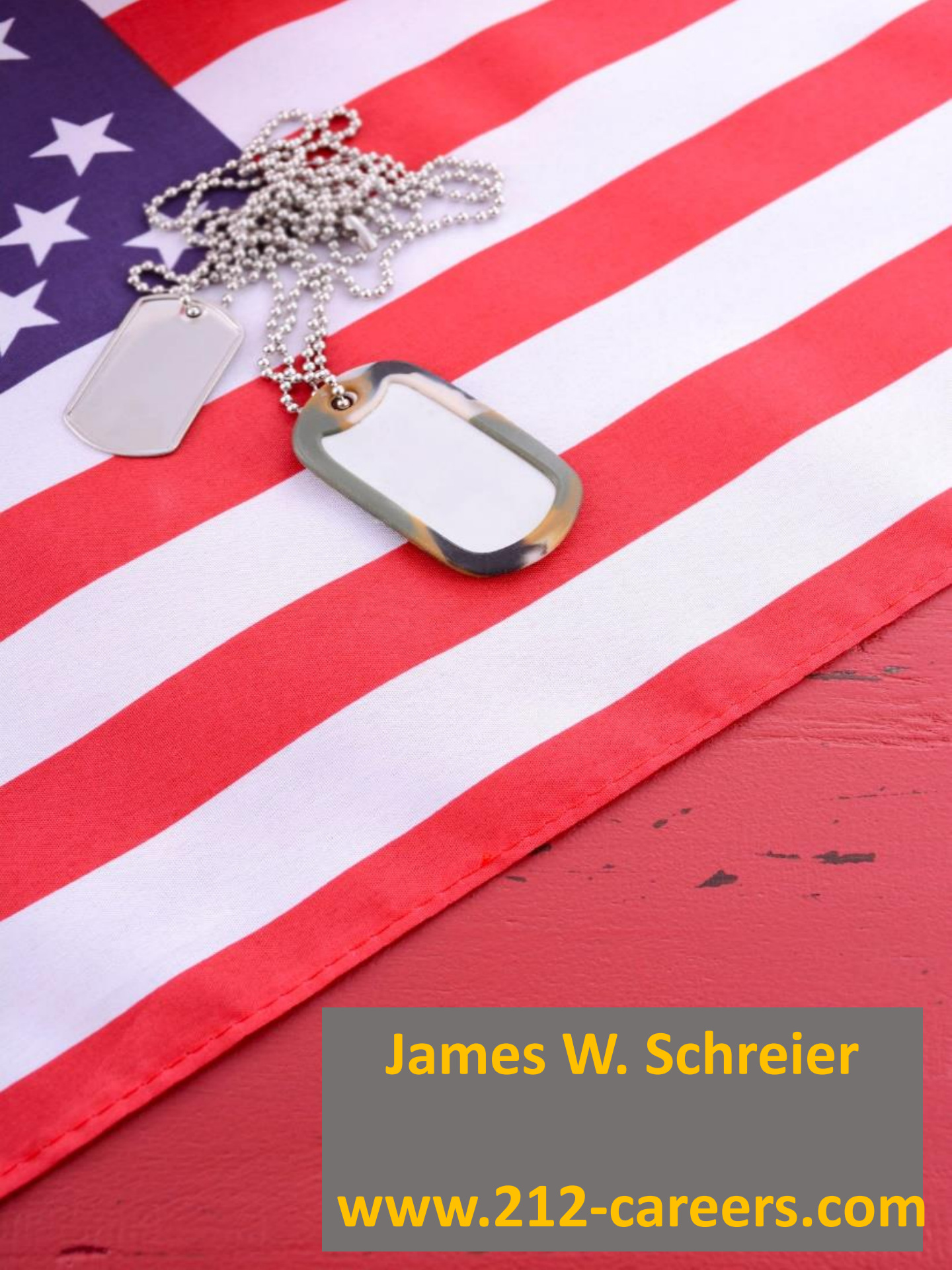




**Career Search
Messages for
Veterans**



James W. Schreier

www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Introduction

Veterans, from enlisted to officers, from 3-4 years of service to 20+ years of service, face challenges in an after-service career search that are unique. It's a complicated set of factors including misunderstandings for many veterans on how to bridge the transition and understand the "non-military" job market. It includes the private sector's difficulty in translating a veteran's experience to their particular needs. Veterans also suffer from a problem facing all job seekers, the confusing plethora of information on resume formats, interviewing techniques, and networking advice.

According to current research:

- Nearly two-thirds of veterans from recent wars said their qualifications don't translate well to the civilian job market.
- 59% said civilians don't understand what vets are dealing with when coming home from war.
- Most don't feel they have received adequate support after taking off their uniform and returning to civilian life.

In the following pages, specific advice for veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce is presented on key factors regarding preparation, including for the career search in general, on preparing a resume, responding to interview questions, and, in general, how to make military experience relevant to the next stage of their careers. But the information is presented with a difference – it's not just the basic advice of "three things every resume should include." The advice here is harder hitting, often blunt, intended to be strong advice, in many cases, to shake up traditional thinking. Or in other words, in the true sense of the "212° – One Degree Better" philosophy, the advice here is intended to make a veteran's job search one degree better than the competition.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

I Am...

Broadway performer Kelli's Barrett uses the Alcoholics Anonymous model as a metaphor for some valuable insights into her profession. She raises a very important concept with her first words: ***"My name is Kelli Barrett and I am an actor."*** ("Actors Anonymous," Backstage) Veterans can take a very important first step by examining their own responses to that statement: "I am..." Veterans often start their career search with "I am a veteran." While that is true and deserving of thanks, respect, and more, it is rarely going to be the primary reason you'll be hired. It is what you've done, what you've accomplished as a veteran that matters.

