

Military OneSource Podcast — Explaining Gaps in Resumes

Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program, May 2023

Episode Transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast, I'm Bruce Moody. The careers of military spouses are impacted by the demands of military life. Military spouses face unique challenges, frequent moves, gaps in employment history, solo parenting during a deployment. All of that can make it difficult to find a job. Specifically, military life can leave you with gaps in your resume, but are they really gaps? My guest, Kristina Santos, has some thoughts on this subject. So Kristina, welcome to the podcast.

Kristina Santos:

Hello, Bruce. Thank you so much for having me back to the podcast today.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, welcome back. So why don't you tell us a little bit about your job. You are a SECO career coach. What is that? And for those who don't know what SECO is, why don't you break down that acronym?

Kristina Santos:

Sure, sure. Yes, SECO stands for the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. The Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program was created to really augment the face-to-face services offered to military spouses by their installation, and so we provide education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide throughout all stages of their career progression.

Bruce Moody:

Wonderful. Ok, well let's just jump right into it because military spouses have a lot of gaps in their resume due to relocation and career changes, raising a family, as we were talking about earlier. So Kristina, what are some tips that you'd like to share to encourage them to highlight their strengths and minimize the gaps when they're applying for a job?

Kristina Santos:

Yes, Bruce. Well, as you said, I think, first and foremost, kind of redefining the gap, and like you said, they really are not gaps. They are contributing to their community, to their families. They're enhancing their skills and abilities and learning more about themselves and the world around them, and so I think, first and foremost, just redefining the gap themselves and how they reflect and how they name it and how they own that part of the story. Here at SECO, because we do assist military spouses with all stages of their career progression, for some spouses, that means that they might be exploring and still identifying their career goals and trying to align them with maybe their interests, skills, and values, maybe for the first time, or maybe with new interests, skills and values that they've identified because of the gap.

While for other spouses, it might mean preparing to go back to school for something that they learned that they loved when they were doing some volunteer work, or as you mentioned, Bruce, a lot of them are preparing for the job search or in the job search, or they're reentering the workforce from some time away. So we can really assist them with harnessing their strengths on their resume, on their cover letter, and really how they can approach the gap or maybe multiple gaps that they might have during the interview process as well.

Bruce Moody:

So, a lot of what we do in life is kind of the same. There's a lot of problem-solving. There's a lot of team building, and sometimes, it's in a job setting and sometimes it's in a volunteering setting, and sometimes it's just dealing with life. So, give us some examples of how a spouse can redefine the gaps in their resume.

Kristina Santos:

So one strategy, for example, that's one of my favorites is to help military spouses maybe add a section of their resume that we often call career profile or summary section. This contains information about who you are, maybe what you've done or what you do, what you've achieved, your most important credentials. It's a short paragraph that you can add at the very top of your resume, so it's a great opportunity to introduce yourself with the most important information that you want to showcase first, such as specific experiences, capabilities, other assets that you want the hiring manager to see that are going to be relevant to the position that you are applying for. And so during a specialty consultation with a SECO career coach, we can kind of help identify a lot of those skills and abilities that you have developed over time, maybe during the gap or between gaps, and then we can help with how to highlight those on the resume so they stand out first and foremost, even if they happened some time ago.

Bruce Moody:

So, we talked about you as a career coach at the very entry into the podcast today, and you're talking about it now. Get into some of the details. When you work with military

spouses, you're helping really to perfect their resume. So there is a tool called Resume Builder, and it's on MySECO. What is Resume Builder? And then how do you work with a spouse and their resume to get them prepared for their next chapter in their career?

Kristina Santos:

Yes, you're spot on, Bruce, that a lot of the skills and abilities that employers are looking for the most are communication skills and teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, teaching and learning, maybe technology skills, business ... and so military spouses gain so many of these skills in a wide variety of ways. So, one way that they can really redefine the gap on their resume is to maybe highlight some of the activities and accomplishments that you completed during your time away from the workplace. So that could be volunteer work or any classes that you attended. So, by working with a SECO career coach, we can really help them with talking through strategies that can explain or mitigate the gap from their career narrative. Gaps happen to very good and valuable people all the time, so really, we're going to help them with just staying positive, with being honest and really just showcasing what they have done maybe during that gap.

Yes, yes. There are a lot of resources that military spouses have access to through the SECO program, and one of our major components is the MySECO website that military spouses can visit where they are actually able to create an account. And so by creating an account on MySECO, they have unlimited access to free tools, information, services and interactive features that they can take advantage of that are all related to navigating military life and enhancing their education and career goal journey. And so when it comes to resumes, we have a variety of sample resumes and cover letters on the MySECO website that military spouses can access, and they are actually military spouse profiles, so you'll see multiple moves, employment gaps, volunteer work, just a variety of different examples on there. And military spouses with a MySECO account can actually input information into their profile, and then they're able to utilize the Resume Builder that would give them an initial draft of a resume, pulling the information from their profile.

Bruce Moody:

So, you bring up a really neat point because I can go online and I can Google template resumes and things like that, and there's a ton of them. They're all over the place. But you're talking about a resume that's really specifically for a military spouse. Talk about the tools and also the coaches and how they're prepared to address specifically a military spouse.

