you all the best.

David F. Smith

Colonel, U.S. Army (Retired)



# **INTRODUCTION**

## **The Employment Conundrum for Ex-Military**

The modern American ex-service member returns to civilian life with a new mission: finding a job in the toughest economy since the Great Depression. More than 200,000 military veterans end their service every year and struggle to find employment. In the next ten years, those figures will increase as a result of a half-trillion dollar cut in projected defense spending. U.S. ground forces will be cut by 100,000 troops over the next decade. And with every new jobs report, the rising unemployment rate among military veterans paints an ever bleaker picture. We are in a crisis.

That is why I wrote this book. I've been an executive recruiter for more than twenty years. Every day, I coach job seekers on effective strategies to landing employment. As I began to recruit military servicemen and women and present them to prospective employers, I realized that military job seekers are facing more of an uphill battle than their civilian counterparts.

Consider this: the typical member of the armed forces may have started their military career right out of high school or college and had a branch manager (or, as some call it, "the manpower guy") in Washington, DC managing their entire career. They've never had to draft a résumé, search through job listings, interview for jobs, or face rejection time

and again. For many servicemen and women in transition, the civilian workforce might seem an impossible nut to crack.

Civilian employers' preconceived notions about ex-military people don't make it any easier. I'm not naming names here, of course, but here are some common concerns I've heard from managers about hiring service members transitioning out of the military:

- *Why would I hire a military person to supervise here? In the military, their people had to do what they were ordered to do or face a court martial. It doesn't work that way here.*
- *Why would I hire a military person to lead my team? These people come from a highly regimented environment and have never had to think creatively.*
- *Why would I hire a retired military person for my plant? I need someone with youthful energy and drive—not someone at the sunset of their career.*
- *Why would I hire a military person to join my team? They are like government workers. They justify their existence with numbers and technical jargon. I need an action person.*
- *Why would I hire someone who was a commanding officer in the military? I'm looking for a team player, not someone who shouts orders and expects people to obey.*
- *With unemployment at over 7 percent, why would I risk my investment on an unproven commodity?*
- *Why would I hire an Army reservist or a state National Guardsman? Just when you need them most, they'll get called up for service. Then what?*

- *Why would I hire a retired military person? They have guaranteed income, so they won't put forth the effort I need. This job will just be income padding for them.*
- *Why would I hire a military person? We don't even speak the same language. They use all those acronyms and statements about the mission. Just give me someone I can relate to.*

Obviously, there is a huge disconnect between employers and transitioning military service members. Employers aren't seeing the tremendous value that ex-military personnel can offer their organizations. And on the other hand, those ex-military job seekers aren't effectively showing their value. They're not speaking the same language. We need to bridge that gap. And that's what I intend this book to do.

I don't come from a military background, and I don't claim to be an expert on transitioning from military to civilian life. However, as a recruiter who has learned something new every single day for the last twenty years about what employers are looking for, I've picked up some valuable advice that can help you.

Recruiting through my company Client Staffing Solutions in South Dakota, I receive several hundred résumés every week from veterans seeking employment in the civilian sector. I speak with those that show the most promise, learn what they can offer employers, and coach them. If I believe their skills and background would benefit my Fortune 500 food and beverage industry clients, I then arrange job interviews.

I enjoy working with job seekers one-on-one, and I truly believe my life's purpose is to help people take control of their careers. When I began to come across more ex-military personnel searching for jobs a couple of years ago, I realized I needed to tailor my advice to address

their needs. I also realized it was impossible to reach the hundreds of thousands of people transitioning out of the armed forces every year to share my knowledge. So I decided to write this book to share everything I know to help our military veterans land the great jobs they deserve. *Deployment to Employment* is the third in a series of career development books by Directional Motivation.

As I say in all my books, ***the little steps you take today will determine your future success.*** Despite the difficult times we live in, I firmly believe that those who take charge of their careers will succeed.

If you're a military veteran, you've undergone rigorous training to accomplish seemingly impossible missions. The job search may feel unnerving, but don't ever forget this: you're part of an elite group of people who can handle anything life throws at you. I offer this guide to you as your strategy source. If you adopt the principles in this book and apply the discipline you learned in the military, there is no reason why you should not succeed.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Starting Over and Recognizing Your Value**

Before I go over the winning strategies to getting the job you want, let's get you into a mindset that will allow you to be focused, passionate, and productive. Okay, so the skeptic inside you might be thinking that I don't understand you because I've never spent time in the military. But after twenty years as a recruiter and spending an extensive amount of time mentoring ex-military personnel on how to find employment, I know what you're going through. No matter what I tell you in this book, none of my advice will make any difference unless you approach the information with an open mind and an open heart.

