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## Transition to Civvy Street

### 10 Tips You Won't Find Anywhere Else

by

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**You** have chosen to serve your country and now – voluntarily or not – you are faced with the decision to leave and pursue a second career outside the forces. Since setting up Defence in Business some four years ago, I've met hundreds of members of the Defence community and many who were in this situation. I will say it as it is: Transitioning is challenging. Not only is it a career change, it is also a significant change to your (and potentially your partner's and kids') life situation. But the change is rewarding too! It opens up a whole new world of opportunities to build on all these distinguished things you've done.

In this e-paper I would like to pass on 10 simple things every transitioning member should consider when leaving the forces to set up their second (or third or fourth) career. In doing so, I will focus purely on the professional aspects of the transition. Some of the tips you will find obvious – some may not be as obvious. In any case, they will apply to different degrees at different levels in your specific situation.

So keep an open mind and whatever you do, make sure you transition as well-prepared as you can and connect with the business community and others who've done it before as early as possible.

Here are the 10 tips for your consideration.



### TIP 1: Clarify Your Aptitudes and Interests

Professional life outside Defence is different. A number of things count in business that you were normally not exposed to in the military such as marketing and sales. But you may be a natural at both without knowing it and I've certainly seen a number of successful transitions into these roles. There are a number of ways you can get clarity.

- (1) Talk to family and friends to get feedback – you may be surprised.
- (2) Consider 'work experience' programs to get exposure to your target environment.
- (3) Consider professional capability and compatibility assessments such as the Birkman Method.

I did the Birkman recently and found out my dominant interests were in musical and artistic activities – which makes sense but more on that in a special purpose paper on the topic.



### TIP 2: Invest in Your CV

You've most likely done things during your military career that set you apart from your peer age group on civvy street in terms of personal attributes, experiences and skill sets. Some key questions are:

- (1) How do you communicate your skills to someone who does not know what a CO does or what it means to be a Sapper in the EOD Sqn who was deployed to Afghanistan twice?
- (2) How do you work out which of your skill sets are relevant to the job you are targeting?



Help isn't far away. There are a number of organisations out there that help you with exactly that and many of DiB's members I've spoken to have helped transitioning mates in the past getting their CV's ready. In addition programs like Defence in Business' Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme help you with translating your military experience into civilian industry-recognised qualifications. It definitely pays to invest in your CV and you may even be eligible for funding through assistance schemes like CTAS. Do your homework and get your CV right, first impressions count!



### TIP 3: Invest in Yourself

Guess who's your biggest asset? You! No CV, contact or strategy can help you if you 'stuff up' the execution. Give yourself a moment to assess your own strengths and weaknesses and invest in your professional development to support your target vocation. Coaches and mentors are a great way to get an outside view and point you in the right direction. I've personally mentored a number of transitioning personnel over the years and it's amazing to see how a person can grow over six months with support during the transition process. Groups like Defence in Business or other professional/industry groups are a great way to find a mentor or coach who can relate to where you come from and where you want to go.



### TIP 4: Network, network, network

It cannot be emphasised enough. More often than not, it's not what you know but who you know. Consider professional and industry groups such as the Australian Institute of Human Resource Management (AHRI) if you intend to go into Human Resource Management or the Australian Industry Defence Network if you intend to set up your own start-up business in the Defence industry. To complement these groups, Defence in Business gives you a trusted peer network of other ex-Defence members where you will find support, honest and frank advice and a variety of industry contacts and professional expertise. A last point for consideration: Depending on who you talk to between 30% and 70% of jobs are secured in the 'hidden job market' – they are never advertised but filled through referrals. I've seen this happen within Defence in Business many times. The prerequisite: Network, network, network well before your discharge date!



IT NEVER  
GETS EASIER,  
YOU JUST  
GET BETTER.

### TIP 5: Consider the 'Easier' Approach but Keep an Open Mind

When you leave, there are a few approaches you can take to make it a little easier for you such as:

- (1) Transitioning into the Defence industry
- (2) Working for someone who has served
- (3) Embarking on dedicated Veterans' employment programmes

These options can be 'easier' as you tend to be dealing with people who value and understand your military background better than most other business people. Keep in mind though that it ultimately comes down to what you really want to do. I left the military and came straight to Australia – during the GFC and without working Visa. Not exactly the 'easier way', so why did I do it? I love the sunny



lifestyle, something that was not really on offer in Europe. After all, we are trained to succeed under difficult circumstances, but if your interests do not contradict with any of the 'easier' options, they are a good starting point.



