

# The Three T's: Things to Think when Transitioning

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The reasons service members transition out of the military vary; however, there is something that is constant within the process for all service members, which is that transition is unfamiliar territory. Think about it: a service member and his/her family have been molded to think a certain way, act a certain way, dress a certain way, and follow specific rules— all of which have been enforced by the military. These guidelines and structure become the norm and routine for a military family. When transition affects that routine, life becomes unfamiliar.

Transitioning out of the military isn't just another PCS. Whether this decision was voluntary or not, it's inevitable. When my husband realized that he would be transitioning out of the Marine Corps, it was rather sudden and unexpected. We often felt like Ricky Bobby being interviewed for the first time where we had no idea what to even do with our hands, let alone our lives. But joking aside, in an ideal situation, you want to have as much time as possible to plan ahead, and to feel like this decision was yours to make, rather than being forced out. But I've lived around the military long enough to know that this ideal situation isn't the case for most.

In my position within higher education and military transitional services, I often advise transitioning service members that want to become entrepreneurs. The idea of not having to report to leadership, setting your own schedule, and making lots of money is honestly appealing to most. In fact, I haven't met anyone who wouldn't find those aspects appealing in life. However, if starting your own business ensured those aspects, everyone would be doing it. It's hard, and it takes time. But with that said, and not trying to discourage anyone from pursuing the American Dream, I put

together a list of "Things to Think when Transitioning" for the entrepreneur. Even if you don't want to start your own business, but you are transitioning out of the military, this list is very applicable to your situation as well.

1. Thinking about transition should be timely and constant.

Remember when I said that transition is inevitable? Well accept it, move forward and start planning. Begin to think about what I like to call the "administrative duties of life." Where are you going to live, I know you want to start your own business, but since that's going to take time, what is your immediate income going to look like? How are you going to make your income? Do you have kids? – Where are they going to go to school? How about medical care? When was the last time you've been to the dentist? Obviously, the list can go on and on but begin to jot down some answers to these questions. When you start to think about these things, more things to think about will become constant.

2. How do you define success?

Begin to ask yourself why you want to start your own business? What are your objectives and goals? Understanding the real reasons on why you want to start your own business, and determining your own goals will allow you to define success. Once you define it, work towards it.

3. Who is your support system?

Yes, you need support. I'm not talking about financial support (although that's important too!). I'm talking about motivation. If you intend to have a particular person be your support system, ensure that you are surrounding yourself with positive people who

believe in you and your abilities 100 percent. News flash: your immediate family may not be the best support system. If your spouse is your primary support system, make sure that you include him/her in your path to starting your business. Your spouse, in particular if she/he is your support system, will inevitably have to make sacrifices as well. For example, if you have kids and you're out of the home starting your business, who will need to take care of those kids during the time that you can't?

4. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Yes, I just went elementary on you. Dream big and figure out what you actually want to do with the rest of your life. Think about this: you're getting a second chance to do what you want to do. But keep in mind, for most service members that have families and financial obligations, this is not the time to necessarily jump around from one big idea to the next. Truly evaluate your skills and interests (search for skills aptitude tests online, and I can guarantee you can find several FREE resources to help you figure out your skills and interests) and stick with something. Even if you want to start your own business, you're still going to need to know what your skills and interests are so you can apply them to your business.

5. Remember that you have a competitive advantage.

You're, like, an adult. Seriously. You have experience, leadership skills, knowledge, and oh yeah, you're way more mature than the typical MBA student graduate looking for a job. And don't necessarily believe what the media puts out there. Most communities would love to work with veteran-owned businesses and professionals. Take advantage of your local community and resources. There are lots of low-cost-to-no-cost resources made specifically available to veterans. To start, go to the local

community college or small business center and ask for help.

6. Know your strengths and weaknesses.

If you're starting your own business, you'll definitely want to know what you're doing. Obviously. However, it shouldn't be expected for you to run it entirely by yourself (unless you want to do it that way!). For example, if you want to start an auto repair shop because your strengths involve fixing cars, then take advantage of your strengths and become the lead mechanic of your business. If you know that your weaknesses are in finance and accounting, hire an office manager with those skills. Keep in mind that when you understand your strengths and weaknesses, the best advice I can give you is to strengthen those strengths, and hire your weaknesses (if applicable).

