



# **Military Transition:** **Effective Networking Guide** **for Current Military** **and Veterans**

## **A Job-Hunt Guide**

### **Patra Frame**

## **Job-Hunt Guides**

*Job-Hunt Guides* are short ebooks published by Job-Hunt.org to help job seekers master a topic that is important for a successful job search.

Each Job-Hunt Guide is written by a job hunt experts. Patricia (Patra) Frame is the author of this Job-Hunt Guide. She is Job-Hunt.org's Expert in Job Search for Veterans.

## **About the Author**

Patricia Frame is an experienced Human Resources executive, a US Air Force veteran, and Wharton MBA. Her careers work began in the military and expanded while working at General Electric and in several software companies. She is known for her extensive writing, coaching, and speaking on effective job search topics. She has worked with a wide range of transitioning military and assists companies in hiring veterans.

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*“We emphasize to the military transition classes we instruct that it’s never too early to start networking and talking to others about your career and your future. In fact, you should never stop doing so. That’s why this book, filled with step-by-step guidance, is so important.”*

**Rob Riggins, Marketing Director, [ClearedJobs.Net](#) | [CyberSEcJobs.com](#)**

*“Networking is how employers prefer to fill jobs today, making it the most essential skill in job search and careers today. Unfortunately, it is also the most intimidating and least understood for many of us. In this book, Patra Frame offers step-by-step instructions for successful networking, from how to plan to what to say and how to follow up.”*

**Susan P. Joyce, President: [NETability, Inc.](#) Publisher: [Job-Hunt.org](#)**

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# Networking for Success: Network Building During Military Transition

Networking is a scary word for many. It sounds sort of like faking friendships or grabbing each person at a meeting for 10 seconds before moving on to another.

Networking is just connecting to another person. You have been doing it most of your life. You may keep in touch with friends from high school, college, or another military assignment. You talk to people in the community or at your kids' events. As you transition to the private sector or a government job, you can help yourself succeed by re-contacting past connections and making new ones.

## ***Step 1. Define Your Networking Plan***

Start with a plan. What do you need to do now? In what order? What do you want to get from your networking efforts?

When building your network, it is smart to start with military friends and peers. You can find many of those you have lost touch with too. If you are returning to your original hometown, re-connect now with people you know there.

Here is a “cheat sheet” of categories – build your networking ideas list from it:

- ◆ *Reconnect* – with people you value but have not connected with lately.
- ◆ *Professional groups' meetings* - national/local groups in your chosen field, chambers of commerce, job clubs, veterans' organizations, or alumni groups.
- ◆ *Developmental events* – seminars, conferences, courses in your field.
- ◆ *Individual meetings* – specific people in your field and outside it.
- ◆ *Hobby and community groups* are often useful.
- ◆ *Online resources* – LinkedIn, Twitter, MeetUp, etc.

## ***Step 2. Define Your Networking Goals***

Define what you need, what you offer, and what you will do in fairly specific terms. Numbers alone are not worth much.

You want quality connections for *mutual* benefit.

Consider:

- ◆ What do you want to learn from each contact?
- ◆ What will you share about yourself?
- ◆ What specific help do you want?
- ◆ Who will you ask for introductions and to whom?
- ◆ What will you offer in return?

While on active duty, begin to build your private sector or government network through LinkedIn and its interest groups, Twitter, alumni organizations, and professional/trade associations. This will help you learn more about opportunities and find people to help you chose the right job/career.

### ***Step 3. Make Networking Easy***

Never go to a meeting or an event without a plan. Do you want to meet specific people or learn something specific in talking with people there? Remember to ask about the market, your job interests, and other things you want to know. Learn about each person and offer any assistance you can.

Have a goal when you connect with an individual or meet in a small group. What do you want out of the meeting? What are you offering in return?

When you are connecting online, use the same process. What do you want to learn and what questions will you ask in each message? What might you offer in return?

And remember the military adage: No plan survives first contact. As you build and grow your network, you will hit a few duds - move on. You will get some advice that does not sound right for you and you can ignore it and move on. Just keep going!

