



## INTRODUCTION

This is a guide designed for SOF operator and support personnel transitioning out of the military. It is a work in progress so it will change. Please refer to the date on this document to ensure you have the most current version.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) spend their entire careers focused on being in or on a team. In fact, nothing is more important than that team. At some point, however, all SOF leave the force. Departure can be at 4 years or 40 years. Regardless of the length of service, your transition will be about you and your family, and not the team.

Many transition programs lack a holistic approach and fail to communicate the importance of detailed mission planning, required lead time, and the consequences of making hasty, ill-informed decisions. Although these tenets were mastered while on active duty; so many SOF fail to apply them to their lives out of uniform. Many in the SOF community quietly struggle, heap stress on their families, burn through resources, and eventually settle for soul-crushing under-employment situations. Based on years of observation and discussions within the Global SOF Foundation (GSF) community, we set out to design a program that would institutionalize the SOF transition process. We created the *SOF for Life* Program out of love and respect for our teammates: past, present, and future.

In 2017 and 2020, the GSF and The Honor Foundation sent out a *SOF for Life* Survey to members of the SOF community who had separated from the military. The survey received over 550 responses in 2017 and over 400 in 2020. The results are posted on the *SOF for Life* website. And they drive the tenets of the *SOF for Life* Program. **The more data we collect, the better the program gets.**

Website: [www.SOFforLife.org](http://www.SOFforLife.org)

Survey: [www.sofforlife.org/sof-for-life-survey/](http://www.sofforlife.org/sof-for-life-survey/)

## SOF FOR LIFE OVERVIEW

### Key SOF for Life Partners:

- **The Honor Foundation (THF)** provides world-class transition courses that are unmatched in content and scope. THF originated in the US Navy SEAL community, and its success is in career placement that is matched by the passions and skills of the SOF applicant.
- **The American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association (AAFMAA)** is the oldest non-profit in the US and provides all aspects of insurance, financial planning, and wealth management.
- **The GSF** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with the mission to build and grow an international network of military, government, commercial, and educational stakeholders in order to advance SOF capabilities and partnerships to confront global and networked threats. The GSF runs the *SOF for Life* Resume Database as a supporting line of effort to their overall mission.



THE HONOR FOUNDATION

[www.honor.org](http://www.honor.org)



[www.aafmaa.com](http://www.aafmaa.com)



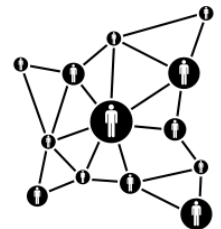
[gsof.org](http://gsof.org)

### Three SOF for Life Pillars:

- **Pillar One: Educate** - Providing learning opportunities specifically tailored to SOF and SOF support personnel.
- **Pillar Two: Employ** - Working with industry to provide career opportunities suited to individuals with a SOF background through job postings and a resume database.
- **Pillar Three: Energize** - Using our findings and experience with the SOF community to bring SOF resourcing requirements to policymakers.

### Accessing SOF for Life and the GSF Network:

To get the perks you must be a GSF Individual Member. It is FREE to join the GSF if you are active duty, and after that it's only \$25 a year (or \$50 for 3 years). We do this to ensure you have some "skin in the game" and are maintaining your user profile as part of the larger network. Your profile will allow you to reach out to other GSF members, post your resume, and receive information about jobs.



**Become a Member: [gsof.org/individual-membership/](http://gsof.org/individual-membership/)**

## TRANSITION GUIDE

This guide is organized into Phases based on time before your date of separation. **Consider these your Jump Commands!**



### PHASE 0: PRE-JUMP THINK THROUGH WHAT MUST BE DONE

**Treat Transition like an Operation:** SOF participate in a thorough and rigorous selection and assessment process, followed by years of training. Just to be a member of SOF, you go through a career change that is often life changing. When you leave the military; the same will be true again. You will have to work hard and invest in your career change, just like you did when you joined SOF. No one is going to give it to you; BUT if you treat transition like an operation, you will be fully prepared for anything and your transition will be much smoother.

**Accept the Reality of the Private Sector:** When you transition, you will work harder than you did on active duty and you will most likely do it for less money, initially. There are no monthly four-day weekends or training days / safety days in the private sector. In the military, there is a misconception that the private sector does not work long hours and they make a lot of money. That is not necessarily true. Everyone has a “buddy” who got out and made a lot of money, but that is not the norm. Most people work hard for good money, and they do it without certainty. Those “buddies” who were successful likely took the right amount of time to transition properly, and that is how they landed that “awesome opportunity.” You can do this too; it simply takes the time commitment. No one will do the transition for you; you have to grab that bull by the horns and ride it yourself. However, you do not have to do it alone! Just like in jump school, where no one jumps alone; transition should not be a place where you operate alone either.



