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## Inside information

### Experts reveal 12 tips for job-hunt success

By Jessica Lawson - Staff Writer

It's true that you never get a second chance to make a first impression — especially when you're looking for a job.

Whether you've only casually pondered breaking away for the civilian work force or you've begun the transition process, chances are you've given at least some thought to the job hunt.

"The job-search process opens you up to a whole new type of scrutiny. This has changed even since I got out," said **Craig Griffin, principal and vice president of operations for recruiting firm Bradley-Morris Inc.**, who was a captain and aviator when he left the Army in 1997.

"We don't want candidates causing themselves to be excluded because of something simple: The answering machine message is not appropriate, a silly e-mail address, some ... pictures from your bachelor's party that were posted on your MySpace account," **Griffin said.**

We consulted Griffin and three other military-to-civilian career transition experts in our search for the ultimate advice. RecruitMilitary president and CEO Drew Myers, MilitaryStars president Todd Hecht and VetJobs president and CEO Ted Daywalt were happy to oblige — and help jump start your job hunt.

Here's their top 12 tip list.

#### 1. Be the early bird.

Start preparing for your transition one year from separation or retirement. Hecht suggests researching the job market and the types of positions that are in demand. According to Myers, it's imperative that you figure out what you want to do, where you want to live and how much you want to make. If you've done a lot of research and still don't know what kind of job you want, Daywalt recommends taking a skills inventory test to help you get ideas.

#### 2. Sell yourself.

**Griffin** suggests you take inventory of your strengths, weaknesses, military experience and whatever may make you a desirable candidate. Prepare for interviews by practicing the answers to common interview questions. Rehearse in

front of trusted family, friends or advisers the replies to “Tell me about yourself,” “What was the best decision you ever made?” and “Tell me about a time you had to deal with someone difficult. What was the problem and how was it resolved?” Interviewers want a 90-second answer, Daywalt said. “You need to be concise and answer the question directly and then be quiet and listen for the next question.”

3. Explore all of your options.

Post your résumé to every online job board, and work with every recruiter you can. As Myers points out, “The goal is to get as many offers as you can, so you have many choices.”

#### **4. Don't settle.**

Real happiness comes from job satisfaction and recognition — not money, according to **Griffin**. Accepting an offer for a job you don't really want is a surefire way to ensure you'll be repeating the whole job-search process earlier than you would wish. Be confident you'll be satisfied and that you'll enjoy working with other people in the company. Myers' advice: Figure out what you love doing and do it — the money will come after that.

#### **5. Use every tool at your disposal.**

Network — through friends, relatives, former military buddies, military associations and professional networking Web sites, such as LinkedIn.com. Attend job fairs. Read help books such as the popular “What Color is Your Parachute?” Take advantage of the Transition Assistance Program, Army Career and Alumni Program and other groups that offer free résumé and related job-search services. Rarely should you have to pay to have anyone assist you in your job search, Myers said.

#### **6. Be flexible.**

Hecht said to keep an open mind by not allowing yourself to eliminate a company, location or type of job before you educate yourself with all the information available. Be flexible on salary and job title. “Flexibility is the No. 1 thing I would recommend,” he said.

#### **7. Prepare for the spotlight.**

Must-dos, according to **Griffin**: Establish a straightforward, professional e-mail address and use it for your job-search and networking activities. Ditto for your answering-machine message. Make sure you've deleted any so-called “cyberskeletons,” inappropriate material posted to blogs or social networking sites — yours or your friends'. You will be Googled, and those photos of you doing a keg stand at your pal Jimmy's bachelor party will not win you points from prospective employers.

#### **8. Civilianize.**

Strip military lingo from your résumé, and don't talk that way during an interview. As Myers reminds us, in the civilian world, “Roger” is a name — not an

acknowledgement. Translate your military experience into terms a civilian employer will understand.

### **9. Take your time on the résumé**

Write a concise, easy-to-read résumé. To win attention from a would-be employer, yours should be specific, not general, so consider writing several versions, each designed to focus on the different jobs you would consider doing. The rule of thumb for length? One page for those with 10 years or less of experience, Myers said. No more than two pages for anyone.

### **10. Sing your own praises.**

Don't assume that a civilian interviewer can make the connection between your military experience and how that has prepared you for the job in question, **Griffin** said. Show him or her examples from your experience that directly relate to the job you're applying for. If you're a military pilot interviewing to manage a manufacturing shop, emphasize the managerial experience you received in the military.

### **11. Mind your manners.**

After the interview, make a good first impression even better by sending a handwritten thank-you note. Want to up the "wow" factor? Myers suggests spending a few extra bucks and sending the note overnight.

### **12. Prepare to make a decision.**

"A lot of candidates will get an offer and will try to sit on it for weeks, waiting for something else to come in," Hecht said. "(But) offers of employment from companies are almost like marriage proposals" — wait too long to answer, and the other person may start to question your loyalties and affections. According to Myers: "It is perfectly acceptable to say, 'I'm interviewing with four companies. I have made a commitment to X number of other companies, who have flown me in (for interviews). Can you give me 10 days?'" It's a direct approach that's fair to you and fair to the company.