



WEARY OF LAME WATER COOLER CONVERSATION?
TAKE A BLOGBREAK AND FIND ATLANTA'S LATEST JOB NEWS.



You're NOT in the Army now

Former military personnel find that Uncle Sam's not the only one looking for a few good men and women

By Laura Raines
For ajcjobs

Basic training took care of your transition from civilian to military life. While there's no boot camp to take you back home again after your tour or career is up, there are a growing number of resources to ease the passage. If you can translate your military duties to employment skills, you should find plenty of job opportunities in today's market.



LEITA COWART/Special

Todd Bussard makes sure the windows work properly in a new home in the Harmony on the Lakes community in Holly Springs. The former sergeant in the Army works as a home-finishing manager for Sharp Residential.

With a patriotic desire to support the troops and a need for skilled leaders, companies are turning to the diverse pool of talent coming out of the military (about 220,000 a year).

"The only companies who don't make hiring former military a priority are the companies who haven't talked with them yet. These are the Mercedes of job candidates," said Shaun Bradley, CEO of Bradley-Morris Inc., the largest military-focused placement firm in the United States, which he co-founded with Sandra Morris in 1991.

Following a typical contingency recruiting model, Bradley-Morris helps place officers, noncommissioned officers, technicians and supervisors who are leaving the military in jobs with Fortune 1000 and emerging companies around the world. It also provides a jobs board and other free services through its www.civilianjobs.com and www.militaryresumes.com Web sites. The company hosts about 76 job-hiring conferences a year nationwide, bringing together candidates and business clients eager to hire them.

"We're in the education business," said Morris, COO. "We teach candidates about what is different about the civilian job market and give them the tools to navigate it, and we tell our corporate clients why they should hire former military [personnel]."



LEITA COWART/Special

Shaun Bradley, CEO, and Sandra Morris, COO, of Bradley-Morris Inc. help place former military personnel in civilian jobs.

The military is a great training lab for leadership and technical skills, Bradley and Morris said. The armed forces have "to bring people in and bring them up to speed quickly, and employers can benefit from that," Bradley said. "Any time you go through things that temper you, you come out better for it. In the last five years the military has been on a very demanding operational schedule. I'm in awe of some of the things our candidates have done."

For a company looking to season its culture with mature decision-makers who have great work ethics, military candidates fit the bill, Morris said.

Still, the matches aren't always obvious to either the candidate or the company. Bradley-Morris uses the acronym BANC (basics, adjust, network and civilianize) to explain to candidates their role in the process.

Former military personnel need to cover the basics of job searching first: decide where they want to live, put together resumes, buy suits and practice interviewing. They need to adjust to the idea that "tank commander" is not a civilian job description and need to be open to using their skills in different ways. They should network by taking advantage of the free services and Web sites available to service members and by consulting headhunters, local chambers of commerce, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other organizations. "Civilianize" means learning to translate their experiences into workplace English -- no military lingo or acronyms.

When Lee Thompson, a West Point graduate and captain in the U.S. Army, started interviewing for civilian jobs 18 months ago, he didn't stress to hiring managers his title as an officer in MLRS (multiple launch rocket system) fire support in Iraq.

"Bradley-Morris showed me how to talk about the hard skills that being in the military gave me: a proven track record of success, an ability to manage and work with diverse groups of people under pressure, leadership, organizational and planning skills," Thompson said.

Thompson knew he had skills, but determining where to apply them was confusing. "There were so many choices," he said. "Bradley-Morris helped me narrow down what sort of work I wanted to do."

Thompson landed a job as a marketing program manager for GE Money and has been very happy. "I didn't have a clue about marketing when I started, but in the Army you change jobs every eight to nine months, and there's no train-up period. You just have to do it immediately."

His attention-to-detail, time-management and planning skills have helped him create new processes for his sector of the company. Any time you come up with an idea, you have to sell its ability to work, he said. That holds true in the military and in marketing.

Before entering the military after Sept. 11, 2001, Todd Bussard had earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Kennesaw State University and had traveled the country as a corporate restaurant trainer for 13 years.



LEITA COWART/Special
Todd Bussard on the job.

As a U.S. Army sergeant, he patrolled the streets of Samarra, Iraq, in 2005.

