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“Seeing the Other Side” After 12 Years in the Military

From West Point to two deployments in Afghanistan over the following eight years, I had spent my entire adult life in the military when I decided it was time for a change. The prospect of transition was challenging and exciting – both personally and professionally. On one hand, life in the Army can offer certain degrees of predictability that are reinforced by the insular nature of the military community. But on the other hand, the military – and the world of military and federal contracting that many former officers move into – can be limiting for some. It’s hard to grow when you never leave your comfort zone. Add to that the difficulties of managing a new marriage when you’re away from your spouse for months or a year at a time, and I was ready to transition to corporate life. The only question was: How?



Jennifer and her wife Kara after completing the Hershey Half Marathon in Hershey, PA

The answer came through the incredible relationship I developed with my [IBM](#) mentor through the [American Corporate Partners \(ACP\)](#) program. ACP was founded to help Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans make successful transitions to corporate careers. Partnering corporations such as IBM provide mentors for one-on-one counseling on everything from packaging one's military expertise in ways that are meaningful to corporate employers, to refining one's "soft" skills to address differences in language and etiquette between the military and corporate worlds. My IBM mentor Ladan Karkooki impressed me with her genuine interest in veterans' transition issues. Ladan's advice and support were instrumental to my successful introduction to corporate life, and she even hired me for my first post-military job!

I served with the Army 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion and 1st Information Operations Command – working on military communications to ensure that units could connect via the internet, telephones and radios. Eventually, I was deployed to Afghanistan as an Information Operations Planner supporting the Special Operations Community. Much of the work I did involved planning and managing people, training and budgets. As I began to contemplate moving into civilian life, it seemed like my military skills were directly applicable to the Project Management field. I just needed someone with an experienced perspective on the industry to help me develop a transition strategy.

Everything I did in the military played out on a very large stage with critically small margins for error. That experience prepared me for the multiple obligations and fast-changing requirements of corporate project management. Working with ACP, I requested a mentor with project management expertise. Although I was coming from a technical/information technology background in the military, I didn't necessarily need to work with an IT professional to help me make my transition. But I got lucky and was able to work with Ladan, who had all the requirements I was looking for.

For me, the most important aspect of a mentor/protégé relationship is the inspiration and understanding a mentor can provide. Ladan understood the enormity of the cultural divide between military and corporate life – even though both sectors require complementary skills for success. Ladan helped me with both the professional and emotional aspects of making use of my experience to shape the future I wanted, and made it a point to address how I was handling the change, and to emphasize the importance of achieving and maintaining a work-life balance – which was among my top goals to begin with. With Ladan's guidance, I was able to make a seamless transition from the military to full-time employment in my chosen civilian career.

I owe a lot to the military, but with my transition to civilian life and with my new job, I feel like I have greater freedom to put my family first. Kara and I no longer have to relocate unless we choose to, and we've been able to settle into a life together without fear of being separated for weeks, months or even a year at a time. Making a major change is hard, but with support from family and friends – along with a great mentor – you can accomplish your goals.

Originally from Pine Bush, New York, Jennifer Pascucci served with 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion and 1st Information Operations Command as a Captain for two deployments in Afghanistan during 2010-2011/2013. Captain Pascucci graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. She is currently a project manager with IBM, having been hired by her IBM American Corporate Partners (ACP) mentor.

To help our returning veterans, please sign up to offer your corporate expertise through [ACP AdvisorNet](#) – a free online Q&A community that provides guidance civilian transition issues to veterans and their families.

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Posted by



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