John Kriesel, a former staff sergeant in the Minnesota Army National guard who lost both legs in a roadside bombing in Iraq, is one of the many ex-military men I interviewed for this book. He recalled how he and many of those in his unit had a difficult time finding work in the civilian sector and considered possibly going back to school. Other former soldiers echoed his sentiments and explained that adjusting to civilian life was emotionally devastating. They had grown so accustomed to following orders that they didn't know what to do with their newfound freedom.

"It's almost like being lost," Kriesel told me.

Despondent veterans who've been repeatedly rejected by prospective employers make statements like, "Who's going to want me now?" or "I've already given everything to my country." So, when heavyhearted veterans contact me, I do understand where they're coming from.

If you feel lost, I empathize. But more importantly, I want to snap you out of it! Let this be your wake-up call. A downtrodden, defeatist mentality will repel employers. Despite your best efforts, it will drag you down.

I'm no psychologist, but I know that transitioning to life after the military is essentially starting over. You've recently left a heavily regimented environment where decisions such as what to wear, what time to wake up, what to eat, and how to spend your day are made for you. You may be adjusting to living with your family again or learning how to manage your finances. You may even be dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder or healing from war injuries.

Starting over is certainly not easy for most people leaving the service. Acknowledge that and give yourself permission to take care of yourself first. The job search demands an incredible amount of focus, persistence, and resilience. You'll have highs and lows, so I want to make sure you're fully equipped to handle the emotional rollercoaster.

I tell all of my clients that their overall health and frame of mind are vital to a fruitful job search, but this is especially important for you. I applaud you for taking the first step to getting your life in order. However, you must address your personal needs first in order to present your best self—the real you—to potential employers. As John Kriesel advised, "You've got to make sure that your mind is right and your body is right before you can take these next steps."



## Your Secret Weapon: Knowing Your Worth

The biggest, most challenging hurdle that unsuccessful job applicants face is quite often themselves. They do everything they've heard they're supposed to do (i.e., submit résumés and cover letters, answer interview questions, follow up), but somehow they are not winning over employers. Sure, they could blame the economy, the highly competitive industries, or their own lack of qualifications. However, I believe the root cause of the widespread rejection is that **these job seekers fail to recognize their own value.**

Let me explain. In my line of work, I meet thousands of people looking for work. I get to know them by talking on the phone and inquiring about their skills and professional backgrounds. All too often, the start of a conversation with a veteran from the lower ranks goes something like this:

Recruiter: *Tell me about yourself. What did you do in the service?*

Job seeker: *Well, I know you won't be able to help me. I didn't lead anybody.*

From the very start of the conversation, I sense they are shutting down and giving up. They assume that I'm exclusively looking for leadership experience, and their first instinct is to apologize for lacking the experience I'm supposedly looking for. It's as if they don't believe they *deserve* a good job.

In reality, I look for candidates with a strong sense of personal accountability, people who strive to function at their highest—no matter what positions they've held. The most successful candidates I've placed with my corporate clients were those that took on every job responsibility as a personal mission. I know what my corporate clients want out of their employees, so that's what I deliver.

People coming out of the military are especially guilty of failing to recognize their value. They tend to equate their worth with their specific job duties without considering their contributions from a broader perspective. Nolan Ruby, Directional Motivation's veterans affairs advisor, served in the U.S. Marine Corps. He remembers joking around with his fellow Marines that when they left the service, they would either become janitors or security guards because that's all they felt qualified to do.

I hear this from many ex-military job seekers, particularly those in the lower ranks who did not have people reporting to them. Here's another common example: a driver will typically say, "I was just a driver. The most important thing I did was deliver stuff from one place to another." I cringe whenever I hear job applicants minimize their roles like this. So much valuable experience goes to waste when you make statements like that. Honestly, do you really think your role defending the United States can be compared to a taxi driver or a pizza delivery person? Of course not!



If you were a driver for the armed forces, you did more than drive vehicles. You solved problems through maintenance checks and prevented transport crises by making sure the vehicle was operating at its best. You were responsible for moving millions of dollars of equipment from one danger zone to another. You might have been in charge of transporting very important officials like the Secretary of State. Do you think your superiors would have assigned those heavy-duty responsibilities to any old driver?

My guess is that your units considered you the ultimate authority over the vehicles you drove and maintained. Instead of going to a 300-page reference manual when they had questions about operating the vehicle, the members of your unit came to you. Most likely, no one ever questioned whether your vehicle was ready to go because you had proven time and again that you were religious about keeping it in top working order. Your unit had the utmost confidence that your vehicle was prepared to enter a danger zone at a moment's notice.

And yet, there are many ex-military drivers out there going to job interviews and telling hiring managers that all they did was “drive a truck” or were “just a mechanic.” If you fit the description above, then your job responsibilities were a personal crusade. You knew your vehicle intimately, and that exemplified your passion and work ethic, which exceeds the norm in the civilian world.