Career expert Richard Bolles ("What Color Is Your Parachute?") states that you should have three "missions" in life, defined by your faith, family, society, and for career purposes, *"one which is uniquely yours, and that is to exercise that Talent which you particularly came to Earth to use -- your greatest gift, which you most delight to use."* Your talent is based on all the training you've received, the experiences you've had practicing that talent, and most importantly, how you want to offer that talent to an organization. This is a very challenge question for most people. It requires introspection, perhaps some coaching, so that other people, particularly potential employers, understand your "I am..."

What's your "I am..." statement? More importantly, does your resume, does your LinkedIn profile, really tell the story of who you are?

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Reality Checks

Veterans must abandon some of the common misconceptions and face some realities about the job market:

#1 Getting a Job Isn't Easy! Too many job seekers think that finding a job is – or should be – easy. For many veterans it is a rare event. You haven't applied for a job in years, maybe decades. Moreover, the overwhelming majority are not skilled (or trained) as job seekers. The solution for this reality is to admit that it is not going to be easy. Take time, focus, and learn skills you may not have.

#2 Nobody "Owes You" a Job or an Interview There are too many people who clearly display an attitude that they are "owed" a particular job or interview. This is more than confidence – it is an arrogance sometimes revealed in the superlatives of resumes or interview responses. A simple response for this – constantly show appreciation for being considered – even if you feel an organization is not responding the way you'd like them to.

#3 You Aren't Powerless – But It's Close In today's market the power is clearly in the hands of potential employers. They can afford to be choosier now than ever before because they are likely to have more candidates, more options for efficiencies, more options for automation. Your power lies in the preparation you put into your job search. It represents the work you expend to understand your strengths and your accomplishments.

#4 You're Unique, But You're Not You are a unique individual. But it is not a valued card to play as part of the job search. To the computer program scanning your qualifications and the hiring manager scanning 100's of resumes, you are a lot like every other candidate with "x" years of experience in "y" field. Again this is an attitude piece – and again it is your preparation and practice that can really distinguish you from a crowded field.