**"THERE IS NO SAFETY NET IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR.."**

There is no safety net in the private sector, so your work is *your work* and if you fail you are accountable. The good news is that if you work hard, you will be well rewarded. Accountability is a good thing to those who do well. In the private sector, you no longer get promoted by year group, and you do not have to run as slow as the slowest man. If someone falls out and can't keep up, you do not have to go

back and get them. You eat what you kill. That is the reality, and getting your mindset right is critical to a successful transition.

Additionally, workers now migrate from job to job over their career in search of greater fulfillment and compensation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in a lifetime people will transition on average 10-15 times, with an average time in a job of 4.3 years, and that number is dropping more every year. Spending another “lifetime” in a career is not likely to happen; and business does not want to do it either.

*So how does one get started?*

**Learn about Transition:** There are hundreds of organizations and assets (many of them free of charge) designed to help service members transition. Each transition program has pros and cons and knowing what each one offers is important. Most people on active duty do not have a lot of time to think about transition, but you must study. Start early (at least 1-2 years in advance)!

There are many places online to get this information, but Military-Transition is one of the most all-encompassing that we’ve found:

[www.military-transition.org/resources.html](http://www.military-transition.org/resources.html)

Another outstanding resource which is continuously updated as new information and services are learned about and/or become available is:

<https://cheatography.com/xfaitth/cheat-sheets/transitioning-servicemembers/>

Other organizations and tools that members of our team have found useful include:

- **Special Operations Transition Foundation (SOTF):** A non-profit organization committed to transitioning Special Operations veterans into their next successful career. (Formerly known as “Your Grateful Nation”) Learn more:

<https://www.sotf.org/>



*"BEING IN A NETWORK AND A SYSTEM TO HELP YOU TRANSITION IS SOMETHING THAT WILL LAST FOR A LIFETIME."*



- **Elite Meet:** A non-profit that connects elite SOF veterans with a large network of high quality employment opportunities. Learn more:  
<https://www.elitemeet.us/>
- **Onward to Opportunity:** A free, comprehensive career skills program that provides civilian career training, professional certifications and job placement support to transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses. Learn more:  
<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/onward-to-opportunity/>
- **Career Fairs, Events, Additional Resources:** A variety of organizations host military-focused career fairs, including: Military MOJO, Hire our Heroes, AMVETS, The American Legion, VFW, MOAA, Vets2Industry, and Vets2PM.

**Additional factors to consider when entering the transition process:**

**Set a Goal to Retire Debt-Free:** Set a goal to retire debt free, less your primary home mortgage. Read Dave Ramsey's book *Total Money Makeover*. Dave presents methodology to work on eliminating debt and also a framework to remain debt-free. This requires a mind shift, but you will find "financial peace" as you approach retirement from the military if you do not have any required monthly payments other than your mortgage.

This will give you the flexibility of time. Time to try new things. Time to figure out where you want to live and work. This will remove many of the stressors that result in so many of us taking the first job out of the gate, which may not be the best job for you or for your family.

**Survivor Benefit Plan vs. Self-Insured:** One of the decisions you and your spouse will have to make will be to opt for, or out of, the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). You should carefully research your options to protect your survivors. SBP costs 6.5% of your gross retirement annuity per month and only provides 55% of your annuity to your surviving spouse. One option to consider is to insure yourself with term-life insurance -- enough to make up for the income lost by your pension. This decision should be carefully made with a qualified Investment Adviser and Insurance Agent.

However, it is critical that you make this decision early, BEFORE you begin in earnest preparing yourself medically for retirement. You may already know that insurance companies give significantly better insurance rates for non-smokers. What you may not realize is that when you sign up for a life insurance policy, you are required to release your medical records and submit to a medical exam; and your premium will be affected by them!

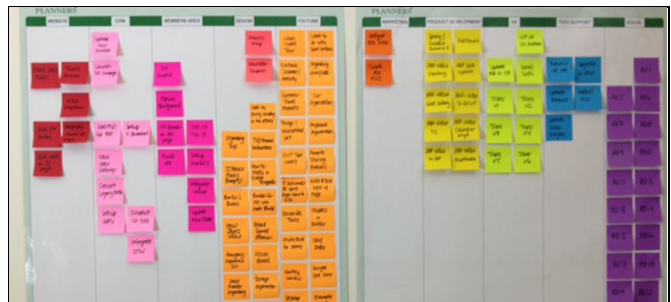
Optimally you would want to sign and finalize any SBP off-setting life insurance before you do a Sleep Apnea sleep study, are prescribed any lifelong medications, are diagnosed with asthma, or get diagnosed with any chronic illnesses, etc. These, and many more conditions, you may NOT YET have in your records can affect your premium. Strongly consider making this decision early.