Kristina Santos:

Yes. So, in addition to the MySECO website and the Resume Builder as well as the sample resumes and cover letters, military spouses are also able to meet with a SECO career coach like myself or one of my amazing teammates, and so during our sessions, we are able to conduct virtual sessions. So, they happen over the phone and they are scheduled for about a 45-minute timeframe where military spouses can actually email us their resume, their cover letter if they have one or a job posting or job postings that they're interested in, and we can actually review that with them over the phone. So, we can hear from them about what they like about their resume, maybe what they're unsure about, and really hear about their stories and how they have developed over time and how we can really showcase the knowledge, skills, abilities, their overall strengths as they relate to the position that they're applying to.

Bruce Moody:

So how can a military spouse avoid future resume gaps?

Kristina Santos:

Yes, and another resume review service that I guess I wanted to mention, Bruce, I want to make sure I don't forget, is in addition to working with a SECO career coach, military spouses can actually submit their resume to our On-Demand Resume Review service. So if they would like, they could email their resume to our email address. It's at secocareercoach@myseco.org, and within three business days, a military spouse can receive personalized high-level feedback on their resume and/ or cover letters. So the greatest thing about SECO resources and services is that spouses can start with any one that they would like. So if they want to start with the Resume Builder, if they want to start by just submitting their resume for the On-Demand Resume Review service, they can get feedback within that three-day window. But of course, if they would like to start off with a SECO career coach and just have a conversation, or if they want to use a SECO career coach at a later time to go a little deeper into their resume, those are all different ways that we can help.

Bruce Moody:

Your enthusiasm, I hope, will encourage people to want to get in touch with you and your colleagues. We're going to put some links in the program notes so people can figure out, have an opportunity to click on them, and with that, they can go to the MySECO website, they can call, they can connect with a career coach. One thing that I wonder about is when you're in a particular environment and you're surrounded by your peers and your colleagues, it's sometimes difficult to really appreciate the attributes that you all have because you're all sort of in the same pool, if you will. What is it about military spouses that you find that is an attribute that employers want in their workplace?

Kristina Santos:

Bruce, that is a great question, and I have always believed in how military spouses can contribute to the workforce, but I think probably now more than ever before, I truly believe in it. Over the last few years, it has become very notable that transitions are becoming an increasingly more prominent part of our lives. And so it really challenges us to keep up and to be able to adapt and adjust, and I think in a lot of ways, military spouses have always had to do that. They've always had to be flexible and to be team players and to try new things. I think when military spouses have gaps in employment, as you said at the very beginning, that they're not truly gaps. They are caregiving. They're relocating their entire family. They're managing an entire household while a service member is deployed and there's minimal communication and they're making all of those decisions and managing the finances.

And I think, in a lot of ways, military spouses have multiple components of their identity, and that is really their superpower that they're able to kind of emphasize or de-emphasize different parts of their life and really have diversity of thought and diversifying themselves over time. And I think really honoring that ability to transition and to adapt in a variety of environments and to stay positive through it all, I think a lot of military spouses can bring a lot to the workforce. Two things that came to mind when you asked me that question are, one, Military Spouse Employment Partnership partner, Amazon. When I attended a military spouse event that they conducted, they noted that diversity of thought is one of their values. And actually yesterday, we had an MSEP Partner Connect event on our Facebook page and LinkedIn page and ACP, or American Corporate Partners, which is another MSEP partner, they showcased that and encouraged military spouses to apply.

And they encouraged how important it is to demonstrate passion in the cover letter. And so I think a lot of military spouses, they are eager to contribute to the workforce and they do bring all of these different skills that they've developed over time, all these different abilities and identities and just the ability to start over and over again, and I'm really excited for all the different ways that they can contribute and thrive in their careers that way.

Bruce Moody:

Kristina, we are just thrilled to have you on our team. We thank you so much for joining us. Do you have any final words, any words of inspiration?

Kristina Santos:

Yes. Thank you so much, Bruce, again, for having me. With everyone's education and career journey, it is unique. So I would always recommend for a military spouse to contact Military OneSource directly by phone to connect with a SECO career coach. Of course, they can always use our live chat feature or any of the tools and resources on the MySECO website as well. Always recommend them to connect with us on social media as well. We're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We always have posts. We have different live events that military spouses can attend that way as well. So I think that just to get the personalized, customized information tools and support resources that are available to them. That way, if they are in the middle of a gap right now and they are seeking ways that they can volunteer or maybe gain a certification, we have resources for that like Onward to Opportunity where all military spouses are eligible for a one-year free subscription to LinkedIn Premium.

And so through the SECO program, military spouses can access these resources and really take hold of what they can control and increase their value. And just in terms of speaking of value, when military spouses are thinking about what's next, I always want to let them know that they want to own their story, but they're still writing their next chapter. But while they are writing their next chapter and trying to prove their worth and value for what comes next, I always want to remind them to always remember how far they've come and reflect on that they are worthy and valuable right now as well.

Bruce Moody:

Kristina Santos, always a pleasure to have you on the podcast. We look forward to your return.

Kristina Santos:

Thank you so much, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. And want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, a call center. We're on social media and we are a podcast. So subscribe to us wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics that help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.