#5 "I Don't Have Time" Is the Worst Excuse I frequently hear the "It takes too much time" or "I don't have the time" excuses. I know the excuse often masks uncertainty of what to do or fear of what is a scary process. I've also heard from job seekers who spend hours submitting resumes – yet they're still pursuing an unrealistic goal or repeating the same mistakes. I've had multiple people challenge me with their (awful!) resumes that they "know" are great. You have the time! Get up 15 minutes early each day and work on your resume – or practice your interview response. If it is fear, admit it and work with someone who can help you.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Auditions

The hiring process for actors is radically different from the hiring process that most veterans have experienced in the military world of “assignments.” The primary focus is on actual performance during an audition. Understanding this unique characteristic of the performance world offers some valuable insights for veterans, specifically how to make your resume, your LinkedIn profile, and your interviews much stronger. There is a strong connection here to some of the “Reality Checks” just discussed.

Daniel Robert Sullivan performs a leading role in the hit Broadway musical, Jersey Boys. He describes an important reality about auditions that all job seekers need to understand: *“I have spent countless days in stairwells and hallways waiting three hours at a time to sign up for an audition, then two hours preparing for that audition later in the afternoon.”* He also describes an even more important element which is preparing for auditions: *“This is already becoming a routine; a long routine! A routine that I hope to repeat a few times if they like my audition today.* (Emphasis added)

In auditions, performers are given segments of a script to perform. Or they’re taught a segment of a dance routine to perform – or they asked to learn one of the songs from the show. If you are not given a job description, ask for one before the interview. During the interview, take the opportunity you’ll typically be given to ask questions to ask some specific questions: 1) “If I were to be offered this position, what would the key indicators of my success be? Or 2) “If I were to be offered this position, what would the key expectations be: for the first year? for the first six months? for the first thirty days?

Your “typically boring” job duties need to be first translated into clear “accomplishments.” Then they need to be elevated to the dramatic incidents of your story. In most cases this is going to be easier than you think – because you are the person who actually lived these events. You are not writing about someone else’s story, or writing about some fictional character you created. Performers are urged to “love the audition,” veterans as job seekers need to “love the interview.”

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Am I My Resume?

Who am I anyway?

Am I my resume?

What does he want from me?

I need this job, oh God, I need this show.

These lines, from “Chorus Line,” express not just the thoughts of hundreds of performers as they stand on a stage as part of an audition, they represent the thoughts of thousands of veterans every day who sit down to write or revise their resumes. In the job world resumes, or alternatively LinkedIn profiles, are considered the “ticket” that begins the application process. A resume is the media for the first screening of a potential candidate’s journey – a first step that for the vast majority of applicants is also the final step because of a rejection that occurs because of an automated screening or what might be no more than a six second scan.

There is strong agreement on some aspects of resume content, for “accomplishments” versus “duties.” There are still 100’s if not 1000’s of resumes that are produced by job seekers daily that contain boring lists of duties, often taken from equally boring organizational job descriptions.

One of the biggest problems veterans face is that their “experiences,” their training, doesn’t translate well to the civilian world. But their accomplishments will transfer well if those accomplishments, driven by that training and skills is presented properly.

The most important solution for this does require some effort. “Skills” are what you have, not what you’ve done. It is important to understand this reality. “Having” a skill does not mean you are good (or exceptional) at using it and it does not mean it is something that represents one of your strengths. So, your skills should be included in the accomplishments you list for each position you describe on the resume. Think about the top 2-3 accomplishments for each position and write them in a fashion that describes the “Challenge” you faced, the “Action” you took, and the “Results” achieved. The “Action” you took is where the “Skills” should be clearly stated. You must describe your accomplishments as specifically and vividly as possible. It should be written to entice the hiring manager, to make him or her want to interview you.

