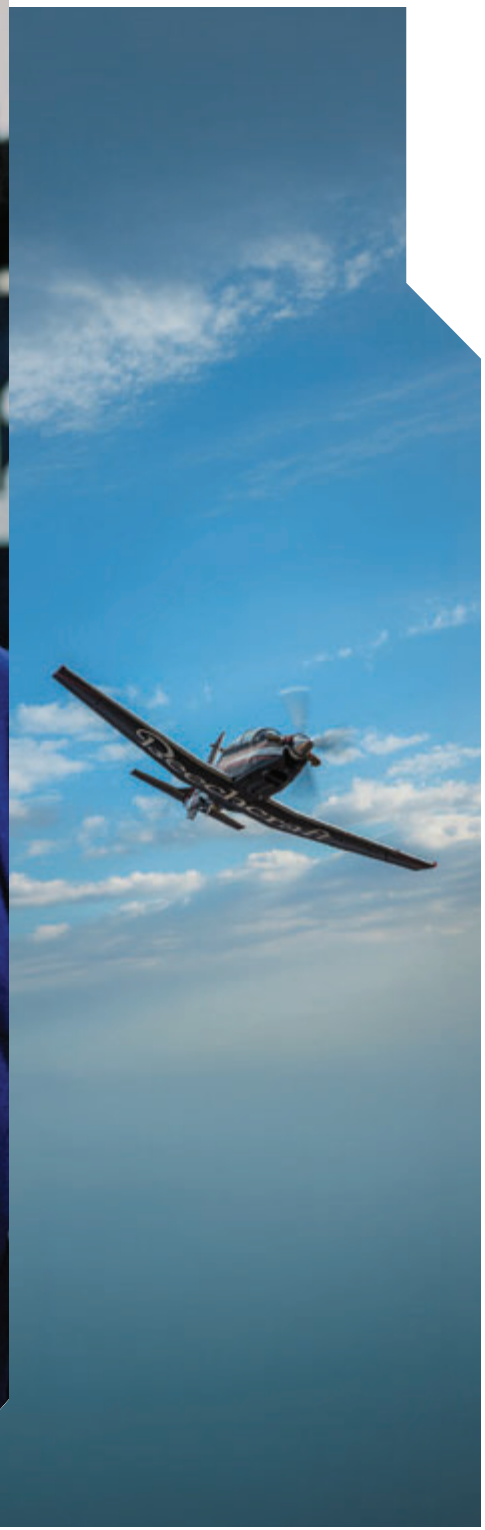
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MILITARY-TO-CIVILIAN TRANSITION GUIDE

THE ULTIMATE PLAYBOOK FOR THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

FOREWORD

Despite 33 years of service to our nation – including multiple combat and peacekeeping tours – my transition into the private sector was one of the most difficult periods in my life. As an honorable soldier though, I conducted an after-action review to capture my lessons learned. A summary of my notes is presented in this transition guide so you might benefit and enjoy an easier transition into your new civilian career.

I began my transition woefully unprepared for the challenges that awaited me. I was wildly shooting resumes downrange in hopes of hitting an unseen target – a blind, Kentucky windage-style approach. I received no feedback in return. It wasn't until I put structure to my problem and began using military problem-solving tools that my performance and results improved. Sun Tzu, a military strategist and philosopher, became my guide:

"If you know the enemy and know yourself,
you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."
– Sun Tzu

I realized to achieve success in my military-to-civilian transition "war" I needed to properly prepare for combat. So, I studied the "enemy" (the recruiter), their methods of war (the application process) and myself (by defining my own career interests). Soon, I stood victorious.

"I will never leave a fallen comrade!"
– Warrior Ethos

The Warrior Ethos, the principles that define my values, was the driving force behind the development of this guide. I won my transition battle, and I knew I had to turn around to help the next transitioning military member. Whether you are transitioning into the private sector from active duty or a Department of War (DoW) civilian career, looking for civilian employment while continuing to serve in the reserve component, or completing your advanced degree, exploring a change in civilian careers, or are a military spouse, I am confident these tips will help you endure the rigors of your transition and lead you to an overwhelmingly successful career in the private sector.

