

Military Spouse Thrives After Her (Free!) Career Mentorship Program

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One of the biggest misconceptions about mentorships is that you have to have a plan or direction going into them. Though this thought has merit, it's not entirely true.

Mentorships can set you on the right track to not only achieving your professional and academic goals, but setting them in the first place. A mentorship can develop regardless of what stage of your career or education you're in. Whether you have a clear map of where you're headed, or haven't the faintest idea, a mentor can help you refine your goals for your career or education, or both.

When American Corporate Partners (ACP) Protégé Heidi submitted her Spouse Protégé Application in October of 2020, she, like many other Military spouses, didn't know what to expect from our mentorship program. She had previously tried résumé-building websites and other professional resources, but had never tried a mentorship customized to her own aspirations—in fact, she wasn't really sure what those aspirations were. As an active duty Military spouse, Heidi had always taken the first job she was offered, regardless of whether it aligned with her level of experience or education. This might not seem unfamiliar—when you're a Military spouse, there is less emphasis placed on building a career and more emphasis on finding employment, period. As a result, Heidi took jobs working in construction, nonprofit and healthcare. When she and her husband discussed his retirement, she knew it was time to start evaluating what her career needs were, but she felt like she was starting from scratch. ([apply for the program here!](#))

Heidi holds her Bachelor's degree in Medical Assisting and always knew that the healthcare industry was a space where she felt comfortable. As soon as she finished her degree and completed an internship at a local hospital, she and her husband PCS'd to Japan where she ended up volunteering with the Red Cross in order to stay involved in the community and industry; the local hospital didn't hire U.S. civilians. Throughout her husband's military career (which involved seven relocations), Heidi found different jobs along the way and valued the exposure she got in different industries. On her first call with ACP, her point of contact asked about her goals for the mentorship and what industries she would want her Mentor to have experience in. She decided that it would be most helpful to be paired with someone who had undergone some sort of career transition (though not necessarily military to civilian), regardless of industry, so she could see how her Mentor decided between and evaluated different roles.

A few weeks after Heidi had her initial intake call with ACP, her point of contact let her know they had found a match: Krista, a Regional Field Sales Trainer at an international healthcare corporation. Not only did Krista have a lot of experience and contacts in the healthcare industry, but she was formerly a commercial pilot, so she undoubtedly knew something about changing career fields. Heidi accepted and the pair were introduced to each other shortly after.

With a Mentor secured, Heidi knew that she had to get to work contemplating which fields she wanted to pursue. Their first call, Heidi recalls, "was probably pretty difficult for Krista. It was like pulling teeth. After she told me a bit about herself, she tried to get me to tell her what I wanted out of the program and to identify my goals. I was lost. I just really didn't know at that point."

They decided to start small. Regardless of where Heidi wanted to end up, she would need a strong résumé to get her there. Heidi and Krista set to work identifying all of her past responsibilities and skills from the different roles she held. She quickly learned that even though she hadn't professionally worked in the healthcare field in the same capacity that she might have worked administratively in nonprofit or construction, the skills she needed to succeed were one and the same. Once she had finalized her resume, Krista set Heidi up on some informational phone calls with various people in her network. Heidi was introduced to a fellow military spouse who works in nonprofit, a nurse navigator and a surgical technician. From there, her eyes were opened.

Upon speaking with Krista's contacts, Heidi experienced two realizations: one was that while she had a deep appreciation for nonprofit, she wasn't passionate about pursuing a career in that industry. The second and more important was that she wanted to become a surgical technician.

"When I spoke with the surgical tech that Krista introduced me to, I knew immediately that this is what I wanted to pursue. I made the decision so quickly that Krista got nervous! She didn't want me to jump into anything."

The woman that Heidi spoke with also had young kids and when they talked, she emphasized that it was easy for her to balance time between work and family. Before Heidi set her sights assuredly on being a surgical technician, Krista wanted to make sure that there wasn't a single doubt in Heidi's mind that this was the career she wanted to pursue. She organized another call with a different surgical technician she knew whose background was more similar to Heidi's, and after that, there was no question.

"Speaking with Krista's connections opened a door – it was like I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. Learning about their jobs, realizing surg tech is something I wanted to work for, learning that it is a national certification, made me confident to go back to school. At that moment, I knew what I was working for and what I needed to do to get there."

In January of 2021, Heidi applied to a very competitive surgical technician training program that only had 16 slots available. In March, she got tentatively accepted into the program as an alternate. With Krista's support, Heidi advocated for herself, doing whatever she could to ensure she got a spot in the program and that she would be ready when she did.

"I called my advisor and asked where in the list I was, and told her that I was going to take the same summer courses so that I would be prepared to start Fall classes if I were able to obtain a slot. Krista really helped me with that confidence. Before, I would have just waited until next year, but I made it happen for myself."

Sure enough, Heidi's advisor called her in April; she said that of 300 other applicants who were selected as alternates, Heidi stood out to her because of how passionate and proactive she had been in the process.

"She gave me the good news that someone dropped out and she offered me the spot. I was so excited, but kept my cool over the phone and accepted!"

Heidi started classes in May and will be completing credits until the main program starts up in the Fall of this year. Not only is she inspired by her career path, she is also confident in her networking skills and ability to make connections with her fellow students and her instructors. As Heidi's coursework ramps up heading into the Fall, she and Krista intend to stay in touch and continue working together on interview techniques and reformatting her LinkedIn page. Heidi is already looking ahead to the future possibilities of internships and of course, eventual employment once she completes her coursework and earns her certification in May of 2022.

"Through this process and with Krista's guidance, I've learned that when I'm in an interview, I'm also interviewing them as a potential employer. Once I get my certification, I'll be looking for the job that is the right fit for me. I feel like I have so much more to offer; not only am I on the career path I want, but I have the confidence to work where I want to work."

When Heidi joined ACP she was, in a word, unsure. Unsure about her next career move, unsure about herself, and unsure whether an ACP mentorship would make a difference in her life. Heidi is far from unsure now. The mentorship gave her the opportunity to connect with people of different industries, and offered her the space to self-reflect and evaluate what aspects of a career were important to her. Sometimes, all it takes is some guidance to figure out the next right step. No matter where you are in your professional or academic life, if you're currently an active duty military spouse, consider signing up for an ACP Mentorship to help you take the next step in your career