# What Do You Need to Know? How Will You Learn That?

## *Stage 1 - Self-Assessment and Career Exploration*

At the start you want people who know you and can help you begin your self-assessment and the process of deciding what you want to do next.

### **Build Your Personal Board of Directors**

Start by thinking of the people you can trust to be honest with you and to give you solid advice based on their expertise. You might also create a small group of trusted advisors at the beginning of your transition to help you assess what you want to do next and how to get there effectively.

These people should be non-judgmental but willing to help you understand your strengths and weaknesses and push you to be your best. They can be family, friends, coworkers/bosses, or other people you know and trust. They serve as a sounding-board during this process so that you have trusted sources to talk with about your concerns, fears, or issues.

Consider these categories to select your advisors; someone who...

- ◆ Can help you see the ‘big picture’ of your future.
- ◆ Knows your skills fairly well.
- ◆ Knows your temperament well.
- ◆ Is very creative.
- ◆ Cares deeply about you and your future.
- ◆ Has private sector business experience.

As you begin to see the picture of who you are and what future options most interest you, you will expand your network to expand your knowledge. Here your networking goals usually are to learn more about successful transitions and to figure out what you might want to do next in more detail. Seek out:

- ◆ Peers you worked with who can suggest some of your best attributes and skills while you are doing your self-assessment
- ◆ People who know you well and can assist as you debate varying career options
- ◆ Past bosses who can serve as references

- ◆ Past co-workers who have already made the transition to a new civilian career and can tell you what they did that worked well and what mistakes they made
- ◆ People in your community who can offer information or contacts in career fields you are assessing.

### Sample Questions to Ask

- ◆ Based on our work together, what do you think my best skills and interests are?
- ◆ We worked together several times, what private sector work do you think I might want to consider?
- ◆ How did you build your network?
- ◆ You have already made the transition, what do you think was the smartest thing you did in the process?
- ◆ Based on your transition, what would you have done earlier in the process? What did you waste time on?
- ◆ What were the two things you wish you had done differently in your transition and why?
- ◆ I am thinking of moving back to our hometown, what is the job market like there?
- ◆ I am thinking of going into (career field), do you know anyone who does that who I could talk to learn more?

### *Stage 2. Focusing on a Critical Few Career Choices*

As you finish your self-analysis and focus on possible career choices, begin to expand your connections. Find those who can help you understand more about the work and your target employers or how to translate your skills effectively. Talk to people you know in the community.

### Find Career Advisors

Look for local groups of people in each field to meet, starting at those nearest your current assignment. Some may be chapters of professional or trade associations. Others could be found searching Meetup.com, Lanyard.com, EventBrite.com and local business calendars for relevant events. A local job club also will offer a range of useful information and connections. If you are not in the US or are far from the location you intend to move to, you can also build a network at your desired location by starting to connect using social media.

Online you can join networks on the specific field and groups on social media, such as LinkedIn. Look for the relevant associations and their social media efforts too. Reach out to those whose advice or articles you read and see value in.

Talk to a range of people at each event you attend and learn about them. Follow-up with those who seem the best matches to your goals. As you build a relationship with each one, ask for their recommendations on other people who might be able to help you.

If you are completing a degree now or will do so as your first transition step, don't forget to check out student groups in your field. Use your school's career services function! If you are an alum already, check out the career services your school offers. Many have extensive programs. Most will help you connect to other alums in your desired career field.

Connect with others via LinkedIn, which is the largest online network of professionals. As you join groups or read articles there, look for people who seem to make a real contribution to the group or write useful articles. Contact those people and ask to connect - telling them why. Once you have connected, ask questions and keep in contact. When possible, seek to meet these people in person.

Most often you will discover that saying to a potential connection that you are a transitioning military person and would like to learn more about your desired work or their expertise in some area will result in helpful conversations and great referrals.

Don't forget to go back to your past connections either. Some may be in your desired field but others who are not may have great connections in it to help you. The same is true as you begin to assess potential employers.

### Sample Questions to Ask

Of *any* connection:

I am interested in career field X, do you know anyone who does this work? If so, ask - Would you be willing to refer me to that person so I can ask a few questions to learn more about the field?

Of those in the career field:

- ◆ How did you get into this career field?



