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April The Coolest Month For Newly Employed Former Marine

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - After 23 years, 1st Sgt Curtis Beauchamp faced a new challenge: starting over. But however daunting it may have seemed, the 23-year Marine was ready. He had begun preparing for his retirement two years before, investing in new clothes, honing interview skills, typing countless resumes and checking out online career sites.

On April 1, Beauchamp's military career ended. On April 3, he found a job with the Destiny Group, an online service that provides corporate clients with access to a database of thousands of individuals with military backgrounds.

"The funny thing is that I enlisted on April Fools 1977, and I got out this April Fools," said Beauchamp, a customer service manager with the Destiny Group. "The main thing was that I was prepared. The transition programs mandated by Congress now tell you to start getting ready for retirement three months before. That won't work; the sooner you start, the better."

Beauchamp said finding a new career is no different from any other mission facing military personnel and their dependents-in order to succeed, one must prepare and be resourceful. "The only difference is that this mission is for yourself and your family."

200,000 Annually

Approximately 200,000 military personnel leave the armed forces each year, many motivated by the prospect of greater earnings in the private sector. Veterans offer worldly experience, efficiency and know-how, Beauchamp said. "There's also the aspect of discipline. That's the most important thing. In the military, you have to come to work on time or you eventually get demoted and lose money."

Stephen Tompkins, vice president of communications for VetJobs.com-an Internet career site with more than 10,000 resumes on file that deals with 300 major corporations, including GE and General Dynamics-concurs. "Another factor companies like are the facts that military personnel have been tested for drugs and often have security clearance," Tompkins said. "With all the computer viruses being spread nowadays, that's a big incentive for corporations. Also, in the military, you have to work in a culturally diverse environment, which is something companies want."

Beauchamp and Tompkins offered tips to aid veterans crossing the bridge into a new career:

Be ready for disappointment.

"Most likely, you won't get that dream job right away. You have to plug away and be persistent, which is something veterans already have-that 'can-do' attitude," Beauchamp said.

Practice and be proactive.

One needs to shop their resume around and pump it out to numerous companies, Tompkins said. Also, job seekers should make it a point to work on their interviewing skills. VetJobs.com has a transition assistance section offering "Ten Commandments"-suggestions in such crucial areas as resume development, interviewing with potential employers and interview attire. "You would be astonished at how many people just out of the military don't know how to organize a resume or haven't applied for a job before," Tompkins said. "While many have the necessary technical and work skills, they need to learn to be able to compete with someone with the same background but who knows the interview game."

Know where you want to go-that has a double meaning.

"Most of the time the military will pay for your last move," Beauchamp said. "This can be a good incentive for a company because once you figure out where you want to live, they [the employer] can save on relocation costs. Also, it's important to know what you want to do. If you're unhappy at your job, that can cause a tremendous amount of stress. You need to do your homework ahead of time and figure out what career path you want to pursue."

Tompkins, a 12-year Navy veteran who served a year in Vietnam, said he initially had a difficult time adjusting to the civilian workforce. "There's just a different attitude. That's not a bad thing, but you have to be patient and realize you're in a different environment."

"That's why I'm excited to be involved with a company like this," he said. "I wish there was something like this when I got out. In the military, there's a sense of taking care of one's own. If we don't help make the transition to civilian life easier, work will filter to potential new recruits, and they won't want to join."



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