

Military OneSource Podcast — SECO/ MSEP

Program title: Spouse Education and Career Opportunities

Episode transcript: Spouse Education and Career Opportunities and Military Spouse Employment Partnership

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. We cover a lot of topics on this podcast. Spouse employment consistently ranks as one of the most important. It's important to military families, so it's important to us. There are plenty of websites and services out there to help you get a job, but the Military Spouse Employment Partnership's portal is specifically designed around the life journey of a military spouse. That's what it's for. So, we're going to talk about that partnership today.

And a little housekeeping note for you, we do try to avoid acronyms on this podcast. Maybe you have a swear jar at home. We have an acronym jar. But today we're going to refer to the Military Spouse Employment Partnership by its acronym, which is MSEP. And we're going to do it because we're going to be talking about it through the entire episode. So, I'll make a contribution to the acronym jar after today's episode.

But first, let's bring in our guests. Kristina Santos is a SECO career coach and bringing us a new acronym that we need to account for. Also, Anne Kelly is a MSEP specialist. So Kristina, tell us what SECO stands for, tell us what's a SECO career coach and tell us how you came to become one.

Kristina Santos:

Hi, Bruce. Yes, thank you so much, first and foremost for the opportunity to join you all today. It is a true pleasure and honor to be here. My name is Kristina, as you mentioned, and I am a career coach with the Department of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. So that is what SECO stands for — Spouse Education and Career Opportunities. I am also a military spouse, so I actually connected to and became a SECO

career coach by connecting to my local installation's military and family center on the installation. So, they really helped me with a lot of different resources, along with resources through Military OneSource. I hold a master's degree and I am a national certified counselor through the National Board of Certified Counselors. Here at SECO, we provide education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide. That actually includes access to free unlimited career coaching services so through my role as a SECO career coach, I provide resources, tools and information, as well as I hope to provide inspiration and support to military spouses so that they can pursue their education and career goals while bravely navigating and balancing those unique demands of military life. I really have a passion for honoring each and every military spouse's unique story, helping them to be more present, to harness their strengths, clarify their goals, believe in their value, and really just to use the information, tools and support that's available to them through SECO and Military OneSource so they can take the next step and really trust the process of their career journeys.

Bruce Moody:

Just listening to you, I think I understand why your job title includes the word “coach.”

Kristina Santos:

Yes. I really am passionate about what I do and just really want to empower spouses that they have everything that they need inside of them, but that we also have tools and resources to help them get there too.

Bruce Moody:

Excellent. We're so glad to have you on the podcast. Anne Kelly, you're an MSEP specialist. Why don't you tell us about yourself, please?

Anne Kelly:

Yeah, absolutely. Well, first of all, thank you so much for inviting us here to talk about these services. I've been working alongside the military community for over 10 years. My passion's always been employment services and especially for the spouse community where there's a huge need. I began my journey as a SECO career coach just like Kristina, and that really allowed me to see what spouses were looking for in a career and the challenges they faced when considering the right employment opportunity. I brought that experience over to the MSEP specialist role and that's allowed me to speak with employers and work with them to create more flexible, portable opportunities as well as internal support within their organizations. And we do that on a regular basis to just make sure it remains consistent, the level of support that they can offer spouses. So, I'm able to turn those one-on-one spouse discussions that I had as a career coach into action items for MSEP partners to pretty much better understand what the military spouse community is all about.

I'm also the team lead for the Job Search Navigator service so you'll have to hold me honest if I say JSN, that's what I'm referring to later on in the conversation. But that's allowed me to pretty much come full circle and connect back with the current coaches and our team works with them to provide individual job leads based on their interactions with spouses, along with their skillsets and what the spouse's desired career path is. So, I think this is a great opportunity to really dive deeper into what we can offer spouses. Again, thanks so much for inviting me.

Bruce Moody

Oh no, thank you for being here. This is great. I think we've got just the right people here for this conversation. Anne, let's start with you. Give us a general overview. What is MSEP, the Military Spouse Employment Partnership?

Anne Kelly:

Yeah, so MSEP is a very unique partnership. The partnership consists of over 580 different organizations and that list grows quite a bit every year. But it's with the shared goal of improving hiring practices in support of the military spouse community. And I say it's unique because we do share that goal so you'll see similar organizations working together instead of against each other to make sure that they are understanding the military spouse community and sharing best practices. And I just think it's really awesome to see that in action. These organizations are vetted by the DOD before they can become a part of the partnership. And we do work as MSEP specialists to provide opportunities for the spouses that they're looking for. Are they flexible? What types of locations are they in? Is it kind of different roles? What's the career progression? Is this a growing industry? Just different things like that, we're looking for from our partners to make sure that we're offering as many different opportunities for the spouses as possible.

Each partner when they are vetted and they come on board and are inducted, they sign a statement of support. And that's essentially saying that they're going to agree to recruit, hire, retain and train military spouses and pay them equally as their civilian counterparts, which is really important.

Furthermore, they work closely with specialists like myself to make sure they're improving the ability to offer portable roles and just add that extra flexibility that a lot of spouses are looking for. So, these are companies essentially that spouses should feel very comfortable with applying to and show they are proud military spouses. Gaps in employment and frequent location changes on a resume are pretty much understood within the partnership. So MSEP pretty much offers a solid foundation of committed employers for spouses to seek employment with. They understand the challenges and they work hard to minimize those as much as possible. And that's what the specialist role is all about, is making sure that we support these organizations so that in turn, they can support the spouses.

Bruce Moody:

So Kristina, can you talk a little bit more about this because military spouses will often think I need to figure out how to not mention that I'm a military spouse when I'm trying to fill out a job application when I'm working with a prospective employer. Or they're trying to figure out what to tell their boss because they've been at this job for two or three years and now they're going to be relocating. What does it mean to be working with MSEP or to be working with a company that is vetted by MSEP for military spouses?

