

From the Field to the Workplace: Translating Military Experience to Civilian Skills

Purpose

The skills you developed as a service member are valuable and unique, but communicating those to a potential civilian employer may be challenging. Work environments and terminology vary between the different contexts, but they are translatable. Never underestimate your military experience; it can give you the extra edge to get a position.

Modifying Military Language

Military language is very different from the civilian workplace language. Acronyms, technical terms, and designations for different positions in the military can be confusing for potential employers who have not served. In order to translate your military experience, these types of terms need to be modified.

Here are some tips:

- Acronyms: Spell them out and consider simplifying them
 - Examples: “Base” instead of “BCT”, “Commander” instead of “CDR”, “Non Commissioned Officer” instead of NCO, “Junior Leaders Course” instead of “PLDC/WLC”, “Advanced Leaders Course” instead of “BNCOC/ALC”
- Occupational Designator: State your job title rather than the MOS/MOC designator
 - Examples: “Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Specialist” instead of “74D”
- Technical Terms: Put them into the simplest terms possible
 - Examples: “Military helicopter” instead of “AH-64”, “Operations department” instead of “S3”
- General Terms:
 - Use “personnel”, “staff”, or “employees” in place of soldiers or platoon members
 - “Supplies” can be used to describe artillery, uniforms, and ammunition

Translating Skills and Responsibilities

While in the military, you gained a competitive advantage by increasing your communication, leadership, analytical, organizational, and interpersonal skills. As you develop your resume, keep those categories in mind and expand upon the ones that best fit the positions you are applying to. If there is a direct correlation between your previous military duties and those of the career field you are earning a degree in, highlighting job specific skills can help you rise above the applicants who have no out of classroom experience.

There are multiple resources to help you identify specific military skills and responsibilities to showcase on your resume. Consider using your VMET or input your MOS in O*NET OnLine (address listed in references section).

Here is an example of military experience that might be on showcased on a resume:

“Provided 12 junior staff with group training to gain and deepen skills needed to increase efficiency and advance within the power plant and their careers in the Navy”

This example showcases communication and problem solving skills. Although a civilian employer will be able to understand what was accomplished they might still be unclear on the specifics, such as how you helped maintain a marine power plant and how the training increased the staff’s efficiency. Consider utilizing the S.T.A.R. method to increase the employer’s understanding and ensure you are providing the relevant details.

For this example:

- **Situation** – Professionally developing and managing a team due to a drop in productivity and safety concerns
- **Task** – Increasing general power plant operations, procedures, and drills
- **Action** – Developed and led a two week training program that highlighted crucial operations and procedures that needed improving, implementation of LEAN system, and hazardous situation drills
- **Results** – Increased efficiency by 30% by training junior staff, aiding them to reach watch-standing qualifications, and reviewing safety training drills

Now, these details can be added to resume to provide the employer with a better idea of what you accomplished and achieved.

“Increased workplace efficiency by 30% by developing and managing a 2-week training course for 12 staff members with a focus on time management, strengthening safety procedures, and career development.”

By using the S.T.A.R. method, you can communicate specifics in civilian terms, highlight the preferred or required skills, and demonstrate personal growth.

Military Education

While in the service you likely received specialized training in your field as you increased in rank. This type of training and education can be military specific, but some training can be relevant to the civilian workforce as well. If you decide to showcase any of your military education and training, make sure it is directly applicable to the position you are applying for. List the coursework and training in detail if it is not clearly identified by its title so that civilian employers will be able to clearly understand how the training is applicable. Also, consider referring to military training in hours instead of weeks or days to give employers a better sense of how much training you received.

Here is an example of military education that might be on showcased on a resume:

“Engineer Basic Officer Leadership Course, *St. Robert, MO*

- 19 week (760 hour) course with a focus on interpersonal communication, civil engineering, and personnel, supply, and project management skills in different situations
- Wrote and presented 3 procedure trainings to increase staff technical and tactical proficiency”

Cover Letter

Cover letters are a professional writing tool that help you further introduce yourself to the employer while you showcase specific skills and experiences in more detail and explain to the employer why you are interested in their organization and the specific position for which you are applying. Depending on the employer’s preference of veteran workers, it is generally a safe idea to apply the same language transitions from your resume into your cover letter. A cover letter provides the perfect opportunity to expand upon your military experience to help the employer understand how it correlates to the civilian position you are applying for.

After you are done writing your cover letter have someone review it. If you mention your military experience in it, have a civilian go over it to ensure they fully understand the experience you are listing. When in doubt, stop by Career Services within the Student Resource Center to have someone from our staff review your materials.

Resources

- O*NET OnLine Crosswalks Search translates military experience to civilian experience:
<http://www.onetonline.org/>
- A website to help you receive your VMET which can bring out certain skills and responsibilities:
<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/tgps/#>
- Additional resources to help you translate military experience to civilian skills:
<http://www.job-hunt.org/veterans-job-search/translating-military-experience.shtml>
<http://www.realwarriors.net/veterans/treatment/civilianresume.php>
<http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator>