

Commanding Success:

Making the Switch to Corporate Management

One of the most common challenges transitioning military leaders at all levels face is integrating their management style into a corporate framework. In this article, we'll discuss some best practices for effectively switching to a civilian role.

■ Know your strengths

Perhaps the most important task of a transitioning Veteran is understanding and applying their strengths to new roles. Garry Harvey, a U.S. Army Veteran and now Principal Consultant for Cybersecurity at management and technology consultancy Capco, says that Veterans possess several important qualities for success, including a strong sense of integrity and accountability, the ability to make decisions with speed and precision, and a stellar work ethic.

"Military personnel are accustomed to working long hours, meeting deadlines, and maintaining high performance under pressure," says Harvey, who now mentors with American Corporate Partners (ACP) to help fellow Veterans transition. "This makes them reliable, accountable, and resilient leaders in any industry."

Christopher Pfaff, ACP Mentor and Managing Director at UBS, adds that service members learn to work effectively with many personalities, preparing them to navigate various civilian workplace environments.

■ Use your training

The military is a high-stakes, dynamic work environment, whereas corporate workplaces are unlikely to have the same urgency. "The biggest thing to keep in mind is that in the military, you have to be there [all the time] and in the private sector, you don't," says a former Navy NCO and current nonprofit manager, adding that this is somewhat dependent on the specific role.

Francene Duncan, a former U.S. Army Officer who now works as a project manager in defense contracting, explains that Veterans are adept at instantly understanding

the full scope of an assigned task. If you tell your soldiers to go from Point A to Point B, the implication is that they should take the route that will avoid enemy fire and protect their fellow soldiers. With military training, this calculation happens instinctively.

Duncan, an ACP Mentor, believes service members have an advantage in the business world due to their big-picture understanding. Unlike civilians who often gather excessive information before acting, service members learn from day one to quickly assess situations. This skill helps them delegate tasks efficiently and complete projects swiftly.

Find Your Battle Buddy with an ACP Mentorship

ACP is a national nonprofit organization that bridges the gap between the military and civilian sectors, connecting experienced professionals with Veterans and Active-Duty Spouses seeking successful civilian careers. Through a tailored one-on-one mentorship, as well as strategic networking opportunities and robust online resources, ACP combats underemployment and empowers individuals to achieve their full career potential. By [signing up](#) for ACP's no-cost, yearlong mentorship program, you'll gain a trusted guide who can help you make the transition!

■ Ask and clarify

Leaving the military means entering a less hierarchical realm. While military leadership requires agility, there's rarely ambiguity about when and how a task needs to be accomplished or who is ultimately responsible. That's not always true in the private sector.

"When I was in the Army, you couldn't disagree [with superiors] or offer up alternative options," says Duncan. "In corporate roles, you do have that opportunity to speak up, to ask clarifying questions, and to offer your input and experience." As a leader, she encourages new employees

to advocate for their ideas and to listen to their teammates' input.

Harvey agrees, saying, "Many corporations promote decentralized decision-making and team-based collaboration, allowing employees at different levels to provide input." He notes that respect in the corporate world comes through performance rather than rank or position. He advises transitioning leaders to rely more on negotiation and teamwork with superiors and subordinates.

■ Remember your values

Harvey explains that the military facilitates a "servant leadership" approach in which leaders are responsible for subordinates' well-being, morale, and career progression. Service members who are accustomed to this approach may find it difficult to transition to a civilian role with less direct influence over their reports, but you don't have to leave it behind when you take off the uniform.

By bringing the servant-leader mindset into the private sector, Veterans can continue to positively impact both their subordinates and company culture. "Veterans prioritize teamwork and mission success over personal gain," says Harvey, who recommends that you seek out, network with, and learn from other leaders who have successfully fostered a healthy corporate work environment.

■ Market yourself!

Harvey offers practical advice for Veterans transitioning to corporate management roles. He suggests that they explore company-specific programs and initiatives to train and hire Veterans and connect with Veteran business networks both in-person and online.

Harvey also recommends "demilitarizing" your resume. "Instead of listing military ranks, highlight leadership, risk management, and crisis decision-making" to convey transferable skills." Military leaders also possess excellent experience in training and mentoring their junior service members, which looks great on a CV. RecruitMilitary offers many free [resume building services](#) for transitioning service members.