**Focus on You...** Knowing what makes you who you are is critical to transition. Understanding your values (which might be different than those you followed while in the service), what makes you want to give the best of yourself, and finding your true strengths are all critical to “landing on your feet.” It requires a lot of soul-searching to find what you really like and what makes you happy. You have to know your “Why.” Once you know that, everything else in transition will become much easier, because you will know what you are looking for and not what you *think* you need.

The Honor Foundation’s Transition Program focuses deeply on this concept and can help you get where you want to be over nothing more than a simple “cup of coffee.” You can learn more about these opportunities, which include a 12-week program, 1-day seminars, and a new Virtual program, on the THF website:

<https://www.honor.org/>

**...and Your Family:** Your transition is not just about you; it is about your entire family team. You need to include your team in your pre-mission planning. One approach is to go out to an office supply shop and find some large sheets of paper or get a large desk calendar, and some post-its of various sizes and colors. Put these sheets on a wall in your house using masking tape and start your back-planning while also tracking your appointments, interviews, and milestones in a way that is visible to everyone.



**"77% OF THE SPECIAL OPERATORS EXPERIENCED ANXIETY PRIOR TO THEIR SEPARATION FROM THE MILITARY."**

A survey of more than 550 members of the special operations community in 2017 showed that 77% of the special operators experienced anxiety prior to their separation from the military. Additionally, 80% of those responding indicated their spouses experienced anxiety prior to their

separation from the military. The primary reason for their anxiety and stress? Financial readiness.

**Set a Timeline:** You need to think about your transition **at least two years prior to separation or retirement**. The hardest thing is to figure out your “transition date” – not the day you plan to exit the aircraft, but when you have to be assembled on the drop zone. Some serve until their Mandatory Retirement Date (MRD); others who leave before their MRD have to determine what that date is going to be. YOU HAVE CONTROL OVER THIS. Don’t set yourself up to fail, because you underestimate the timeline requirements for landing on your feet. Also, getting your requested retirement date is not automatic because each service has requirements. If you ask late, expect to get delayed. Knowing the date gives a motivational “hard time” that military personnel understand. Set yourself up for success by giving yourself plenty of time to take advantage of all of the options available to you. We’ll talk more about what all those options are in our next section.



## PHASE 1: JUMPMaster INSPECTION

### 24 MONTHS PRIOR TO SEPARATION

**Determine how long can you go unemployed:** This is the number one issue with people leaving the military. If you do not have your fiscal house in order, it leads to a long list of personal problems. We have seen families survive decades of war only to come apart after the service member leaves the military due to poor financial preparation. You might not require this time in the end, but failing to prepare for it will only lead to self-induced suffering for you and your family.

Unfortunately, many people in the military live above their means. Over the last two decades, SOF have grown accustomed to hostile fire pay, pro-pay, jump pay, tax free income...a lot of money that is above base pay. The *SOF for Life* Survey found that the average person had savings (college funds and personal savings/investments) that was equivalent to 3–6 months of salary.

"MANY MEMBERS OF THE SOF COMMUNITY LIVE ABOVE THEIR MEANS..."

Survey respondents on average said they were unemployed or underemployed for 9–15 months, and they did not change their lifestyles to compensate for the loss of funding. To compensate for the loss of income they burned through their savings and quickly ran into financial trouble.

**Conduct a Personal Financial Review:** Everyone will have a different financial status, but most people from the *SOF for Life* survey had to work once they left the military. [AAFMAA Wealth Management](#) will provide a FREE holistic review of your financial situation. If you fail to

take advantage of this, then you are missing out on a great opportunity. The review includes insurance, investments, savings, college financing, mortgages...everything! To learn more about the resources available to you, contact Garrett Sorensen at [gsorensen@aafmaa.com](mailto:gsorensen@aafmaa.com) or 615.578.5574 and mention the *SOF For Life* program.

**Review your estimated retirement pay:** Before transition it is wise to get an estimate of your retirement pay. The base finance office can provide this. Starting on 1 January 2019, the new DoD Retirement System started and people leaving the service after their first enlistment or prior to retirement will now get some level of funding. Knowing the estimate of that pay is critical.

**DoD Website:** <https://militarypay.defense.gov/Pay/Retirement/>

Additionally, there are a number of veterans offering helpful resources for transitioning service members to use. Here is one good one that will help those transitioning understand what their gap will be between the last day of Active Duty financial security and retired pay:

**Eric Horton** (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ericchorton/>):

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RRgW9NbJtHK5wpTgRjm5xVoCbYWsZcSV>

**Be Prepared to Pay More Income Taxes:** In the military, there are a lot of allowances that are tax free. When you transition, one of the biggest shocks to people is they find themselves in higher tax brackets that they did not anticipate. As a private citizen, you are now subject to a lot of taxes that were not taxable in the military. You have to be mentally prepared for this.

