



From Navy Officer to Civilian: Finding My Second Mission

Trading a Uniform for Uncertainty

When I left the Navy after two and a half decades of service, my biggest challenge was simple to describe but difficult to navigate: I went from being a commissioned officer with clearly defined responsibilities and authority to being an ordinary civilian trying to figure out what came next.

In the military, rank, experience, and performance establish your place in the organization. In civilian life, nobody knows your history unless you can explain and document how it translates to marketable skills. I suddenly found myself competing for jobs with people who were younger, willing to work for less money, and already familiar with the civilian employment landscape.

Like many veterans, I had to learn how to translate military experience into language that civilian employers could understand. Writing résumés, attending interviews, and convincing hiring managers that Navy leadership and administrative experience had value outside the military became my new mission.

A Costly Career Detour

My transition was not without mistakes.

Believing I needed a completely new career field, I invested my GI Bill benefits in a court reporting training program. On paper, it seemed like an excellent opportunity. Court reporters were in demand, and the profession offered good pay and stability.

Unfortunately, I discovered that success required skills and temperament that did not match my strengths. Between performance anxiety, thinking too much, and becoming stuck at a critical stage of the program, I was unable to complete the training.

At the time, it felt like a major setback. I had devoted considerable time, effort, and educational benefits to a path that ultimately led nowhere. Looking back, however, that experience taught me an important lesson. Sometimes veterans assume they must reinvent themselves completely after military service. In reality, our military experience often contains the foundation for a successful civilian career if we are willing to recognize it.

Leveraging What I Already Knew

Rather than starting over again, I decided to build upon the skills I had developed throughout my Navy career.

My background in administration, personnel management, training, and human resources translated well into education. An opportunity opened at a local community college, where I became a vocational education specialist.

It turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life.

I had the privilege of working for an outstanding dean who recognized my potential and encouraged my professional growth. In addition to my duties as a vocational education specialist, he sponsored me as an adjunct computer science instructor. Over six semesters, I taught courses in Microsoft Windows, Word, and Access Database applications.

Working with students in both roles was deeply rewarding. I helped people identify career goals, navigate educational programs, and develop practical skills that improved their employment opportunities. The same leadership, training, and mentoring abilities I had developed in uniform proved just as valuable in the academic field.

Discovering That Service Never Really Ends

Eventually, I retired a second time, more than twenty years ago.

Full retirement, however, did not mean becoming inactive. Today I tutor students online, assist learners with history, writing, computer applications, and Spanish. My freelance writing continues and has been going strong for the past 25 years. In many ways, I am still doing what I have always enjoyed most—helping people learn and succeed.