Your resume is not your work/life history. Veterans’ resumes are often filled with long lists of courses or trainings completed. Most of this is irrelevant to a particular position, include it, and customize it, only when it’s directly related.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Resume Mechanics

Your resume is more likely to be rejected for any job you apply for – whether it's an online or personal screening process. If an organization receives 100 resumes, it's likely that 75-85% will be immediately rejected or placed in a "C" pile. 10-15% will be placed in a "B" pile, for "later" review if nobody from the remaining 5-10% in the "A" pile doesn't yield a final candidate. Unfortunately the easiest way to end up in the "C" pile is by making what's best described as a "technical" error on your resume or LinkedIn profile.

There are a wide variety of resume formats today while at the same time more and more organizations are moving toward online application processes (although most of those allow a resume attachment). There are new formats for "visual" or "Infographic" resumes which can be considered. But the traditional resume is still dominant. Unfortunately do are the errors!

Length is still a critical issue. While a one or two page resume is certainly acceptable, anything longer for the initial application is likely to be ignored. And even with a two page resume, you want to make sure the right information stands out at the top of that page. Remember your resume may be getting nothing more than a six second scan.

Spelling and grammar still count. Many hiring managers will automatically move a resume to the "C" pile for spelling and grammatical errors. A seemingly simple "its versus it's" or "your versus you're" can ruin your chances. The simple solution is review and make sure someone reviews for you.

Margins, fonts, and font size also matter. Squeezing your work history on one page with .25 inch margins and a 9 point font will irritate a hiring manager and, again, put in the "C" pile almost immediately – in less than six seconds. So will using a fancy font that is hard to read. Basic fonts, at least 11 point, with at least a .75 inch margin is solid advice!

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

You're Not Superman or Wonder Woman

There are two potential problems that are at least somewhat unique for many veterans. Because of years of service with the variety of experiences that come from multiple assignments and the military's formal programs for recognition, I've seen too many veterans' resumes with one or both of the following problems: 1) too much information and/or 2) too many awards.

A veteran recently sent me the current version of his resume and upon careful reading it is filled with significant accomplishments. However, the first impression I had of viewing the resume was "Is this guy Superman? The second part of the resume, after a "Professional Summary" that was a few sentences too long, contained a list of almost 20 "Skills." This "Look, I can do everything" top section could easily land the resume in the "B" or "C" pile. The core problem, from a hiring manager's viewpoint, is that, because I am looking for someone to perform in a specific position, this resume does not speak to what I'm looking for. Also the list of skills is extremely broad, covering almost every business function from marketing to management, from purchasing to project management, from "speeding bullets to tall buildings."

I actually double-checked my reaction with a respected colleague with whom I've worked on multiple projects developing materials and teaching improved hiring techniques. Her e-mail nailed the concerns that I had:

The resume is designed to GET YOU THE INTERVIEW, NOT describe everything plus the kitchen sink. It's like throwing darts in the dark and hoping you will hit someone. Also, with the time that people probably look at resumes now, it's time for a regroup.

Based on your research about the position and the organization you are applying to, your resume should highlight the accomplishments and skills best related to that position. There's no excuse today for a "one size fits all" resume.

Recognition in the military is generally more common than it is in many organizations. And it should be! But recognition is earned as a result of something you've accomplished – not as a separate category on your resume. I recently received a resume that listed multiple awards as "Experiences" as a separate section, including the same award received multiple times. This person's entire resume focused on recognition – which is valuable to know because I would conclude that formal recognition is important to him – but the resume focused more on awards than accomplishments. You didn't just receive commendations – you did something that included being recognized for that accomplishment.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Practice – Practice – Practice

*We sang 'Yellow bird' and 'Let's go fly a kite'
Over and over and over, till we got it right*

That last line from a song in “Tick, Tick, Boom,” has become a primary theme for one of the most important aspects of your career search – and provides a link here between writing your resume and preparing for interviews.