**Online Calculator:** <https://www.taxact.com/tools/tax-bracket-calculator>

**Get a JAG Review:** Many people in government work in procurement and/or with defense contractors. The government has rules that limit what veterans can do with industry, post-military. In some cases there is a “cooling off” period that restricts their ability to work in the defense sector. Additionally, there are rules on what you can and cannot do during Terminal Leave. Do the due diligence and get a legal review of any future job limitations and/or job offers early so you are protected and educated on what you can do.

**Explore Higher and/or Continuing Education:** Many people will do a great job of soul-searching and discover that they need additional education to do what they want to do after the military. DoD provides educational benefits to service members, so use them! If you're interested in the business world, think about getting a business degree or completing business certifications:



- **Bachelor's or Master of Business Administration (MBA):** If you do not already have an undergraduate degree then consider a Bachelor's degree in business administration. If you already have a Bachelor's degree, then consider earning a Master of Business Administration (MBA). If you don't have a background in business or economics these degrees will allow you to learn and develop essential business skills, ideas, and language that will complement your military-borne leadership experience. This could take 3-4 years (for a Bachelor's degree) or between 20 and 36 months (for a MBA) depending upon the program and assuming you go full-time.
- **Certifications:** There are many certifications available in professional and technical areas that will differentiate you from others, and that employers find desirable. Some examples of professional certifications include, but are not limited to:
  - Human Resources Certifications (PHR, SPHR, SHRM)
  - Project Management Certifications (PMP)
  - Six Sigma and/or Lean Management
  - Information technology or computer engineering

A great resource to complete these programs WHILE ON ACTIVE DUTY is the COOL programs for each service. If you have not used any Tuition Assistance monies for the Fiscal Year, then you have \$4000/year to use on this program; and the best part is there is no Additional Service Obligation (ADSO) required to participate! This might be one of the most underutilized programs in the DoD, so be sure to check out how you can take care of yourself before you even start the process of transitioning.

**DoD COOL Program:** <https://www.cool.osd.mil/>

- **Other Education:** There are academic institutions and professional societies that offer continuing education. Programs include design thinking, innovation, data, business analytics, and more! One alternative to an MBA at one school is to combine courses or certificates from several "marquee brand" schools that will give you additional skills, get you noticed, and, most importantly, expand your network. Think of your education in terms of "[stackable](#)" units.

**SOF for Life Academic Partners provide many options:**

<https://www.sofforlife.org/academic-opportunities/>



**Networking:** Networking is critical to the success of anyone transitioning from military service into the civilian workforce. To think you will be hired because you are a veteran or have a

security clearance, is simply bad thinking. Greater than 97% of the US population has no connection to the military at all, and albeit, many will say “thank you for your service” or even pay for a meal; that does not cause them to think twice when it comes to offering a job to a transitioning service member. Thus, your ability to be able to translate your value, in a language that the other 97% of the population understands will be the KEY to successfully landing on your feet.

Many think of networking as “brown nosing” or other forms of “selfish service.” These thoughts could not be farther from the truth. Networking IS how corporate businesses find, interview, and hire talent. SOF from around the world are certainly some of the most talented, hardworking, and adaptable leaders on earth...and this is what corporate business is looking for, and have a very difficult time finding. So, there IS a demand for your services on the outside, but you are going to have to hunt to find them....this process is called “Networking.”

Greater than 70-80% of open positions at any business are NOT found on job sites. Indeed.com and Monster.com are great places to learn about openings, and studying companies hiring from their LinkedIn profiles are great resources; but very few jobs are filled based on a simple resume submission to a job opening. Those “buddies” we talked about before, who transitioned out of service and made a large payday, likely did not do it by standing in line at a job fair and handing over their resume. They likely networked through Social Media, connections they made while in the service that led to connections within industry, and reached out to leaders in industries that interested them to learn about how that individual got to where they are and how they might be willing to help the transitioning service member into the same industry. These “cold calls” are incredibly common (and well received!) within industry.

So, you are likely going to have to open yourself up to talk to people you do not know and share your stories of service and the value you could bring to their company. And these leads will (over time) set you up for the perfect career transition job...and if not, it will lead you into an informed understanding of knowing what you are looking for in the next job. (Remember, 4.3 years is the average in a job...and dropping.)

How do you get started with all this? Start with what you have, and see where it leads you!

Going through transition can be seen as standing in an open desert with a compass. The compass is only as good as you knowing which direction you want to go. You can't stay where you are, so use the tools you have available to provide you the needed guidance towards a safe and secure place to bed down.