"Charlie Mike,"

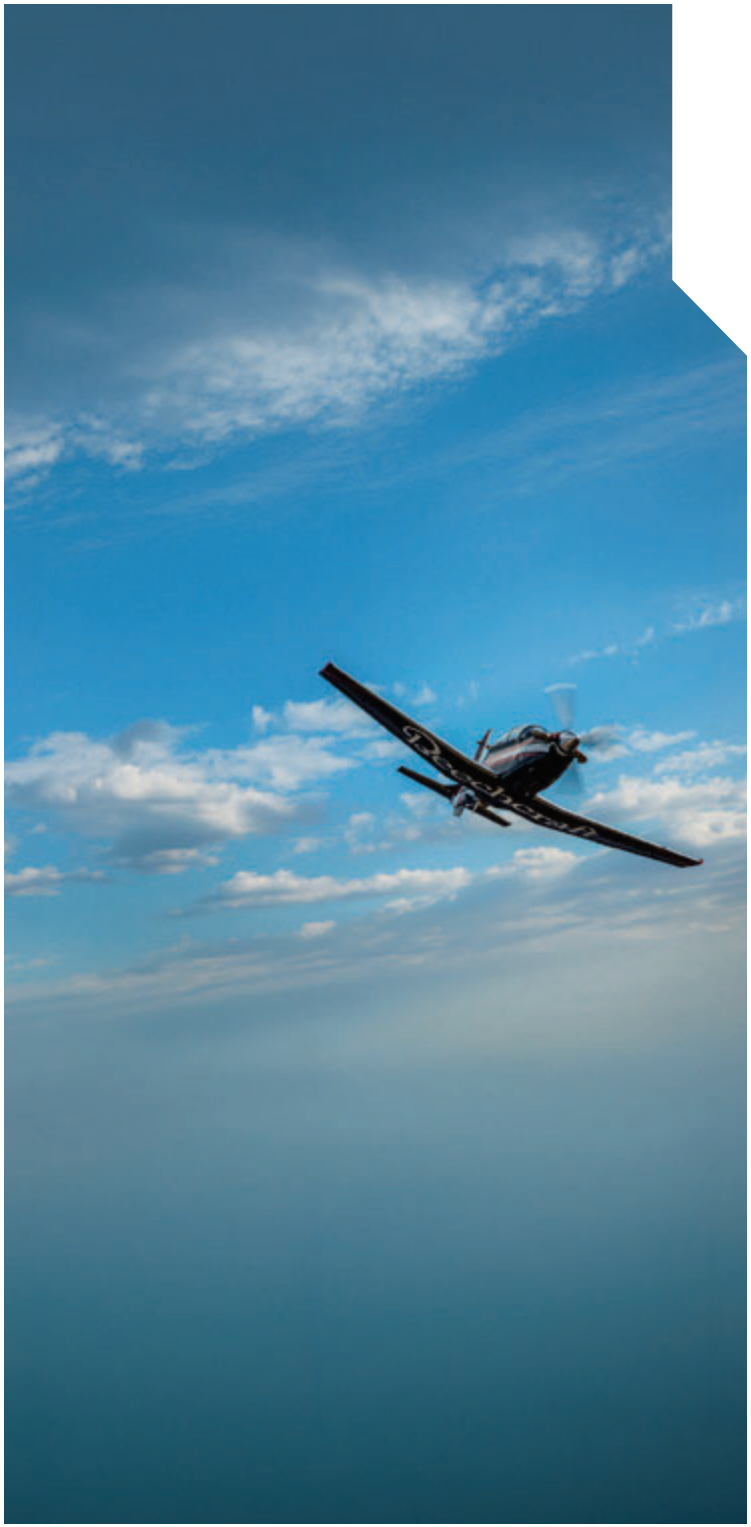


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This guide uses military terminology such as "war," "enemy" and "combat," as a strategic lens to help translate your operational planning experience into career transition success. These terms are not literal. Recruiters and hiring teams are not adversaries. On the contrary, they are key players and important potential allies in your success. This framework simply enables you to approach the hiring process with the same discipline, preparation and strategic mindset that defined your military service.