## TIP 6: Be Confident

Have you ever compared yourself to your age group in terms of what you've seen, done, accomplished? Most likely you can outperform them in many aspects. Typically the can-do attitude, resilience, reliability, adaptability and discipline (to name a few) that are developed through military training and experience are hard to match. In addition competencies like leadership, project management, logistics and technical / engineering skills are often of top standards given that the military people, processes and technologies are tried and tested under extreme conditions which leave little room for failure. Maybe not too surprisingly a research study on 'Military CEOs' which was published in the US in 2010 found that military CEOs are overrepresented and that military CEOs perform better in times of distress. So you have sufficient reason to be proud and confident about your achievements but...



## TIP 7: Be Humble

Now, that's enough for praise. Face the fact that there are challenging perceptions out there about 'military types'. And guess what: Perceptions count! They range from 'Rambo' type images to 'following orders', being narrow-minded and insensitive. You may also have skill and experience gaps for your desired vocation which you'll have to make up for. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- (1) You most likely lack industry experience – give yourself time to learn.
- (2) Your rank does not count – you have to earn your standing as a leader (again).
- (3) You may not know the business culture – give yourself time to learn the new game.

A mentor or coach can help you to stay grounded and assess your standing in your new environment more objectively.



## TIP 8: Prepare for a Culture Shock

Once you've actually landed your target vocation, you have to get into it, learn the new game and prove yourself as an effective resource or business leader. In civvy life nobody cares about your rank or what you've done, notions like 'integrity', 'punctuality' and 'loyalty' have a different, somewhat less strict interpretation, a whole new set of terminology and acronyms is thrown around and cash becomes king. In my experience it will take at least six, typically 12-18 months to adjust in full. During that time you'll need to learn to swallow your pride, reassess your place and find ways to become effective in your role. One important thing: Don't lose yourself and all the good things Defence has given you in the process. They can be your differentiator and it will pay to be punctual and well-prepared for meetings, disciplined, action-orientated and outcome-focused. Ultimately common sense prevails. If you play it right you have a great chance after a while of emerging stronger than most of your peer group, having built on the great foundations you developed in Defence.





## TIP 9: Prepare for a Second Go

As I mentioned before, most people we talk to undergo a major transformation in the first 12- 24 months after the leave Defence. To give you an example, here is an extract of the list of things I never used to do and have been doing over the last 5 years since I left Defence: (1) Internet marketing (2) Product Development (3) Product and services sales (4) Not-for-profit management (5) Fundraising (6) Board governance (7) Line management (8) Management consulting (9) White paper writing. What I'm saying: You may not have done before what you are about to do in your new role so be prepared to adjust your path – it happens regularly and is part of the journey.



## TIP 10: Enjoy and Keep in Touch

You have embarked or are about to embark on a life-changing journey which will open up tremendous opportunities. Look at the people below and let what they've become after their military careers guide you as an inspiration:

- General Peter Cosgrove AC MC – Qantas Board Member
- The Hon. Campbell Newman – Premier of Queensland
- Patrick Snowball – CEO of Suncorp
- Prof. Michael Porter – World-leading Harvard Professor known for Porter's Five Forces
- Tom Enders – CEO of EADS (revenue in 2012: 56.5 billion Euros)

One last point to remember: Many aim to make a complete break when they leave. I recommend that you consider the good times you've had and all the great things Defence has given you. Many of your mates will stay, others will leave too. In my experience, the strong bonding and fond memories of camaraderie and shared experiences will prevail and may still add a lot to your business and personal life after Defence.

So keep in touch with your roots and try to stay an active member of the Defence community. In fact, leverage your roots to get ahead in business – that's what Defence in Business is all about.

Visit [www.defenceinbusiness.com](http://www.defenceinbusiness.com) for more information on how we can help.

### About the Author

Dr Thomas Triebsees spent twelve years in the German Army Signal Corps, including two international deployments to Afghanistan and Kosovo. He discharged in 2008 in the rank of Captain and moved straight to Australia. Whilst progressing his post-military career as a management consultant, he has established Defence in Business, Australia's first social enterprise connecting the Defence and business community for mutual reward through tailored networking, education and career opportunities.



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