But how would a civilian hiring manager know this if you didn't explain it? How could they? Only you can make them understand. And before you can do that, you must know it and understand it yourself. Quite simply, you must believe in yourself. You cannot hope to convince an employer that you would make a valuable addition to their team if you don't believe it yourself.

Start by thinking of your previous roles from the 200,000-foot level. How would a mission be compromised if your unit didn't have you,

the private E-2, the seaman recruit, the airman first class? What operation would have been delayed if you hadn't transported a shipment on schedule? How many people's lives would have been at risk if you hadn't done your routine engine check on the aircraft? You may have heard about another unit whose mission was hindered because one person failed to do an assignment.

Now think of the tasks you did in order to raise your level of preparedness and avoid the mistakes that others had made. Did members of your unit ever compliment you on your abilities? Did they ever make statements about why you were better in your role than others? These statements are valuable as you begin to understand what you have to offer employers.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Action Item: FAAB+ Sheet**

When you hear the word “fab,” you might think it's a shortcut for “fabulous.” However, FAB sheets list a person's features, accomplishments, and benefits. Recruiters typically have job candidates fill these out. The traditional template uses three columns. However, you are more than the “typical” job seeker. We at Directional Motivation always strive to push our audience to get the most out of our products. In this book, I've supercharged the old template into my own version I call FAAB+, which stands for features, accomplishments, attributes, benefits, plus.

This is one of the most effective exercises in this book. Whenever I work with job seekers who need that extra boost, I always have them do this exercise. It leads to phenomenal results, so I'm making this a requirement for you. This activity will help you flesh out information and give you a burst of confidence. It will also serve as an aid for writing your résumé and preparing for job interviews.



Before we go through each part of the acronym, I suggest you download the FAAB+ Sheet template from [www.directionalmotivation.com](http://www.directionalmotivation.com).<sup>3</sup> The website also features a webinar explaining this exercise.

### **Features**

These are the cut-and-dried facts about you that are most likely in your résumé or military file. Dedicate one row in the chart for each position you held in the military and write down your job responsibilities. Write down every single task, no matter how small. Part of recognizing your value is being able to identify how you spent your time in previous jobs. Avoid technical jargon and be direct, simple, and concise. If you get stuck, imagine yourself explaining your typical day in the military to your ten-year-old cousin.

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<sup>3</sup> From the Resources tab, you'll see the link to Worksheets.

**Accomplishments**

For each position in your features column, list your successes and how you achieved them. You already listed the tasks that you performed in the features column. Every little task inched you closer toward something. If you reached those goals, list them here. If you came close to your goals, go ahead and list how close you came.

Don't judge yourself or dismiss your accomplishments as being merely "part of the job." Small victories are meaningful and every unit needs them to survive. After you list your accomplishments, you may realize that you left out the features that led to those accomplishments. Go back and add those to the features column. Notice how the features relate to the accomplishments.

Here are some examples of military accomplishments to get you going:

- named squad leader in first week of basic training
- moved up to NCO<sup>4</sup> ranks after two years
- resolved major logistics errors
- completed extra electronics coursework during ROTC
- created a new SOP<sup>5</sup> for community outreach that was implemented by the entire command
- assisted in editing new counterinsurgency regulation
- served as a recorder for judicial hearing board
- received Airman of the Year award

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4 non-commissioned officer

5 standard operating procedure

- planned multiple retirement, deployment, and change-of-command ceremonies
- briefed members of Congress
- served as escort for government officials visiting the base

There should be at least twenty items on this list. In fact, think about both your personal and professional accomplishments. If you're having a difficult time, here are some areas to consider:

- Did you work while attending school?
- Have you supervised others? Ask them for their honest opinions about your performance and how you impacted their lives.
- Has your commanding officer ever recognized you formally or informally for a job well done?
- What kinds of awards have you won?
- How have you influenced members of your unit?
- How have you influenced your unit as a whole?
- Have you ever done volunteer work? What did you contribute?
- What have you failed at? What did you learn from those failures and how did they change you?
- Have you ever faced an obstacle that seemed impossible to get through?
- How have you made a difference in someone else's life?
- Have you ever created something from nothing?



- Have you ever faced a fear?
- Have you ever stood up to injustice?
- Have you ever changed the status quo? How?

### **Attributes**

Review both columns of each row you've completed so far and write the qualities you demonstrated in each row. Your attributes are your strengths. Regardless of position, industry, or employer you have, you carry these attributes with you. For example, if your accomplishment was "named expert rifleman in basic training," you might write in the attributes column, "persistent, passionate, accurate."