GATHER INTEL FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

You've conquered the job search, and you're ready to face the front line. Proper preparation is the key to triumph in the final, most intimidating battle – the interview.

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75 Interview Types, Venues and Tools
76 Interview Pointers – Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse
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79 Leave Happy
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INTERVIEW PROCESS

This is a multiple-phased "operation" for hiring new employees. It is vital for the company to evaluate your skills and character properly and thoroughly.

INTERVIEW PURPOSE

1. The *company* determines if you are a good fit for their company in this role, at this time.
2. *You* determine if the *company* is a good fit for you, at this time.

INTERVIEWER'S OBJECTIVES

1. Confirm the candidate's skills and experiences are relevant to the company's needs.
2. Assess if the candidate's character is aligned with the company culture.

To achieve their first objective, the interviewer will usually ask questions about your skills and experiences directly related to the those presented in the job description – daily responsibilities, basic and preferred requirements. Sometimes they will ask about specific experiences you included in your resume.

To achieve their second objective, the interviewer will normally ask situational-based questions to better understand your thought process, to assess your problem-solving skills, communication skills and how your values orient you when overcoming challenges to meet goals.

In many cases, your interview experience will resemble more of a conversation. In other words, you won't just receive a battery of questions. So be prepared for multi-part questions and follow-up questions or requests for clarification. Also, be prepared for and elicit a discussion with the interviewer.

YOUR OBJECTIVES

1. Get the Job Offer.
2. Confirm this company and this role will lead you to your "Top 10".
3. Accurately reveal your character and the value you can create for the company.

To achieve your first objective, you should follow the tips and guidance in the next section, below.

To achieve your second objective, you should prepare questions aligned with your "Top 10." You may not have the opportunity to ask all prepared questions, so prioritize them. And, if you know who will interview you, then align them with the appropriate interviewer; the one who may be best prepared to answer. (See section below titled "Questions You Should Ask the Interviewer.")

To achieve your third objective, you need to come prepared. Know what the company's expectations are for their employees and analyze how your contribution and performance will create value for the company. And get comfortable answering situational-based questions so you conclude each answer with a description of what you learned from that experience and how you apply that lesson today.

INTERVIEW TYPES, VENUES, AND TOOLS

Knowing the purpose of and the type of interview the company will conduct will have a direct effect on how you prepare, perform and behave.

INTERVIEW TYPES:

- **Screening** – Usually conducted by the recruiter with the intent of identifying the 3 to 5 candidates to be interviewed by the hiring manager or the selection committee. Members of this committee usually have specific knowledge about the role.
- **Technical or skills test/assessment** – Usually reserved for skilled-trades roles or specialist positions; often conducted by a technical professional and is designed to assess your skills.
- **In-person** – Usually conducted by 3-4 separate interviewers who will provide input to the decision maker – the hiring manager; these interviewers may have held this job previously or worked in a similar environment. They usually have specific and first-hand knowledge about the role.

INTERVIEW VENUES:

- **Telephonic** – Usually a shorter session and used principally for the screening.
- **Video Interview Tool (e.g. HireVue)** – Often used as or to complement the screening interview.
- **Virtual** – A remote experience leveraging video conference platforms where more than two people can be involved; this venue can support all interview types.
- **Face-to-Face** – (also referred to as in-person interviews) usually the final opportunity to earn the job offer. Often hosted at the actual work site and may include a tour.

VIDEO INTERVIEW TOOLS – WHAT TO EXPECT:

There are both Live and On Demand video programs.

- A live interview will connect you with recruiters and hiring managers in real time. Interviews under this venue are like face-to-face interviews.
- An on-demand video will let you record responses to pre-determined questions without the recruiter or hiring manager's presence. Your recorded answers can be shared amongst the hiring or selection team. • The procedure will resemble this sequence:
  - The recruiter will send you an email with an embedded link that contains the questions you must answer.
  - You will be given time to review the questions and prepare your answers.
  - When ready, you begin the video to answer each question independently, within a specified time.
  - You may review each answer before you return the file to the recruiter.
  - If you do not like your answer, you will often be afforded one opportunity to re-do your answer.
  - Once completed, you return your completed file to the recruiter.