Remember the drills from basic training – the constant and probably for many boring, meaningless repetition for marching, weapons, and formations. But answer this, particularly if you are a veteran who experienced this decades ago. How much of it do you still remember? How much could you repeat today, maybe a little or a lot slower, and with some lack of precision? I know that much of the marching, weapons, and formation skills I learned more than four decades ago could be accomplished – roughly – today. Why? The repetition – the drills – became hard-wired, muscle memory. Just like riding a bike, never to be completely forgotten.

While you may not find it pleasurable, you need to acknowledge the power of this learning for your job search. Put directly:

- Have you **written, rewritten, rewritten, and rewritten again** each of the key “accomplishments” on your resume?
- Have you **checked, double-checked, and triple-checked** your resume (letters and e-mails) to make sure the spelling and grammar are perfect?
- Have you practiced your responses to several different interview questions, “**over and over and over, ‘til you get it right?’**”
- Have you **carefully thought about, and worked on, a vision**, for the career you want – not just a job?

A successful job search is not just practice – but practice still matters – if you practice the right things. It takes talent, which may mean in some cases admitting that you do not know how to create a strong resume or prepare good interview answers, and then finding someone who has the talent. Finally, that practice needs to be driven by a passion and the expectation that your efforts are worth it.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Tell Me about Yourself

You've organized the information you want to use for your resume. You've followed some good advice you've seen on identifying "accomplishments," not just what tasks you performed or the skills you have. However, now come the most important next steps: translating these accomplishments into effective "stories" for your interviews. Stories? Absolutely!

Stories have three compelling components that make them a powerful part of your career search strategy:

1. Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
2. Stories include emotion: excitement, suspense, humor, or strategy.
3. Stories spark interest in the reader to know more.

Now comes the toughest part – your interview needs to contain short stories – only short stories. Moreover, this is where lack of preparation – and perhaps a natural tendency – creates the biggest mistake. Many job seekers are OK with the idea of telling stories – but they start the stories with the equivalent of "Once upon a time..." and drag on until the interviewer figuratively if not literally falls asleep.

Interview Stories

For interviews, you need the "Goldilocks" solution. Stories that are too short will lead the interviewer to believe there's not much substance to your responses – or at least you are not prepared. However, if you give a wandering five-minute response, your answers are too long. So your need to prepare – and practice – interview stories that are "just right."

Hiring expert Lou Adler presents an outstanding format for preparing a "universal answer" to interview questions: the Say-A-Few-Words 2 Minute Response. The SAFW 2 Minute response should include:

- An opening statement
- Amplify the opening statement
- Add some examples
- Wrap it up

Let's look at an example in the context of an interview – "tell me about your experience at..."

- Open: I directed the training for all managers and employees...
- Amplify: One of my most important responsibilities was developing new, highly experiential training programs.
- Example: I developed a completely new employee orientation program... (details)

- Example: I responded to a request from the owner to improve the effectiveness of managers meetings... (details)
- Wrap: The programs I developed were all reviewed positively with excellent participant attendance.

With the details added as indicated, it should be easy to see how this answer could be a SAFW 2 Minute response. You should prepare 3-4 of these responses for each of your positions, and if recent, for your education. Prepare and practice! If you develop true stories, you'll spark interest in companies and interviewers – they're your stories. Tell me more!

If you want to increase the likelihood of your success, find someone who is willing – and capable – of serving as the “Drill Sergeant” for your performance. This may not be easy because your Drill Sergeant needs to be qualified which means understanding the key points of good interviewing. It means someone who's willing to give you honest, critical feedback on your responses. It means someone who's willing to spend the time listening to your responses “over and over again...”

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

You'll Be Asked Bad Questions

The interview is the most widely used – and most inaccurate – part of most selection processes. You'll spend a lot of time being interviewed. You'll be interviewed by poorly trained interviewers who think they are experts. You'll be asked bad questions. You'll be judged in 30 seconds or less based on first impressions.