7. Invest in yourself.

For most civilians, this is easy. But for a service member or veteran, this is actually easier said than done. I get it, you have prepared yourself and have agreed to be selfless, and if it came down to it, you would put down your life to save another defending our country. If you have a family to take care of, investing in yourself can be placed on the backburner. But if you want to be successful in starting your own business and maintaining it, then you need to invest in yourself. Embrace personal and professional development opportunities. It may cost money for you to attend a conference or to take a class, but I truly believe that change is not the only constant thing in life. Learning is constant too! Here's something to keep in mind as you attend these events: If you're the most knowledgeable person in the room, go to another room.

8. Don't be shy, but leave your pride at the door.

Network, collaborate, promote, and engage the community. Be confident in what you believe and why you know your business will be a success. But be careful not to have too much pride. Sometimes, you'll need to start at the bottom, and that's okay if you know you're working towards something great. Something that I often say to transitioning service members is, "it isn't what you know, or who you know. It's who knows you."

#### 9. Research.

Now that you've defined success, how will you achieve success? Business and marketing planning (determining the need of your business) are just a couple of things that need to be done. The local small business center and trade schools can help you determine the need and how your business could be successful. You need to be well prepared because your business will be a huge investment of your time and money—both of which you do not want to waste! Also, keep in mind that the research to starting your business will most likely take more time than actually starting your business.

#### 10. Communicate and ask the right questions.

You don't know what you don't know. Talk with other business owners and try to understand their struggles. When talking to another business owner, ask the question "if you could go back in time and know something that you didn't then, but know now, what would that be?" Truly understand what questions to ask and when.

#### 11. Be realistic and strategic.

It's great to be excited and motivated to get started. But don't rush things and make sure that all decisions are strategic when starting your business. You'll need to make sure that you understand that the decisions you make will ultimately affect your business and your

life. Decisions should be tactical and deliberate, and ensure that you understand all of the choices available. Planning takes time, and although you're excited to get things moving, sometimes it's only realistic to slow things down. Sometimes you will only have one chance to do something, so make sure it's done right.

#### 12. You get out what you put in.

Don't expect things to be handed to you. Don't get me wrong; there are some people out there that have had these crazy ideas of an invention and overnight became billionaires. Although this could happen (and it has), the chances of it happening are slim. Sorry for the bad news. Starting a business is hard. Remember the ideal situation of making your own hours and not having to report to anyone? Yeah, that may be the case of some business owners who have been in business for a long time. But I haven't met one business owner that hasn't worked around the clock and made sacrifices to start their business. You need to commit to your business entirely, and when I say commit, you need to put in time, effort, and even some sweat to make it a success.

#### 13. Understand your ROI.

I know I said this before, but starting your own business is a financial investment. Your research should determine your return on investment before you even begin to start your business. Know the facts: did you know that most new restaurants fail within the first year and that if the restaurant succeeds, the ROI is a minimum of three to five years, maybe even longer in some areas? Three to five years, that's a long time when you think about it – especially if you have a mortgage, a family to feed, medical bills and so forth. Oh yeah, how are you going to manage family life with work life? Wait, is your business going to offer health insurance to your employees? Are you even going to have

employees? How are you going to pay them? Do you know how to process payroll? If you own a restaurant, many first-time restaurant owners go in to open the restaurant at 0700 and then stay through closing at 2000. Just some food for thought.

14. Embrace your intuition.

Sometimes all of the knowledge in the world cannot prepare you to make some decisions. Go with your instinct. If something just doesn't "feel" right, then chances are it's not. Part of believing in yourself to succeed is trusting you to make the right decisions.

15. It's Okay if you don't want to start your own business.

If you go through all of this thinking (I know, it's a lot!), and realize that starting a business may not be in your best interest, that's completely okay. Remember when you took those aptitude tests to determine what your skills and interests are? Well, go back to it, and see what kind of civilian jobs are out there that will accommodate your skills and interests? Look into all of your options too! If you're not ready to start a career right away, perhaps going back to school is the best option for you right now. Utilize your advantages. Look into the GI Bill® and see where that can take you. Go back to your support system, and ask them what they think the best options are for you.

One last thing I can state to you is that your EAS is not the end. It's only the beginning to the rest of your life.