

Are you a bi-lingual veteran?

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Securing a first corporate civilian position isn't enough. Veterans need to learn how to speak the language of business. Unfortunately, many military veterans are unaware of the invisible line they cross and fail to adapt from military to civilian language. Unconsciously many veterans continue to communicate in "military speak" after they've entered civilian roles. Rather than distancing themselves from their colleagues and managers, veterans can adapt their messages to the ones they've entered. In fact, our research suggests that successful military veterans listen, adapt and use the language of the business.

As veterans honor the skills and experiences they've gained from their military careers, below are five steps to adopt a new vocabulary to transition into civilian roles:

Listen first. During one to one meetings as well as team meetings, notice the words, acronyms and phrases that seem foreign to you. Make notes and learn the new language of the business. Notice how leaders use language to engage, inform, inspire, direct or influence others. Consider and make note about how the words and nonverbal messages differ from what you might have experienced in the military.

Remember the multiple definitions for words. Unlike some cultures that have distinct words to describe objects, feelings, etc., the English language includes numerous words with distinctly different meanings. It is often confusing for veterans who have grown accustomed to use language with their own unique definitions. For example, when a business leader hears the word mission, they most often think of the mission statement or what the business does. Military veterans, instead, might think of an assignment to be carried out or their marching orders.

Make note how others respond to you. Most misunderstandings aren't noticed until there is a mistake or it is too late to correct. During interactions, notice the nonverbal cues that might signal confusion or surprise. For example, if you were to say, "I'll have the report to you by 1400 hours.", others might wonder why you're continuing to use military time. Or in some organizations, using the word subordinate to describe those you supervises might raise eyebrows when others use colleagues, direct reports or team mates. The behavior would be a reminder of who you were and signal that the assimilation process isn't complete.

Repeat what you heard to yourself. Once you've listened and observed, ponder what you heard and determine whether or not there is a chance for confusion or misunderstanding. It might feel like you're communicating in a second-language. If there is a

chance for confusion, you might require more translation in the moment. Be open to asking questions until you become familiar with the new corporate language patterns.

Repeat or paraphrase what you hear. Test your understanding as a way to ensure clarity and alignment. As you gain confidence in your translations and interpretations, test yourself in the moment by communicating what you heard to others. Experiment with using the language of business rather than “military speak.”

When military veterans enter the corporate world, they enter an unfamiliar culture with new rules, expectations and language. Even so, the military experience has prepared veterans to learn, adapt, think differently and quickly. Entering the corporate environment provides a new challenge and opportunity for veterans to apply their skills and achieve success.

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