INTERVIEW POINTERS

The key to your success is in this critical engagement is to properly prepare. Interpreters are not allowed to accompany you to your interview. So, practice speaking plainly, drop the military jargon and REHEARSE, REHEARSE, REHEARSE.

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1. Talk about "I." This is about you and the value you can create; avoid emphasizing your team (we) and its accomplishments.

2. Reveal your character. For situational-based questions, the interviewer assesses your character from how you reveal it when describing your performance in a situation. Conclude with a positive takeaway.

3. Embrace past failure. Get comfortable discussing your professional weakness or past mistakes and failures. These can show humility and self-improvement.

4. Don't be afraid of silence. Take a second to create an outline of your answer to avoid rambling responses and ensure you answer the question fully.

5. Do your share of the talking. Think of the interview as a conversation, creating give-and-take with the interviewer.

6. Prepare questions in advance. Ask questions to determine if this opportunity will fulfill your "Top 10" needs and learn if "this" company and "this" job are the right fit for you.

7. Don't be first. Do not initiate discussion about salary or wages. But, be prepared to express your value in a salary range or wage. There will be time to negotiate.

8. Know the company's general business situation. What service or product do they provide and for whom? *(The hiring manager's favorite.)*

9. Understand the company's culture and values. Show how your qualifications and experience contribute and add value to their business needs, and how your character aligns with their culture.

10. Turn off your phone. Better yet, leave it in the car.

COME PREPARED

Your recruiter or coordinator should provide necessary logistics information, including date, time and location, names and titles of those who will interview you, links, or connection instructions for video assisted venues, parking and entrance instructions for in-person opportunities. If you have a question or concern, it is best you get it clarified beforehand and save embarrassment.

- Come dressed for success. (If you don't know what's appropriate, ask the recruiter in advance.)
- Leverage all that you learned from your Informational Interviews, use the professional words and language appropriate for your targeted career field(s) – speak plainly, drop the military jargon so you don't need an interpreter.
- Arrive on time, but not 30 minutes beforehand. Five minutes in advance is perfect.
- Carry a portfolio or folder or an old-fashioned NCO notebook that includes the following items:
  - Blank paper on which you can write notes or outline your answer.
  - Put the word "I" on the top of each blank piece of paper to remind yourself that you must talk about the difference you made; your team is not with you, and they won't get hired along with you either.
  - A list of 15 questions – This is where you achieve your objective for the interview:
    - ▶ *Gather the remaining information about your "Top 10"*
    - ▶ *The interaction is conversational, so some questions may be answered before you ask them.*
    - ▶ *You don't want to respond with an empty stare when they ask, "so, what are your questions?"*
    - ▶ *See section below for suggestions: "Questions You Should Ask the Interviewer."*
  - A copy of the Job Description for your reference.
  - A list of the company's employee values for your use and reminder.
  - A few copies of your resume – although everyone should have already studied it and have a copy.
  - A copy of your DD Form 214.
  - A copy of your academic certificate or diploma.
  - A photo ID.
  - A list of your references including their contact information – phone number, email address, etc.
  - If required, a copy of your Disqualification (DQ) Statement or Memorandum For Record.
  - Breath mints.
- Research those who are scheduled to interview you.
  - Review their bio (biography) on the company's web page.
  - Do a "Google" search on them.
  - Review their LinkedIn profile and maybe even their Facebook page.
  - Why?
    - ▶ *Identify their role and experiences so you can ask them appropriate questions.*
    - ▶ *To lessen the tension in the interview room by mentioning something you have in common.*

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK THE INTERVIEWER

To help you achieve your objective of confirming this company and this role will lead you to your "Top 10," consider asking questions. Asking thoughtful questions will also leave a great impression. It will show you are interested, enthusiastic and engaged.