**Build your Network of Personal Email Accounts:** Your network is priceless and often the most valuable thing to a future employer. Your network is your ability to reach out to someone. If you do not have the contact information, then you do not have a contact.

**"IF YOU DO NOT HAVE THE CONTACT INFORMATION, YOU DO NOT HAVE A CONTACT."**

People in the military take this for granted. The military email systems have "global" directories that allow you to find people regardless of what system they are on or where they are assigned.

Most people in the military do not have a great PERSONAL contact list because the military systems make it easy. When they leave military service that is gone. The Army no longer has AKO, so once you are out of the military most of your contacts will be gone.

We recommend you dedicate about two hours a week to transitioning all of your .mil or .gov contacts into .com accounts. Send an email to people and tell them you are transitioning and that you want to make sure you stay in contact. Give them your personal contact information and ask them for their personal contact information in return.

Also, notice who you know that works for companies you might want to work for. Certain businesses have individuals whose sole mission is to employ veterans in their company... see if they know that person!

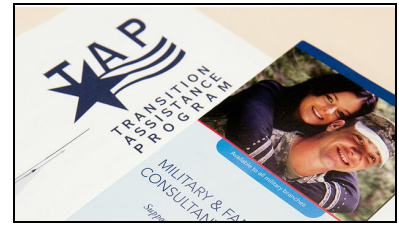


**Print Personal Business Cards:** Having a personal business card is critical. Go to an online resource like [VistaPrint](#) and order 500 personal business cards. To start, just do plain white medium grade card stock with black letters. Include your name, address, personal account (e.g., gmail) and cell number. Do not include ranks or insignia. Purchase a business card holder and take them everywhere you go. In the private sector, you

always want to have your business cards on hand because you NEVER know when you will need to give someone your card. If you are actively meeting people, you can quickly go through 500 cards in 3-6 months, but you would rather give 100 too many cards than 1 too few.

If you give someone your card make sure you get their card. If they fail to offer it, just ask them for it. The private sector has as much personnel turnover as the military, so once you get someone's card, reach out to them and ask for their personal contact information. LinkedIn helps, but having a personal email address or cell number ensures you remain in contact with someone.

**Attend the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) early:** These are now mandatory for everyone; however, the *SOF for Life* Survey found that TAP was inadequate to support transition for many members of the SOF community. The sooner you complete TAP and understand that transition is on you, the sooner you will begin to place transition higher in your list of priorities.



Have your spouse attend this course as well, because it is a lot of information that requires “self-learning” and your spouse will pick up things you miss. In most cases, the spouse has a better handle on finances, expenditures, and the homefront battle rhythm.

**Apply for The Honor Foundation (THF) Transition Course:** THF developed its program based upon one-on-one interviews with more than 300 former SOF operators from all over the U.S. The program consists of transition experiences and courses that are the cornerstone to the *SOF for Life* Program transition support.



THF started out in San Diego supporting the SEAL and West Coast MARSOC communities from their campus. THF now has a campus in Virginia Beach and one near MARSOC HQ at Stone Bay, North Carolina. And they have recently expanded the program to Fort Bragg (Fall ‘21). BUT they have also developed a Virtual Course you can attend from anywhere worldwide!

THF runs three, 15-week courses (fall, spring, and summer). They meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1800 – 2100 hours, and THF students are called Fellows while in the program, and Alumni upon graduation. Currently 93% of the Alumni are placed within 23 days of separation, with an average starting salary above \$125,000, annually. THF runs short Transition Seminars at the Global SOF Symposiums in Tampa and at the Modern Warfare Symposium at Fort Bragg. Visit them online to apply at:

<https://www.honor.org/>





## PHASE 2: ACTIONS IN THE AIRCRAFT

### 12 MONTHS PRIOR TO SEPARATION

**Attend Networking Events:** A lot of people avoid these when they are on active duty, but that can be a huge mistake. You have to learn how to talk to people in the private sector because they do things differently. Attending networking events will help you grow your network and allow you to learn. It takes sacrifice to attend these because they are generally after hours and they often cost money. Many people in the military want to get everything for free, and that is just not realistic. Additionally, there are ethics rules that govern what can be offered to service members for free.



**Hone your Resume:** There are a lot of opinions about the formation of a resume. Many people find it difficult to write a resume that translates their military experience into civilian terms. We recommend that people do not over inflate their importance. If you are a Battalion Commander or Squadron Commander you are not a CEO. The Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Air Force are CEOs. The THF Transition Course has a great class on how to do this and there are a lot of other programs that can help, like American Corporate Partners (ACP).



**ACP:** <https://www.acp-usa.org/>

You can also find someone you know with a similar background that is already out and use their format to get started. You have to start somewhere so just do it. This leads directly into....