Bad interviewing questions are so common that there have been books written about them. Some of these questions are so bad that they are funny – but not to you if you are on the receiving end. In Daniel Pink's outstanding book, "The Adventures of Johnny Bunko," he includes some excellent examples of the insanity of some interview questions:

- *Where do you see yourself in five years?*
- *What's your biggest weakness?*
- *What will your biggest weakness be in ten years?*
- *If you were a can of soup, what flavor would you be?*

So, if you are going to be asked bad – or crazy – questions, what can you do? The answer is actually simple: learn and rehearse. Now let's apply the ideas on practice and story telling to bad questions. Let's take a look at a couple of common examples.

"So, what's your story?"

This matches the classic "tell me about yourself." It is a bad question but not completely for the reason most people think. It is bad because the overwhelming majority of candidates are not prepared to give a good response. I've tested the "tell me about yourself" question with 100's of candidates. Less than 10% provided answers that were "A" responses. Most were wandering or irrelevant.

"What would you do if it were your last day on earth?"

Questions like this are frequently asked by interviewers who believe they can divine some magical conclusion about you or your personality. The problem, of course, is that the question has absolutely no relevance to the performance expectations of the job.

Answering Bad Questions

So here's where the practice principles again come into play. It again from a deep understanding of your own accomplishments. Because the way you should be prepared to answer almost any question,

particularly the bad ones, is to relate your answer back to one of your specific accomplishments. Let's take the "soup" question:

I think that like most people, who have a variety of different soups in their kitchen, I'd be the variety that was most appropriate for a particular situation. For example, in my current position, I meet customers every day from a wide variety of age, gender, and racial backgrounds. Each looks at the service I am selling a different way – to use the product for different purposes. My job is to listen to their requests, ask questions, and then "serve" up the best solution for each person.

Need another example? Let's take the classic "Tell me about yourself" or "What's your story?"

My current position is a supervisor of a 12 person production team. In the last year, the team increased from 7 to 12 members. My biggest accomplishment in the last year was working to integrate five new members to team, training them, and continuing to meet and frequently exceed the increasing production goals for the department.

The examples here are shorter than the answers you need to prepare and rehearse. The "soup" answer above is less than 30 seconds. Your answers can be 2 minutes. In a very real sense, responding to bad interview questions is about control, listening to the question from the interviewer, then responding from your accomplishments with the best answer.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Networking

According to Lou Adler, one of the top experts on hiring and recruiting, there are two job markets. The better jobs are in a hidden job market compared to the online market where jobs are posted. This is strongly supported by the long time conventional wisdom that companies placed ads in newspapers as a “last ditch” effort to fill positions that could not be filled through referrals and networking. As a result of this dynamic, Adler recommends a “20/20/60” job search plan. He recommends spending 60% of your job hunt networking. The other 40% is split between responding to online posts and developing your resume and LinkedIn profile.

Once your LinkedIn profile is developed, however, the reality is that LinkedIn has become a primary networking site. Yes, you can respond to posts on LinkedIn and you can, hopefully, be found by potential employers via LinkedIn. But it’s also the virtual networking site where individuals build connections, exchange e-mails with possible connections, access articles – including excellent on-target insights from Lou Adler – and search for those 2nd and 3rd linked members who might be important for you to directly connect with.

You are always networking. While you are performing in your current position, you are meeting customers, you are meeting co-workers in other areas, you are meeting vendors. Are you viewing these interactions as “just part of the job” or do you see each of these as an opportunity to connect with these individuals personally? Each of these opportunities, happening on a daily basis, can build your network.

Reconsider your use of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other sites as they appear or rise in popularity. Create a Facebook “page” for your career. Consider what’s more important to you, networking with friends over pets, vacations, children, etc. or connecting with professional colleagues. You can do both – sometimes it just boils down to what you post or how you use a Facebook “page” versus your personal profile.

