



Department of Veterans Affairs | by Lisa Nagorny and Dan Pick

Why are many Vets still unemployed? [The Center for a New American Security](#) conducted interviews with 87 individuals from 69 companies to find out why from an employer perspective. Keep these factors in your hip pocket while you search for jobs!

1. Skills Translation

Unless you're applying for a defense contracting job, you have to translate your military skills into civilian terms. Civilians don't understand your acronyms, MOS, or military terminology, and they aren't going to take the time to learn. Seek out someone from your desired industry and have them review your resume. Or, use a job skills translator [such as the one on Military.com](#) to turn your military lingo into civilian, work-friendly keywords. Large companies tend to use programs that screen resumes for proper keywords, so it's important that yours includes these terms. If your resume doesn't contain the right key words, you most likely won't make it through the screening process!

2. Negative Stereotypes

Some employers believe that Veterans can be too rigid or formal, but it's easy to overcome these stereotypes by preparing for your interview. Have a civilian play the role of an employer and ask you questions about your background, experience, and qualifications. Consider recording the interaction on your smartphone or camera, and the interviewer can debrief you on your presentation. Other stereotypes include problems with anger management or post-traumatic stress. If you are faced with these challenges, help is available at [VA facilities](#) and [Vet Centers](#). You can also reach out to [Give an Hour](#) or other related organizations. It may take some help to get back on your feet, but don't let that stop you from furthering your career.

3. Skill Mismatch

The military helped transform you into a leader with an excellent work ethic. But most employers are looking for specific skills, not just general potential. If you don't have the skills you need, look for ways to build them up like taking classes at a community college. Check out job listings in your industry of choice to identify what employers are looking for, or ask someone you know in that industry, then hone in on the skills you need to improve.

For example, take a community college class and approach the professor about doing a side project or independent study in which you can demonstrate the application of the skills you are learning. Look for volunteer opportunities in which you can demonstrate those skills. You may be able to help out in the business office of your church or local community. Or, you may be able to run the fundraising or marketing efforts for a local charity event. Temp agencies are another consideration; sometimes starting in a temp position may help build relevant skills and lead to permanent employment.

4. Concern about Future Deployments

Guardsmen and Reservists face this challenge, especially if they are seeking employment with small businesses. Be familiar with the [laws](#) protecting reservists and be honest about your continuing military commitment. Recently, I became aware of a situation in which a reservist may have misled a company to secure a job a couple weeks before deploying with his unit. The employer was unaware of his imminent deployment. Actions such as this not only tarnish the reputation of the reservist, but also make it difficult for other vets trying to secure a job. Be candid and upfront!

5. Acclimation

Employers are concerned that Veterans don't completely fit into corporate culture. Interview prep can help you practice interacting in a less military, more corporate way. Finding out about the corporate environment is also helpful. What terms are used? How do people dress (business or business casual)? How formal is the culture? Connect with someone in that industry, or better yet the company you are applying to, to find out about the cultural environment and norms.