**Get a Mentor:** Many of us have had mentors that have helped lead us through the troubling times of our career; transition is no different. ACP offers a mentorship program, but so do [Vet2Industry](#), [Vet2PM](#), and other programs like these. You wouldn't exit the aircraft alone...so don't transition alone. Don't know how to get a mentor? Just ask! If someone came to you asking for your expertise in something, would you not help them? Most of us would...and it is the same way in the business sector. Learn who the people are, who is willing to help you, and set up regular conversations with them to be able to get their best advice...you are likely helping them as much as they are helping you!

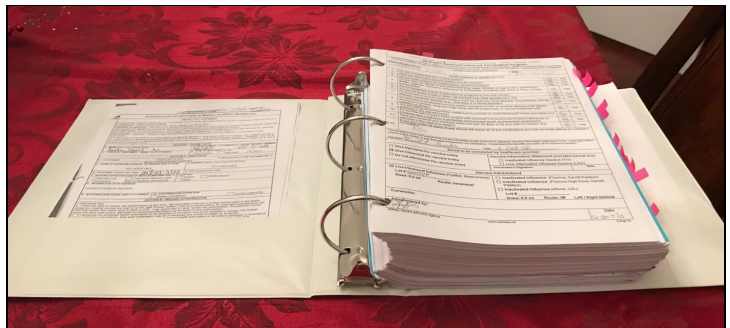
**Write a Short Biography:** A lot of people want to see your biography before they even consider your resume. Having a great biography that people can access is a great tool and something we have seen grow in importance. If you have ever seen a Command Bio from your time attending command handovers between senior enlisted or officers; this is a good place to start your version. Don't forget to make it personal though.

**Get a Professional Headshot Photo:** You need a great high definition photo that has to be professional. You cannot break out the cell phone and use a photo from that. We recommend a professional photo in civilian attire – don't use the "cool guy" photos in uniform. No one will hire you based on a photo with a beard and in full kit. If you want to be treated like a professional, look like a professional.

"IF YOU WANT TO BE TREATED  
LIKE A PROFESSIONAL, LOOK  
LIKE A PROFESSIONAL."

**Purchase Business Attire:** You have to look professional or no one will take you seriously--and not just from one headshot! In the military when you see someone in uniform everyone looks at the skill badges and patches first to see who you are, and it is no different in the private sector. A great reference is searching [YouTube](#), where you can find walkthroughs on what to buy, how to dress, and what makes you stand out at an interview (either in person or during a virtual environment).

**Review and Update Your Medical Records:** Most people in SOF have spent their careers lying about their physical condition. No one wants to miss a mission due to medical limitations, so people just learn to avoid being in a situation where their medical issues are documented. That helps keep SOF in the fight, but it is a big deal when it is time to transition out of the military.



The Care Coalition folks are a great asset, and they can tell you what matters in the medical world. We recommend you get ALL of your medical issues documented prior to transition.

**GSF President Stu Bradin wrote a blog about this...check it out!**

[gsof.org/veterans-affairs-support/](https://gsof.org/veterans-affairs-support/)

**Also, see the blog from one recent Skillbridge Intern:**

<https://gsof.org/update-from-nate-medical-insights-from-our-skillbridge-intern/>

**Understand how the VA Disability Process Works:** The key to this is to prepare and understand that the VA is not the military. When you came into the military you went through a rigorous medical evaluation that lasted days. When you leave the military, you go through a pretty fast exam that is not nearly as thorough as you might expect. The VA system is very different, very bureaucratic, and extremely difficult to figure out. Knowing about the Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) is critical and having answers to those questions that you can backstop with your medical records is critical. Below is a great website. (Note this website recently became a pay-for-service website, with a two week trial offer. We still recommend taking the trial offer at least to learn as much as you can about the process. This is single-handedly the best reference out there for transitioning veterans regarding understanding the VA disability claims process).

[www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/](http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/)

**Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs):** These are the types of questions you need to be prepared for when you complete your DBQs. Great advice, when it comes to claiming injuries sustained while on Active Duty; start at the bottom of your feet and go to the top of your head. It is on the VA to prove that you do or do not have a particular injury. (You can make that easier by getting your records before departing service!) Sitting down with your spouse/significant other is another great way to make sure you don't miss something critical you want to put in your claim.

- **Head:** Have you had any rashes, migraines, traumatic brain injury residuals, mental disorders, or patchy loss of hair?
- **Eyes:** Have you had any infections, double vision, cloudy vision, growths over your eyes or eye irritations from chemical exposures?
- **Ears:** Have you had any ringing in your ears, hearing loss, tympanic membrane scarring or rupture, ear infections internal or external or bony prominence in the ear canal, from cold water exposure?
- **Nose:** Have you had a deviation in your septum, polyps, recurrent nasal infections, excessive snoring, sleepiness during working hours or diagnoses with sleep apnea?
- **Face:** Have you ever had any facial droop of one side or the other, rashes or trauma to the lips, tongue or cheek bones, difficulty opening and closing your jaw, popping of your jaw while grinding or while eating?