And remember, you should be spending 60% of your time networking!

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

Teamwork

In 2002, Jeff and Jon Cannon wrote an outstanding book, “Leadership Lessons of the U.S. Navy SEALs.” Many of the lessons of the book are valuable for veteran job seekers, but the following paragraphs make the most important point:

A resume that tells about the person and not the team shows that the person views a job as just that, a job to be individually completed, not as a job to be completed as part of a team or a job to be completed in the service of a larger goal. And that is the perspective of someone who hasn't yet learned the importance of working within a team. That is the perspective of a person who is an employee and not a potential team leader.

How do successful leaders respond when someone congratulates them on a good job? They start talking about the great team they've got working for them. How this person or that person stepped up in the effort. Or how everyone really came together to pull through. Why? Because they know what it takes to succeed. It takes a team.

One of the strongest talents you can bring to a potential employer as a veteran is your ability to work with and lead within a team environment. Make sure the accomplishments on your resume – and the stories you prepare for your interviews – reflect these team leadership skills.

Including Team Accomplishments

According to hiring guru Lou Adler, hiring managers looking for top performers are looking at some key things. The first is: “Talent x Energy².” A candidate must have some level of the skills needed to get a specific job done – but the “Energy²” is more important. It is the “energy-based” traits: enthusiasm, commitment, passion, etc. Understanding this is simple. Everyone knows someone with just an average level of talent who is clearly seen as a peak performer. The difference? Their enthusiasm, commitment, etc. At the same time, everyone knows someone with an unbelievable level of talent who is not a peak performer. In this case, what's missing is the “energy-based” traits.

The second important element is “Team Leadership” – for all jobs. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing work environment, every job requires the ability to work with others at different levels within the organization – and with vendors, consultants, customers, and... Everyone needs “team leadership” skills.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com

Career Search Messages for Veterans

But What about the Future?

To succeed in today's complex, information overloaded, constantly changing world, career success, including job seeking, depends on multiple skills, for example, communications and problem-solving.

"All the available information means people have to work harder to consume it, categorizing information, sorting facts from opinion, and putting everything into context. Unless we take the time to do that, and have the skills to do it well, we could actually be less knowledgeable."

(Ron Ashkenas, Harvard Business Review, Emphasis added)

In the 19th Century, many Americans followed the Horace Greeley advice to "Go West..." They set out in wagon trains for an unknown future. Parts of it were certainly unknown, but parts were known. The goal was clear: an opportunity, today we'd call it entrepreneurial, for freedom, a better economic environment, for ownership of land. But as the wagons rolled west, the men were aware of their skills for farming, or cattle-raising, or carpentry, or...

The parallels for today's career seekers should not be ignored. You are looking for a better opportunity, perhaps more freedom, or more ownership, or more engagement (think about how "engaged" the families on the wagon trains were in their journey) – and certainly greater economic success.

The "scouts" for the wagon trains road out ahead of the wagon train, collected valuable information over the horizon, and presented their information to the Wagon Master. Seasoned scouts, who made multiple trips, had expert insights into the terrain and the resources available throughout the journey.

Futurist Joel Barker and learning guru Elliott Masie have each proclaimed the value of having scouts to explore the future. Masie suggests that you should identify five scouts and meet with them regularly. He suggests you should have a scout for technology, global, faith, plus one from the retiring and the youngest generations. He recommends meeting with your scouts monthly.

The successful career journey requires additional scouts:

- A "Career Opportunity" scout to monitor the rapidly changing job world. Your "Career Opportunity" scout should work in parallel with your technology and global scouts.
- A "Resume/LinkedIn" scout to advise you on your content, style, and the rapidly evolving world of visual and video resumes.
- An "Interviewing" scout to coach you and help you practice your answers and help you monitor the rapidly changing world of video and "Skype" interviews.

Additional Information on All Topics in this Guide at www.212-careers.com