Here are thirty (30) questions you can consider asking during your interview:

- Can you define the leadership style of the supervisor?
- How would you describe the management style within the company?
- Can you describe the working environment or culture of the company?
- How well does the company do at living up to its values?
- Can you describe the work-life balance in this company? And, in this role?
- How are conflicts handled in this company?
- Can you give me an example of how I would collaborate with my supervisor or manager?
- What made you decide to work for this company?
- How long have you worked with this company?
- What do you like most about working for this company?
- Where else have you worked in the company?
- Why do you continue to work for this company?
- What do you find most exciting about this company?
- What is your biggest concern for this company right now?
- How long has this position been open?
- Why is this position open – is it a new role or did the previous employee get promoted?
- What is the highest priority task or project for the new hire for this position?
- What is the company's top priority for the team that I might be joining?
- Will I be required to supervise other employees in this role? If so, how many?
- What sort of opportunities are there for continued training and education?
- What sort of opportunities are there for broadening, growing, or advancing my experiences?
- Can you share what skills or experiences in my background grabbed your attention?
- Is there anything about my background or experiences that makes you hesitant about moving me forward in the selection process?
- How does my background compare to other candidates you are interviewing?
- Do current employees have a preference in the selection process or hiring?

- What is the biggest challenge I could face in the first 90 days?
- How will my success be measured?
- How will I and how frequently will I receive feedback on my performance?
- How does the company leadership communicate important information to its employees?
- How does the leadership respond when an employee comes up with a good idea?
- Does the company have a Veteran employee resource group that I should consider joining?
- How many other candidates remain competitive in this selection process?
- What is your timeline for making the hiring decision? – Or – when should I plan on hearing back from you?
- What is a typical day like in this role?

LEAVE HAPPY

Thank everyone who was involved in the process, even the Administrative Assistant.

- At the first opportunity, send a "Thank You" note to those who interviewed you.
- Remember, this is a competition, so don't overestimate your performance outcome.
- Begin to prepare for your negotiation – review your desired outcomes.

As soon as you send those "Thank You" notes, commence searching for another job and even draft a new customized resume and apply while you wait to hear your interview results. This is a tough battle; only one candidate will be victorious. And you don't want to lose any momentum if you are not the one selected for this job.

BEWARE OF PRECONCEPTIONS

As a military member interviewing for a civilian role, your skills could be misinterpreted based on your delivery and demeanor. The following are common perceptions and some tips to keep in mind:

The underlying issue for incorrect perceptions of the military community is the cultural and communication gap that exists between the military and civilian populations.

According to the VA, 94% of the current American population never served in the military.

- This means they do not understand the military community member, their language, or their culture.
- They cannot connect the dots between military skills and experiences and their relevance to business needs.
- It leads to misunderstanding, miscommunication and tremendous barriers to the military community member attempting to transition or acclimate to their new operating environment once hired.
- These misunderstandings of your character and language, most often made evident during the interview, present barriers to the military-to-civilian transition.

COMMONLY PERCEIVED STRENGTHS – REINFORCE THESE IN YOUR INTERACTION:

Critical and creative thinking skills – Military Community members often demonstrate these sought-after skills, which also offer a strong baseline for entrepreneurship and initiative.

Compliance – Top companies look for candidates who can balance requirements versus risk and have the ability to hold themselves and others accountable.

Sense of urgency – This is a strength but do be careful. When overplayed, it can be perceived that you are too intense.

Leadership – Often at a young age, many are responsible for managing and training direct reports, are comfortable delegating and providing clear guidance and instruction. Lead by example.

Compassion – Leaders and managers who exhibit compassionate leadership traits enable their team to reach self-fulfillment.

Quick learning – Accustomed to completing rigorous programs, adaptable and agile. Also confident in their ability to learn new skills. Be careful not to portray arrogance or cockiness.

Problem solving – Several processes exist that help the military think critically and solve complex problems efficiently and innovatively.

NEUTRAL

Keep in mind that though you have strong attributes, broad experiences and valuable skills, you may be lacking experience in one or more critical areas.