- **Throat**: Have you ever lost your voice, had a change in your voice, had chronic infections of your throat that needed to be treated with antibiotics?
- **Neck**: Have you ever had chronic neck pain that was diagnosed at HNP, limited side to side movement or up and down movement, or chin to your chest?
- **Back**: Have you ever had chronic back trouble or positive findings on X-ray or MRI to show that you may have Degenerative Joint Disease (DJD)?
- **Esophagus**: Have you ever had ulcers in your throat?
- **Chest**: Have you fractured any ribs, had rashes on your chest, lost lung expansion on one side of your chest, or had breast surgery?
- **Lungs**: Have you had any chronic lung infections, or loss of inflation or either lung?
- **Heart**: Have you had any heart problems in regard to inflections, EKG readings, size, heart rate, rhythm or lightheadedness?
- **Stomach**: Have you ever had chronic stomach infections, bad breath associated with stomach problems, gastric burning or history of ulcers?
- **Liver Problems**: Any difficulties or infections of your liver?
- **Intestines**: Have you ever had a portion of your intestines removed, infections or chronic problems with your digestion?
- **Kidneys**: Have you ever had kidney infections, kidney stones or inflammation of the kidney?
- **Bladder / Ureters**: Have you had strictures of or stones in the area?
- **Reproductive**:
  - Male: Have you ever had hernias, removal of testes, loss of erectile power, removal of glands half or more, removal of prostate?
  - Females: Cervical disease, injury to the vulva, removal of an ovary, uterus, and or ovaries?
- **Anus**: Have you ever had skin infections of the anus area, hemorrhoids, prolapsed or the anus, stricture or rectovaginal or urethrovaginal connection?
- **Extremities**: Have you had any rashes, changes in range of motion, instability of shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee or ankle joints to frequent dislocation or sprains, numbness in hands/legs for any reason, swelling, pain bone growths, bone deformity, amputation, tendonitis issues, bony changes, scars, plantar fasciitis, flatfoot, weak foot, gout, hallux, valgus / rigidus, hammer toe, arthritis, bursitis, new growths, burn or cold injuries?
- **Growths**: Have you had any new growths in your bones, skin, brain, eye, spinal cord areas?



- **Systemic**: Have you ever had anemia, vitamin deficiency, diabetes, hepatitis C, parasitic disease, Leishmaniasis, seizures or fevers?
- **Syndromes**: Have you ever had:
  - Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?
  - Cushing's?
  - Meniere's?
  - Raynaud's?
  - Sleep Apnea?



## PHASE 3: EXITING THE AIRCRAFT

### 6 MONTHS PRIOR TO SEPARATION

**Look into a SkillBridge Internship**: The DoD "SkillBridge" is a program designed to give service members up to 180 days of PTDY to assist in their transition.

SkillBridge relieves you of your military duty work requirement and allows you to "work" for a civilian firm over a 180 day period. In many cases participating members finish with job offers. The common benefit to all participants is exposure to the civilian workforce, an expanded network, time to decompress and finish your VA and Service separation/retirement processes without having additional military requirements levied upon you, and begin to refine your post-service work desires.



There is a DoD instruction and each Service has their own SkillBridge instruction that you can find online. It is important to note that not every part of the country has a formal DoD SkillBridge program set up; however, the DoD instruction allows commands to approve a service member's SkillBridge plan. For example, in Tampa there is no SkillBridge integrator or formal program office; however, GSF has had five successful SkillBridge fellows perform up to 180 days of PTDY with GSF.

We encourage you to reach out to our Vice President of Partner Relations, Stephen Jones or other GSF SkillBridge fellows (listed below) to ask any specific questions you might have. Also, they can all be found on LinkedIn. We have recorded podcasts where you can learn more about the program, and they have also written a number of blogs about their process to a successful transition. Reach out to any of them; they would be happy to help!

**Skillbridge Website:** <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/>

**Stephen Jones:** [sjones@gsof.org](mailto:sjones@gsof.org)

**Chuck Neu:** [chuckneu@gmail.com](mailto:chuckneu@gmail.com)

**Greg Reck:** [gregory.j.reck@outlook.com](mailto:gregory.j.reck@outlook.com)

**Dennis Moore:** [dennis@spartascience.com](mailto:dennis@spartascience.com)

**Nate Swann:** [n8swann@gmail.com](mailto:n8swann@gmail.com)

**GSF Podcast on SkillBridge:** <http://www.sofspot.org>

**GSF SkillBridge Blogs:** <https://www.sofforlife.org/blog/>

**Decide on Your Social Media Presence:** This is a sensitive item in SOF. Many people avoid it. But it can also make sense to limit your social media presence to things that can help. Twitter, LinkedIn, and Clubhouse are platforms that professionals use frequently. Do some research and decide what you're comfortable with. Doing nothing will help you exactly zero.

