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7 Valuable Transferable Skills Service Members Bring to the Civilian Workforce

By **Ashley Brooks** on 06/29/2020



You're proud to have had a successful military career serving your country. Now it's time to look toward the future ... but the prospect of figuring out what to do entering the civilian workforce is more intimidating than you expected.

Your military experience has shaped and changed you as a person. You've grown in immeasurable ways, but you don't have the traditional career experience employers may be looking for. What if hiring managers can't see the value you could bring to their company?

It's normal to feel apprehensive about making the

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transition to the civilian workforce, but there's no need to worry! Most employers are well aware of the valuable transferrable skills service members gain through military experience.

7 Military skills you can bring to a civilian career

Regardless of what your role was as a service member, your military training and experience have likely equipped you with a solid foundation of skills to build a career upon. "The military is a great place to gain real-world experience in a career without any prior education," says Tim Koster, owner of **46 Series Entertainment**.

These military skills are in demand across all different types careers and industries. We spoke with service members who have firsthand experience going from the military to civilian workforce. Keep reading to learn which military skills they say have helped them move on to the next phase in their careers.

1. Leadership

The United States military is known for producing world-class leaders. **Anthony Treas**, now a business consultant to health coaches, shares that his time as a non-commissioned officer taught him that true leadership is about "understanding people and finding how to work with them."

Organizations in all industries need strong leaders to keep their workforce moving in the right direction. "As the leader in my business, I must be able to communicate effectively to my clients and customers according to their learning style," Treas says. Even if you don't have your sights set on a managerial position, your leadership skills will

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managerial position, your leadership skills will serve you well.

“We are always leading in life, even if it's just ourselves,” Treas says.

2. Adaptability

Adaptability means you're able to quickly pivot to Plan B when something goes awry in Plan A. In the military, being prepared for anything and thinking quickly on your feet can sometimes be the difference between life and death.

In all likelihood, the stakes aren't going to be that high in the civilian workforce, but even business plans become FUBAR—and your ability to adapt to any scenario is still a necessary skill. Koster shares examples of clients changing their requirements or COVID-19 striking and forcing organizations to pivot their entire business models. “Having the ability to adapt to changes can result in whether or not you're successful,” Koster says.

3. Teamwork

“Teamwork is one of the fundamental skills in the military,” Koster says. “You need to be able to work with and trust everyone around you.” He points out that service members have plenty of practice developing trust and working on a team with people from an array of different backgrounds.

Many civilians don't have opportunities to develop their teamwork skills beyond the occasional group project in school or organized sports—but teamwork is still a vital skill that's needed in the workforce. Your military experience lets hiring managers know that you're already well-equipped to work with others, whether it's collaborating with people from other departments or working



together with colleagues to bring a project together.

4. Integrity

Integrity and honesty are key in the military, where service members may be entrusted with secret clearances and trust serves as the foundation of teamwork. Integrity means taking responsibility for your actions, being honest at all times and upholding a strong code of honor.

Christopher Reed is an active duty Chief Air Traffic Controller with the U.S. Navy. His military role trained him in the importance of integrity, and it's also an asset as he conducts business as a real estate investor. "This honesty shines through when networking with other real estate investors as they know I'm sincere when building your team," Reed says.

5. Critical reflection

The military regularly asks service members to reflect on projects or missions using an After Action Review (AAR). "After each field exercise, my squad would review what went right and what we could do better for the next time," says **Na'ilah Amaru**, U.S. Army veteran and policy strategist.

These types of critical reflections, sometimes called "postmortems," are also used in the civilian workforce. Having prior experience reflecting on your work can make you a valuable asset in many careers. "Many civilians [move] from one project to the next without intentionally creating time and space to reflect on how they could improve for the next time," Amaru says. "The skill of conducting an AAR has been key to my professional development."



6. Training

“At every rank you are required to train your fellow service members,” says David Geaney, active duty Air Force and founder of veteran career coaching non-profit **SpeakVet**. “If you are proficient at a task that your peers struggle with, the expectation is that you will teach them.”

Service members may take for granted all this experience in training others, but it’s something that will draw the attention of hiring managers. “These experiences are rarer in the civilian world and will give you a leg up on non-veteran competition,” Geaney says. Employers appreciate having workers who can teach others since it helps the entire workplace rise to a higher level of competence.

7. Persistence

Every service member knows that their time in the military has strengthened their persistence and resilience. Regardless of your role in the military, you can probably think of several situations in which you had to overcome adversity and persevere through difficult circumstances. “It’s the ability to accomplish specific tasks under tremendous stress, with limited resources,” Reed says.

That grit is a valuable skill to have in a civilian career. Obstacles can and will appear in any type of job, from projects that run off course to dealing with difficult clients. Your experience building persistence means you’re already prepared to dig deep and find solutions to problems that others may find insurmountable.



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Ready to make the switch?

Taking the leap from military service to a civilian career can take some adjustment, but you can do so with confidence thanks to these valuable military skills. However, you might have one more stop to make between military experience and your new career.

Earning a college degree will give you the technical skills you need to go along with the top-notch transferrable skills you already have. Learn from other service members who have gone before you with our article, **“College After Military: Advice from Fellow Service Members Who Made the Transition.”**



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Ashley is a freelance writer for Collegis education who writes student-focused articles on behalf of Rasmussen University. She believes in the power of words and knowledge and enjoys using both to encourage others on their learning journeys

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