COMMONLY PERCEIVED WEAKNESSES – AVOID FORTIFYING THESE VULNERABILITIES DURING THE INTERVIEW:

Flexibility – Relax. Stiff posture and short responses feed the stereotype that the military community are not flexible.

Humility – Rather than stating that everything you do is a success, show your dedication to truth, a willingness to listen and learn and the ability to sincerely seek criticism.

Change – Be open to change. Military members are viewed as checklist-oriented, afraid of having their ideas challenged or challenging the ideas of others.

Emotion – The civilian world wants you to show passion for your work and in the pursuit of your goals.

Word choice – Eliminate military words and titles, also known as jargon. This helps avoid confusion and delivers your message or point more clearly.

Control – Exhibiting controlling leadership qualities feeds the perception that military leaders are “drill sergeants” or possibly micro-managers.

Intensity – Military leaders and managers can be stereotyped as “blindly charging the hill.” Be open to challenge and listening to the ideas of others.



NEGOTIATE A WIN-WIN RESULT

You nailed the interview, and you're waiting to receive your offer. When that happens, the company will deliver its best offer. They worked hard to screen and review hundreds of applications and resumes and hosted quite a few interviews to find and select the best suited and most qualified professional. They do not want to lose you at this point. But they will be prepared for you to negotiate. So, let's make sure you're fully prepared for this critical step in your military-to-civilian transition war.

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88 Negotiating the Offer
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INITIATING TRUST

Every company will anticipate negotiations; however, they typically prepare a quality offer, so you don't have to.

- It is important to consider the post-negotiation relationship because those sitting on the opposite side of the table may soon be your new teammates, or even your new boss.
- Everyone wants a long-term association and a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Reaching a win-win conclusion will initiate trust between you and your new manager or boss.
- Your trustworthiness will determine your success in this role and career.
- If you trust others, chances are they will reciprocate.
- Trust in the workplace increases productivity, improves morale and reduces stress.

GOAL MUST BE "WIN-WIN"

- The person with whom you are negotiating is most likely going to be your teammate or boss.
- So, it is imperative you focus on achieving an outcome where everyone comes away happy, or at least all parties are satisfied.
- Work towards a mutual "Yes."



PREPARE BEFORE YOU NEGOTIATE

Technically, it is best to identify the company culture, acceptable work arrangements and salary ranges before you apply. Orienting your networking, informational interviews and interview questions on these same topics will put you in an advantageous position.

THINGS TO DO WEEKS BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Defining your negotiation strategy should begin long before you receive an offer – preferably during the self-evaluation and career research phases of your military-to-civilian transition. Use this time to reflect on your needs, wants and your worth so you're prepared to receive, analyze and negotiate any offer that comes your way.

Evaluate yourself

- Know your current compensation package and determine what you need to retain your current quality of life.
- Define the minimum salary you need to maintain that quality of life.
- If relevant, know the value of your retirement paycheck.
- If relevant, know the value of your Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation package.
- If relevant, study the TRICARE retiree health and dental insurance programs – you can compare these to what the company offers.
- Learn if your final move benefit is still available and if it is sufficient to support any planned relocation.
- Be sure to include "higher household authorities" *(Household 6)* in your negotiation preparations.

Evaluate the company and location

- Learn the impact of state taxes on your total income, including any retirement pay.
- Learn what the cost of living is in the employment area.
- Research (Salary.com, Indeed, Glassdoor, etc.) what similarly skilled workers make in the employment area.
- In a humble way, assess your worth to the company – how much value you can create for them?
- Know that the company could care less what the military paid you – they won't take that into consideration.

USEFUL INFORMATION TO GATHER DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Ask questions to help you better understand the role requirements and duties and how it fits into the company's vision. This will help you assess the value you will create for the company, which is the biggest determining factor when negotiating an offer.

- Ask questions to help you understand potential growth and advancement opportunities. This will help you assess if this job will be professionally fulfilling.
- Waiting for a job offer can be a stressful period. Put yourself at ease by asking the recruiter about the company's selection timeline.