**Create a LinkedIn Account:** Service members can get the LinkedIn Premium for FREE for one year. Spending \$30 a month is probably worth it anyway. You are talking about how you feed your family and pay your bills. Spending \$30 is nothing if you are actively looking for work.



"87% OF RECRUITERS USE LINKEDIN TO CHECK CANDIDATES."  
(JOBVITE RECRUITER NATION REPORT 2016)

**Check out LinkedIn's link below to walk through the process on setting this resource up:** <https://socialimpact.linkedin.com/programs/veterans/premiumform>

**It's not just for Service members, but for Military Spouses too! See this link:** <https://socialimpact.linkedin.com/programs/veterans/milspouses>



## PHASE 4: ASSEMBLY ON THE DROP ZONE & MOVEMENT TO CONTACT 3 MONTHS PRIOR TO SEPARATION

**Ensure Your DD214 is Accurate:** When you retire your entire career is on a single sheet of paper called a DD214. It is the one document that you must ensure is 100% accurate. You can go back and “amend” it, but that is really hard to do and it is best to get it right before you leave the service behind. We recommend you ask for a copy of the DD214 and take it home to review it. They will hand it to you and expect you to review it while sitting in the final out-processing and it is worthy of some thought. SOF is involved in so many locations around the world, many in combat or hostile fire locations outside of the OEF/OIF area, and those locations need to be captured on your DD214.

**Have a Retirement Ceremony / Farewell:** We recommend you do this. A lot of people just want to leave, but these events are not only about you—they are about your family, friends, and those who helped you get through the journey. Take the time and honor them for their support.

**File for VA Disability:** Your VA claim cannot be forwarded for processing until your actual retirement date; however, you can formally start this process with the VA when you are 180 days from retiring. The Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program allows you to work with the VA

“THE NATIONAL AVERAGE TIME FOR VA CLAIM PROCESSING WAS 102 DAYS IN NOVEMBER 2018.”

to have all physicals and examinations completed before your retirement date so that on your actual day of retirement your package is submitted for processing. The national average time for VA claim processing was 102 days in November 2018.

Something to consider while on Active Duty is to look into the Medical Evaluation Board process. This process is designed to help capture all service limiting medical conditions, and helps ensure a smooth process between Active Duty and Veteran status.

While you’re at it, check with the VA to see if your state has benefits or hiring preference for veterans. Each state has different support structures for their veterans; get smart on this before you decide to retire to “Fort Forever.”

Lastly, with money received through Defense Financial and Accounting Services (DFAS), be prepared to cover expenses should DFAS make a mistake on your pay. In our experience it can happen and we don’t want it to trip you up!

**Appeal your VA Disability Rating:** You can do this on your own if you know the VA system, have the time, and have a doctor who can articulate disability in terms the VA Compensation Board understands. The remaining 99.9% of the people who don't should hire support. The GSF staff has used CW4 (Ret) Dwayne A. Moorehouse, Eagle Rising Veteran Consulting.

**Eagle Rising Veteran Consulting:**

**Email:** [dwayne@eaglervc.org](mailto:dwayne@eaglervc.org)

**Website:** [www.eaglervc.org](http://www.eaglervc.org)

**Phone:** (256) 858-1586

Many of us just accepted what we were given because we were proud and not seeking to overstate our disabilities, but we failed to understand that our disabilities warranted compensation. The difference between 80% and 100% disabled could mean tens of thousands of dollars and critical services lost to you and your family. When you get out you might feel fine, but as you age your disabilities become more pronounced. We recommend you get what you are legally authorized to have for disability because it helps you and your family as you get older.



**CLOSING COMMENTS**

Less than one percent of the population will serve in the military. Of that number, less than three percent are SOF. Be proud of who you are and what you've done! Share your story with America, as the only way we bridge the Civ-Mil gap is by actively going out and sharing our experience with society at large. Leverage your training, your experience, and your teammates to continue to make a difference for yourself, your family, and by extension the nation you sacrificed so much to defend. Welcome to the strongest network in the world: SOF Veteran!

***Stay strong and stay in touch!***





[www.sofforlife.org](http://www.sofforlife.org)  
[info@sofforlife.org](mailto:info@sofforlife.org)



[www.gsof.org](http://www.gsof.org)  
[info@gsof.org](mailto:info@gsof.org)

## ADDENDUM A: Sample Transition Timeline

# **SOF FOR LIFE**<sup>®</sup> Transition Timeline