- ◆ What do you like best about it?
- ◆ What sort of education, training or experiences are most needed now?
- ◆ I am interested in exploring this field as I transition, would you be willing to answer some questions over coffee or by email?
- ◆ I have this experience (short list or 30 second 'elevator' speech) and a degree in X (if applicable), which jobs in the field do you think I should be investigating?
- ◆ What do you see as trends in this field?
- ◆ What are the common career paths in the field?
- ◆ Which industry or trade or professional organizations serve the field?
- ◆ Are there any local meetings or events I should attend?
- ◆ What is compensation like for the jobs I qualify for?

Of those in recruiting positions:

- ◆ What are the most common requirements you are seeking now for positions in job X?
- ◆ What are the trends in such jobs now?
- ◆ What is market pay for entry/mid/senior level (as appropriate) positions in X?
- ◆ How has pay been changing?
- ◆ Are there other common aspects of compensation in X?

### ***Stage 3: As You Decide on Specific Jobs***

Once you have narrowed your focus to specific potential employers and jobs, keep building your connections. But do not ignore those you have already made. You can go back and ask further questions or keep them up on how you are doing and ask if they have any further suggestions.

#### **Sample Questions to Ask**

Of individuals:

- ◆ I am interested in job X. Do you know anyone who does that work that I might talk to?
- ◆ I am interested in job type X, but I am not sure what level I should look at. Would you be willing to look at my resume (or LinkedIn profile) and give me some ideas?
- ◆ I am interested in companies X and Y. Do you know anything about them that would help me learn more?
- ◆ I am interested in company X. Do you have any contacts there? Would you be willing to refer me? Or may I use your name?

- ◆ I am interested in job X. Do you know any recruiters in that area I should talk with? Would you refer me?

Of others at professional events:

- ◆ What made you interested in this event?
- ◆ How does this event relate to your work?
- ◆ If applicable, do you belong to the sponsoring organization and if so, why?
- ◆ I am transitioning from the military and interested in job X. Would you be willing to talk to me about it in the next two weeks?
- ◆ This is my first time at (event Q), have you been to their past meetings? Are you a member (if applicable)? What do you learn from attending (as applicable)?
- ◆ What other meetings in this field do you attend and why?

## Maintaining Your Network

As you build and deepen your connections with people, remember it is a two-way street. People usually want to help you at first. But you also need to help them so as to keep growing the connection. Growing these connections is a smart investment in your future. Look for ways to assist each person in return.

### *What Will You Offer in Return?*

It could be a simple note or a link to an article you think might interest the person. You could take local contacts out for coffee. If you have connected with recruiters who specialize in hiring veterans for their company, referring others who have relevant skills is always welcome. Making a connection between two of your connections when you think they might be useful to each other is smart. Demonstrating that you have followed up on any referrals is good. So is remembering just to say “thank you.”

Keep the connection alive when you are not asking for help - perhaps via a simple ‘how are you doing’ note or some holiday wishes. This reminds them of you in a positive manner.

### *Manage This Process and Maintain Your Network*

Once you have begun to connect develop a system to help track your connections. Many use LinkedIn, some spreadsheets or a paper record; do choose a method that works for you. Then build up your ability to get the help you need. Ask specific questions, such as those examples above, so you get the information you really need.

Just asking what someone thinks of your resume will often give you little useful feedback. Instead ask about a specific aspect of it; such as

- ◆ “Does the summary capture what is most important to employers in your field?”
- ◆ “Are my achievement statements clear and complete?”

Later, as you ask for referrals or other contacts, be sure you “close the loop.” Tell each person what you did with the information, and say thanks. This needs to be a part of your record-keeping.

Nothing will hinder your progress as much as asking and asking for help without ever saying thank you or showing what you did with the information or suggestions you received. Nothing hinders the flow of useful support like a contact who remembers you did not follow up on some previous help. That does not mean you have to accept each idea or suggested change, but you do need to acknowledge the help you get to keep it flowing.

As your transition progresses, keep your network informed. Simple updates are fine. This helps you be ‘top of mind’ for them but also keeps the relationship building. When you start your first civilian job, remember to tell everyone who helped along the way and thank them once more.

