

Your Personal Brand Can Help You Land a Job

Why you need a strong personal brand to have a successful civilian career

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Transitioning from military life to a civilian career is often filled with mystery, anxiety, and challenges. There are also aspects of taking off the uniform that bring excitement and opportunity. Whether your goals are to pursue entrepreneurship, work for the government or a non-profit, or enter the private business sector, you'll need a strong personal brand to have a successful civilian career.

What is a Personal Brand?

Think of your personal brand as your reputation. It offers you competitive advantage if you are known as someone who can overcome obstacles, build cohesive teams, and add value to a project. On the other hand, if your reputation is that of a troublemaker or someone who is difficult to work with, you will attract fewer opportunities.

Your personal brand is how other people feel about you. The feeling they have leads them to assign you opportunity, such as offering you a job or promotion. It might sound overly simple to say that your personal brand is a feeling others have, but in truth, it's how the world works! If a civilian hiring manager is comparing two applicants for a job opening who have similar experiences and backgrounds but one is more energetic and approachable, he might choose to hire that person simply because the perception is that they'd be more fun to work with!

As human beings, we want to do business with people we like and get along with. If I can expect to enjoy or be challenged or learn more from you, that perception might give you enough competitive advantage to get hired.

Employers seek candidates who have a clear sense of who they are and what they can offer

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to the company. When you are focused and relevant, employers find it easier to hire you!

How Do You Create a Personal Brand?

The good news is that you already have a personal brand. By default, you have a reputation with those around you – during your military service, in your post-military career, and even online on your social networks. People have beliefs and perceptions about who you are, what you value, and what you want.

If you can be strategic about your personal brand, you gain power! You can actually become more intentional and focused about how you come across to others, the impression you are making, and the experience you are setting with key people in your career. When you are intentional about your reputation, you are in control of your career and will find the results to be more meaningful and impactful!

Building your reputation to be consistent with your vision is a simple process, but it's not easy. You have to become an expert on yourself, which means asking and answering tough questions. To become intentional and strategic about your brand, follow these steps:

- **Assess your current reputation.** As stated above, you already have a personal brand – the people you interact with have formed perceptions about you. Step one is learning what that perception is. Ask people you trust to give you an honest assessment of your value, what they believe you are passionate about and focused on, and what makes you stand out. Resist the urge to correct them if you disagree with their assessment. They are reflecting perception of you, and that is a reality you must acknowledge.
- **Envision your desired brand.** How would you like to be known? Do you want people to see you as innovative and creative? Would you like to have earned a reputation as a leader in your field? Envision what you want your legacy to look like after you have departed. How did you make people feel when they were around you?

This might feel a bit abstract, and that's okay. Remember, you have to be very clear on the desired outcome of your personal brand to be able to translate it for a hiring manager who's interviewing hundreds of job applicants who look just like you.

As you envision your desired brand, refrain from going outside of what is possible. At age 40 you likely won't be able to train to be a world-class baseball player. But you can build a reputation as someone who is passionate about serving his community by

empowering others.

- **Identify your target audience.** Who do you want to work with? Do people who dream big and create impactful ideas inspire you? Or, do you prefer to work with people who are more structured or analytical in their approach? Once you identify what kind of people you work well with, consider what companies and industries they work in. As you narrow down the people and companies you would like to focus on, you are creating your target audience.

Next, learn all you can about these people. What do they like/dislike? Are they active online? Do they share the same values as you? Are you connected to them in any way (i.e. online)? Tap into your military training to become an expert on who your target audience is and what they need. Don't forget that, as human beings, they also have feelings and will desire to work with people they like and respect.

- **Tie it all together.** With an understanding of your starting place (current brand), a picture of your desired reputation, and a focus on your target audience, you can begin to create the plan and tools you will need to promote yourself to your desired employer.

Your personal brand will be expressed in how you act, what you say, and how you present yourself. From your online profiles, handshake, conversation, and the references who vouch for you, your personal brand will tell the employer whether you bring the values and experience they are hiring for.

Experience, skills, certifications, and talents are important in getting the attention of hiring managers and recruiters. Your personal brand is how you express your past into a promise of future work and future value. You need to tell the story of who you are and why you are relevant. To rely solely on your experience, particularly if most of your background took place in the context of military service, is neglecting the emotional connection employers seek in their hires. People do business with people they can trust, relate to, and with whom they believe they will enjoy working!

Developed through the VFW's collaboration with Lida Citroën of the international brand strategy firm LIDA360, this article is part of the VFW's expanding education and transitioning services, resources and [webinars](#) designed to provide service members and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce with an opportunity to learn about personal branding and strategies for navigating the job search process. To learn more about Lida's commitment to the veteran community, [check out her recent TEDX talk](#).

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