"I came back stronger, a different man," Bussard said. "I knew I didn't want a career in restaurants, but I had too much energy to sit behind a desk every day."

Working with Bradley-Morris led to a job with Sharp Residential as a home-finishing manager. He's responsible for taking multiple homes from initial framing through buyer closing. "I don't think I would have ever thought of the construction industry without their counseling, but it's a perfect fit for me. I'm out at job sites all day, using my multitasking, management and communication skills, and I get to go home to the family at night."

The recruiters helped Bussard assess what he had to bring to the table and to see that his fitness, honor, work ethic and ability to accomplish missions would be prized in the working world.

"I don't feel like there's anything that Sharp can throw at me that I can't or won't do," he said. "The military gives you confidence and the attitude that you can get it done."

"These people take success with them," Bradley said. "When companies see what they can do, they want more of them." He sees a very strong demand for military candidates and a growing number of resources to get them into the work force more quickly.

"The candidates have to take the initiative, but the world is out there for them," he added.

Government resources

"An amazing effort is going into helping returning service members find jobs, get training and start new careers. There are systems in place to make sure no one falls by the wayside," said Ken Cochran, employment and training program manager at the Georgia Department of Labor.

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) -- a collaboration of the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Transportation and the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) -- prepares people leaving the military to go into civilian life.

Trained and certified specialists working through the Labor Department deliver the two-to three-day TAP workshops at nine military installations in Georgia, usually within three months of military personnel's discharge.

"TAP covers everything involved in the transition, including the stress of moving from an environment where benefits and housing are fully covered to a world filled with decisions," Cochran said.

INTERNET RESOURCES

- www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap
- www.dol.state.ga.us/service_member.htm
- www.woundedwarriorproject.org
- www.hirevetsfirst.gov
- www.hirevetsfirst.gov/realifelines
- www.bradley-morris.com
- www.civilianjobs.com
- www.MilitaryResumes.com
- www.RecruitMilitary.com
- www.Military.com
- www.Vetjobs.com
- www.destinygrp.com
- www.tttga.net

Candidates learn how to make a personal appraisal, assess their skills and interests and explore careers. They are taught how to create a resume, conduct a job search, interview and take employment tests.

"We talk about dressing for success and body language. Military people tend to sit at attention, and this can be perceived as arrogance, whereas in the military it was a sign of respect," Cochran said.

The program also helps them determine their financial needs, weigh job offers and negotiate salaries. They learn about the 53 Labor Department career centers and Department of Veterans Service's officers who can help smooth the transition.

"About 68 percent of military personnel and their spouses take advantage of TAP and say that it's a tremendous help," Cochran said.

In Georgia, returning military have an additional safety net called Operation Welcome Home.

"Commissioner Michael Thurmond launched this program in May, along with state and military agencies, out of concern for the returning 48th Infantry Brigade of the Georgia National Guard, but it's intended for all returning vets," Cochran said. (For information about Operation Welcome Home, call toll-free 866-699-3540.)

Estimating that 15 percent of all veterans would be unemployed when they returned from active duty and that another 15 percent to 20 percent would be seeking new jobs or retraining, the Labor Department opened a transition center at Fort Stewart in Hinesville, called statewide for job offers from Georgia employers and has coordinated 10 regional job fairs for former military personnel. The program is ongoing, but, between May and August 2006, it had placed 2,830 in jobs and received 1,230 jobs from companies.

The special challenges faced by returning veterans who are wounded and injured are met through Georgia's involvement with the U.S. Department of Labor's Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines) program. It sends trained specialists into military medical centers to provide individual counseling, rehabilitation services, job training and re-employment services to seriously injured or wounded veterans. U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao launched the pilot program with the Bethesda Naval Medical Center and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2004, and it has spread to other other states.

Georgia has a REALifelines center at the Eisenhower Medical Center at Fort Gordon and specialists working at its One-Stop Career Centers statewide.

Cochran was one of many representatives from community, state and federal agencies nationwide who met in Auburn, Ala., for a national summit on services for injured veterans.

"The purpose was to share best practices, create ties of connectivity between the various departments and organizations, while decreasing overlaps or people working at cross-purposes," he said. "Many of these veterans will be in rehabilitation centers for a while, but we'll be staying in contact with them and their families to make sure that, once they return home, they get the education and training they need to enter a new field."