### **Why Bother?**

First, your connections can help you understand your options and the private sector faster and in more depth than most other ways to learn. This will help you in finding the right job options and in preparing your resume and interviewing for jobs. Second, large numbers of jobs are filled via networking. Networking is especially valuable when you do not already have past peers in the field or area. The more senior the role you seek, the more likely it is that an employer is using internal and external networking to fill it. It is who knows you that is important in this process. Few people you know will have a job to offer you. But as you grow your network and more people know you well and know your goals, you will have far more people who may be able to refer you.

Finally, do not abandon your network efforts once you have a job. Many people do. But extensive research shows that those people who continue to maintain and grow their networks are more successful. They achieve their career goals more easily, make more money, and bounce back from adverse events quickly and well.

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## Coming Soon from Patra Frame:

### ***Military Transition: Start Smart for Job Search Success Guide for Current Military and Veterans***

Far too many people jump into writing a resume and applying for jobs without enough knowledge or planning to succeed. Whether you expect to transition to a job in your current military specialty or not, the research and planning needed is critical to a faster, more successful job search.

This book discusses the step-by-step approach to creating a successful future based on your past experiences, no matter what your current field or desired next steps. Full of detailed guidelines and questions to ask yourself and others, it will help you move forward quickly. It will help you avoid the common mistakes and issues which lead many military to be unemployed for months, to have trouble even finding that first job, or to go through several civilian jobs within 2-3 years.

## Suggested Reading:

[\*GIVE AND TAKE, Why Helping Others Drives Our Success\*](#) (book) by Adam Grant

[\*Job-Hunt Quick Guide to Networking for Introverts\*](#) (book) by Wendy Gelberg

[Job-Hunt Guide to Job Search Networking](#) (articles) by Liz Ryan

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## Articles by Patra Frame:

### ***Preparing for Transition***

- ◆ [Smart Military Transition Resumes](#)
- ◆ [Making a Smart Job Choice: 3 Steps to Plan for the Best Military Retirement Job](#)
- ◆ [Short Timer? How to Manage Transition to Civilian Life](#)
- ◆ [Preparing for Career Transition: Analyzing What Makes You Unique](#)
- ◆ [The Realities of Military to Civilian Transition](#)

### ***The Job Search Process***

- ◆ [Veterans' "Soft Skills" Advantage](#)
- ◆ [Do the Hard Work to Get the Right Work](#)
- ◆ [Beginning Your Civilian Job Search](#)
- ◆ [Leveraging Targets of Opportunity](#)
- ◆ [Increasing Your Job Search Options](#)
- ◆ [Finding Help for Your Job Search](#)
- ◆ [Giving Job Search Help to Others](#)
- ◆ [Job Search Success Tactics](#)
- ◆ [How to Avoid Self-Sabotage](#)

### ***Choosing Your Civilian Career***

- ◆ [Your Great New Career in 7 Steps](#)
- ◆ [Determining Your Career Direction](#)
- ◆ [Combat Arms to Civilian... What Now?](#)
- ◆ [Show Me the Money!](#)

### ***Veteran's Job Search Tools***

- ◆ [Vet's Job Search Battle Plan](#)
- ◆ [Be Prepared: Interview Cheat Sheet](#)
- ◆ [Military Women: Finding Job Search Success](#)

### ***Implementing Your Civilian Job Search***

- ◆ [Networking: The Secret of Successful Military-to-Civilian Transition](#)
- ◆ [Identifying and Leveraging Your Marketability](#)

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## **Coming Soon**

### **Military Transition: Start Smart for Job Search Success Guide for Current Military and Veterans**

Far too many people jump into writing a resume and applying for jobs without enough knowledge or planning to succeed. Whether you expect to transition to a job in your current military specialty or not, the research and planning needed is critical to a faster, more successful job search. This book discusses the step-by-step approach to creating a successful future based on your past experiences, no matter what your current field or desired next steps. Full of detailed guidelines and questions to ask yourself and others, it will help you move forward quickly. It will help you avoid the common mistakes and issues which lead many military to be unemployed for months, to have trouble even finding that first job, or to go through several civilian jobs within 2-3 years.

