

Changing Gears—Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates more than 1 million military personnel will transition to civilian jobs within the next few years. Veterans are likely to face unique challenges as they re-enter the civilian workforce—and finding employment is one of them.

To gain insight into successfully transitioning to civilian employment, we interviewed two veterans: Dean Myers and Scott Killoran. Both men are employed with the N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions as disabled veterans' outreach program specialists (DVOPs) and have recently separated from the military. Myers is located in the NCWorks Career Center in Waynesville. Killoran works in the NCWorks Career Center Charlotte South. As DVOPs, they provide intensive case management services to veterans who have substantial barriers to finding employment.

Killoran served as an enlisted flight engineer in the Air Force. He says one of the biggest resources that helped him in his initial job seeking stages was the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which provides job assistance and separation counseling services for soldiers and their families on base during the transition away from active service. In addition, he used O*NET OnLine to translate military skills to civilian skills. O*NET OnLine enables transitioning military personnel to use their military code or title to discover related civilian occupations/careers within O*NET OnLine's [Military Crosswalk Search](#) or My Next Move for Veterans' [Military Transition Search](#).

“You need to temper employment expectations, plan ahead, mitigate debts prior to leaving the military, and constantly seek out resources,” advises Killoran. He further suggests that returning veterans should establish a business relationship with a professional—someone like himself—who has direct contacts with employers. Some of the problem, he says, is that he tried to look for work on his own. “The business professional will be able to represent the veteran's skills and abilities and advocate in behalf of the veteran.”

Myers served as a low altitude air defense officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. He was introduced to the job search process through TAP, which he found helpful. One interesting aspect of the program, Myers notes, is that “a styling specialist was available to help us think about wearing business attire for interviews and daily workwear. We had grown accustomed to wearing uniforms.”

It is sometimes difficult to translate your military skills to civilian jargon. You may do a lot of different jobs in the military. Myers says a job description in the military is wide-ranging and often difficult to fit into one job title. Human resource managers familiar with the military



understand the relevance of soft skills, such as leadership and loyalty, and the value veterans bring to their companies.

Myers says he mostly searched for jobs on his own but added it would have been helpful to have been aware of the services available through NCWorks Career Centers. Each career center has specialists who conduct outreach to employers to increase employment opportunities for vets.

Veterans can also use [NCWorks Online](#) to search for job opportunities, training programs, labor market information, and other career resource tools. To find out more about veterans' programs and services, please contact your [NCWorks Career Center](#).