The Art Of Military Networking

All people making a major career move will experience some difficulties in growing a new network of people, but for veterans these difficulties are compounded by our lives in a sub-culture of America called the military. Therefore here are 5 steps that can help veterans successfully network with civilians.

Be a civilian

Too often when those in the military attend career fairs on base or networking events off of base, they attend in either their work uniforms (i.e. ACUs) or in one of their dress uniforms. The reality is that while these recruiters are specifically looking for veterans, no civilian employers, besides those in the government, have specific and individual jobs laid out for veterans. Sure, these employers might have hiring initiatives and programs, but at the end of the day, they are looking for someone who will be a great fit in their company, they are looking for a professional civilian with a military background. Therefore dress the part.

Get on LinkedIn

The reality is, that networking is no longer only a face-to-face activity. LinkedIn and other online sites have created the ability for recruiters to find you and vet you based upon conversations that you are having. Unless you are one of the few who have skills in such high demand that recruiters are already crawling all over each other to get to you (which probably means you wouldn’t be reading this), just setting up a LinkedIn account isn’t good enough. You need to be taking part in conversations in groups that are of interest to you. You need to post and comment on professional articles. You need to monitor who is viewing your profile, which sectors they are in, and where they are located, so that you can fine-tune your LinkedIn profile. You need to consider the benefits of having a LinkedIn premium account versus a regular account.

Up your game

Many people put more work into how they present themselves at a club than they do when networking (although never discount any place or situation as a possible networking opportunity). Just like the club, you need to be at your best when networking so that employers and individuals come to you. Therefore before anything else buy yourself a suit and make sure that it is properly tailored to fit you. Next, go to sites like moo.com or vistaprint.com and buy yourself some professional business cards. (DO NOT print your business cards on a printer.) Also buy heavy white linen or cotton paper on which to print your resume. Lastly buy a portfolio to carry your resumes, pens, and business cards. Your goal is to impress everyone you meet. Don’t leave your impression up to chance.
Networking is the art of business being intermingled with small talk. If you aren’t in the military, you probably don’t care or understand most of what any of the military times papers are printing. Even if they do understand or care, you want anybody with whom you network to see you as a competent and professional civilian. This means that you need to be able to talk about more than just what is happening in the military. Therefore start reading publications that many individuals in your field are reading. Good places to start reading are some of the following publications: The Economist, Harvard Business Review, The Washington Post (or any other large newspaper), Business Insider, and Inc.

Don’t shun veterans

Whether you join a VFW Post or attend IAVA events, if you are not an active member in the veteran community you are hurting your ability to successfully transition into the civilian workforce. Your honorable service to this country has allowed you to join the largest alumni association in America, the veteran community. This community, your community, is filled with individuals who want to help you successfully transition out of the military. Find a group that you feel comfortable with and become an active member.

Networking is an art. It will take time to become great at it. It will take time to build up a large network. But at the end, a successful transition into the civilian workforce requires you to successfully network.

Have Questions? Want Help WithPreparing Your Resume or LinkedIn Profile? Don’t Hesitate To Contact OMS’ Employment Strategist @Jlawtonb@masonlive.gmu.edu and Career Services’ Student Veteran Liaison @Lwinkler@gmu.edu.

Have You Checked Out Career Services Yet? If Not, Make Sure To Go By Their Offices in SUB 1, Room 3400.