REVIEWING THE OFFER

Once you've received your offer, ask for time to review and consider it. Be sure to include time for "*Household 6*" to review and provide input. Salary is not the only thing to consider – review the entire deal.

Compensation packages may provide programs that will strengthen the financial offer and may also be negotiated, sometimes more easily than salary alone. They might include:

- Start Date
- Telecommuting or remote work
- Signing bonus
- Vacation and personal days
- Differential pay and authorized time off to enable service in the reserve components
- Medical and dental insurance, as well as vision assistance programs
- Life insurance
- Relocation support
- Investment programs with corporate matching
- Retirement plans with corporate matching

To reinforce the salary, companies may provide bonuses as an incentive for value creation and retention:

- Spot bonuses for accomplishments
- Variable bonuses for performance
- Annual compensation adjustments for performance and perceived increased potential and value creation
- Annual review for increased salary

Two often overlooked but critical items to consider with any offer are:

1. Does the company provide for developmental or "broadening" experiences, including credentialing and additional training and education? *(Progressing in the company will increase your responsibilities, authorities and experiences, along with corresponding increases in pay and benefits.)*
2. Will the company offer advancement opportunities? *(Adding to your portfolio increases future compensation.)*

YOU GOT THE OFFER – NOW WHAT?

Continue focusing on your "Top 10". They want you on their team, but don't get a big head or get emotional over it. Take the time to compile all the information you've gathered throughout this stressful process.

1. Thank the company for the opportunity and for their trust in you and confidence in your ability to create value for them.
2. Ask for time to study the offer – agree on a date and time when you will respond to their offer.
3. Review the offer:

- Compare the offer against your "Top 10" needs - validate your desired outcomes
- Re-evaluate what you learned about the company's culture
- Assess the company's predicted outcome

4. Review the opportunity and offer with "higher household authorities" *(Household 6)*.
5. Once you comprehend the entire offer, then prepare your response.
6. Respond on time.

SHOOT FOR A WIN-WIN CONCLUSION



- Establish a cooperative relationship to achieve the best outcome.
- Leverage your newfound cultural awareness and style of communication.

NEGOTIATING THE OFFER

Here are 10 steps to successfully negotiate a job offer:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

1. **Review your "Top 10" needs.** Will this job with this company help you become the best version of yourself?
2. **Play detective.** Evaluate the company and confirm its culture and the opportunities it offers to grow and advance.

DURING THE INTERVIEW:

3. **Validate your desired outcomes.** Ask questions to confirm your "Top 10" needs; assess the value you will create for the company and discover what that value is worth to them.
4. **Validate the company's predicted outcomes.** Ask questions about the role, its connection to the company vision and the value they expect you to create.
5. **Reduce the stress.** Waiting for the job offer can be painful, so ask about the company's selection timeline.

REVIEWING THE OFFER:

6. **Buy time to strategize.** Once the offer comes, ask for time to review, and talk it over with "Household 6."
7. **Salary is not the only thing to consider.** Review the entire deal including benefits, which are usually easier to negotiate: signing bonus, retirement plans, insurance, vacation and personal days, relocation support, etc.
8. **Assess the offer against your and the company's predicted outcomes.** Does the offer equal the value they expect you to create? Does it incentivize you to perform? Does the entirety of the compensation package strengthen their financial offer?

DURING THE NEGOTIATION:

9. **Stand firm on your desired outcomes:** But avoid ultimatums unless you intend to walk away permanently.
10. **Fixate on win-win: Get to a "yes."** Be reasonable, knowledgeable, flexible and enthusiastic.

HOW TO DECLINE AN OFFER

Sometimes there are reasons to decline the offer. It is just as important to prepare for this eventuality. In case you must:

- Be kind and polite.
- Thank the company for their offer and for their trust in you and confidence in your ability to create value for them.
- Tell them that unfortunately, you will have to decline.
- Provide them an appropriate reason for your declining their offer.
- Thank them again and wish them good luck in finding a quality employee for this role.