### **Benefits**

This column requires you to push yourself by thinking from your superior's perspective. Typically, I tell job seekers to list how their accomplishments and attributes benefitted their employer. In your case, you can list how your accomplishments benefitted your base, station, or ship. This is the turning point of this exercise because it will naturally lend itself to the next column.

### **Plus (+)**

This last column will take your A-game to the next level. However, I recommend holding off on completing this column until you read Chapter 4. Don't worry, I won't let you forget about this very important column. I have included a reminder in that chapter for you.

In the + column, you take the ideas from the benefits column and translate that into how you can specifically benefit the company where you hope to work. In other words, you've shown what you did for your previous employers. Now show what you can do for this



new employer. The only way to effectively complete this column is by researching the company you are applying to.

To see a couple of FAAB+ sample entries, go to pages 69-70.

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Regardless of what rank you held in the military, I know for a fact that you have something valuable to offer employers. Despite the high unemployment rate for veterans (9.9 percent in 2012),<sup>6</sup> there are literally hundreds of companies that need your knowledge, skills, and experience in order to operate more efficiently and increase profits.

I know this because I talk to these employers every day. There is a high demand for you out there in the civilian world. As president of a staffing agency, I specialize in placing job seekers in the food and beverage manufacturing industry. Most veterans have never had experience in this industry, but I’ve known many who have successfully demonstrated to employers that their skills were useful to that industry.

Countless hiring managers have told me that people from the armed forces are high performers for many reasons:

- They’re problem solvers.
- They’re inherently hands-on.
- They work well in teams.
- Managers don’t have to “babysit” them because they’re self-disciplined and work independently.
- They learn quickly.

<sup>6</sup> “Employment Situation of Veterans Summary,” released March 20, 2013, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed April 4, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>.

- They excel in diverse environments, including rough industrial settings.
- They're task-oriented and have a strong sense of accountability for every aspect of their job.

Do you have these valuable attributes? If yes, then congratulations! These are the kinds of qualities employers are looking for.



It always amazes me when an employer explains to me that their company's food manufacturing plant is refrigerated and then asks if my ex-military candidate would be able to handle such harsh conditions. These employers are merely being conscientious, but their comments reveal how little they know about military life.

Think about it. If you've been in combat, you've had to work in tougher conditions than most people could ever fathom. You've trudged through mud, fought off camel spiders, contended with

snakes, hidden in desert caves, endured extreme cold, and thirsted through baking heat. You've survived violent gun battles and saved the lives of your fellow soldiers.

When you contrast your previous work environment to a cramped office or a soot-filled manufacturing plant, don't you feel like you can excel in virtually any environment? Compare the worst possible mistake you can make in a corporate setting to the worst possible mistake you could make on a mission for the U.S. Armed Forces. Consider what you've had to accomplish in eight hours on a military mission versus what you'd be expected to accomplish in an eight-hour shift at a civilian job. If you don't believe you can bring tremendous value to a civilian employer, you should.

One of the ex-military men I interviewed for this book was Aaron Curtis, who served more than twenty years in the Army. In the summer of 2012, after two and a half months of searching for a job, he was offered a position in Washington State as the senior quality engineer for a German aerospace company. Aaron always tells his old comrades, many still in Afghanistan, "You already possess the skills to be successful." He reminds them that the job search may feel foreign, but hey, that's nothing new. They've already been overseas. They know what it's like to navigate through foreign territory. I encourage you to consider the job search as "foreign territory" to explore, understand, and benefit from.

Civilian employers may not understand the level of responsibility required of every military position and, therefore, may not comprehend the value you would bring if they brought you onboard. It's your responsibility to explain it to them. I'll go into more detail about explaining those responsibilities in Chapter 4. But for now, the FAAB+ exercise hopefully got you pumped up about being you. If you truly believe in yourself and persist in moving toward your goals, you'll be just fine.



## CHAPTER 2

### Adjusting Your Mindset to the Civilian World

The civilian world is messy. It's chaotic, political, and many things are subject to unexpected change. The civilian world is full of a wide variety of personalities and emotions. Learning to establish yourself as a professional in the civilian world will require some acclimation. This chapter gives you four specific strategies to put yourself in the best possible frame of mind for your job search.

#### **Steer Clear of the Entitlement Mentality**

This is not an easy subject to talk about, but since I do intend this book to be a wake-up call to veterans seeking employment, the message is extremely important. **Your military service does not entitle you to a job.** Companies are looking for employees who will contribute value and help them increase profitability, enhance customer loyalty, decrease costs, implement greater efficiency, and more. They are seeking high performers.

I mean absolutely no disrespect here, and I sincerely appreciate your service to our country, but **employers don't owe you a job.** Every now and then, I meet an ex-service member looking for a job, carrying around that entitlement mentality. They give off the impression that they've already proven themselves and should not need to do it again. In their minds, they shouldn't have to start at the