Kristina Santos:

Oh, Bruce, that's a great question. I really think it means everything to military spouses that I work with one-on-one. When I am working with them and they're either starting or continuing their job search, the Military Spouse Employment Partnership is usually the first place that we go because it does give them the opportunity to connect to employers, as Anne mentioned, that are committed to hiring, recruiting, retaining and promoting military spouses. And so, these are companies and organizations that not only value the knowledge, skills and abilities that military spouses have to offer, but they view their military spouse status as a strength and as an asset to their organization. And so, I think when military spouses are applying to these different positions and connecting to these different MSEP partners, they're able to show up as their best selves because they can show up as their authentic self, and really honor that really special and intense and demanding role that they play, that oftentimes takes top priority in their life, which is being a military spouse.

Bruce Moody:

Kristina, I wonder if you could follow up on that because we have employers who are really proud to be in this partnership. But we say, and they say, that while they're obviously proud and patriotic employers, hiring a military spouse is a business decision. It's good business. And that's what we want ultimately to be the driving force behind this partnership. We want an employer to hire a military spouse because it's good for their business. And can you talk a little bit about that?

Kristina Santos:

Yes. Military spouses, regardless of their education and career goals, they do all have a variety of backgrounds and they have many, many transferable skills. They are flexible, they're adaptable, they have excellent technology skills, they are resilient. They have had to start over time and time again. And so, I think that the resilience that comes with just knowing who you are regardless of your role or your job title, that you're able to show up somewhere and learn things quickly and try on different hats and sometimes wear a lot of different hats at once. They can contribute immediately to America's workforce when they're given the chance. And so, I think that these employers are really valuing military spouses more than ever before because the workforce has changed and

the world has changed. And I think military spouses have always been used to living in a state of unknown, and a state of change, and they know how to still show up and show up for each other and for the community and be part of a team.

Bruce Moody:

That's absolutely true. COVID hit and military spouses said, "Yeah, we got this. We understand. We understand this environment no problem."

Kristina Santos:

Yes.

Bruce Moody:

So Kristina, let's turn to the MSEP job tool. What is it? And how do spouses use it? And what can they get from it?

Kristina Santos:

Yes, one key feature of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership is the MSEP job search tool. Military spouses can actually access this tool by visiting the MySECO website. It's at myseco.militaryonesource.mil. I know we're going to include the link there and they can access that tool. So from here, military spouses from all branches of the armed forces can find thousands of MSEP jobs offered by hundreds of MSEP employers. As Anne mentioned, there are now more than 580 MSEP partners and organizations. So spouses can actually view a list of hot jobs, so these are going to be jobs that need an immediate fill in locations across the United States and around the world. Military spouses can also use the MSEP job search tool to search for jobs in a variety of ways.

So, they can use job titles, keywords and locations. If they want to refine their search, they can actually search by industry. They can search by a specific partner that they might know, or an organization that they're interested in to see if they're a partner. They can also search by job type and radius. Military spouses can even connect with partners, a list of partners who have acknowledged that they may offer telework positions. So, that's really popular right now and needed right now, especially with the portable demanding military life as well.

And from the MSEP job search tool, spouses can actually view all of the partners so they can dive a little deeper into researching MSEP companies and organizations and learning a little bit more about them. So, as SECO career coaches, we always encourage military spouses to actually create a MySECO account and build their MySECO profile so they can actually save partners and job postings to their MyJobs section of their account menu. This can actually help them develop a targeted company list and stay organized in their job search application and in the hiring process. We also encourage military spouses to consider using the Job Search Navigator service that Anne mentioned. It's an amazing

service and I try to encourage all military spouses that I work with to take advantage of it. So that's another great advantage of using the MSEP job search tool and getting connected to that service as well.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, Anne, we were talking briefly about the Job Search Navigator before we started to record. Why don't we go over it again? Tell us what is the Job Search Navigator?

Anne Kelly:

The Job Search Navigator program is something that spouses can access through their SECO career coach. So, if they're actively working with a career coach and they have settled on a pretty clear career goal, and they've worked on their resume, and it's a close finalized version of their resume — we always encourage them to tweak it a little bit per application that they send in. So, if they have a pretty solid resume and a clear career goal, then the career coach can refer them to the JSN service. And essentially what that is, it's a highly customized referral of typically 10 to 15 current job opportunities with our MSEP partners. And so, these are cultivated using feedback from the SECO career coach that the spouse is working with and there's also a survey that goes along with that. So, the coach and the spouse will work on that survey and they'll submit that to our team. That pretty much details everything that we would need to look for positions with our partners.

So that's going to include their experience and their education level, the industry they're interested in, job titles, type of flexibility that they're looking for in their work schedule. Are they looking for exclusively remote positions? Do they want to look in the area they're living now? Or maybe they're going to be PCSing — which is moving soon — then that's something that we can do. We can look in multiple locations, which is really helpful to the spouses because sometimes they're not sure what's available or what MSEP partners are in the new location. So that's been very helpful for those spouses that are going to be moving soon.

So, the coach will send the referrals that they receive from our team to the spouse, and it typically is around three to five days after the Job Search Navigator is assigned. And so, they can further discuss those roles with the spouse, decide if it's a good fit for them, if they want to move on with applying, or if they feel like they would like to look at maybe the company because they're interested in what the company offers, but not necessarily that position. So, these results can be used in a lot of different ways. It could be used to apply to that specific position or give them that tool to research that MSEP partner a little further because there's something on there that interests them. And of course, if additional support is needed, if they decide they want to move forward with one of those positions, they can work with a career coach to finalize that resume. Or even if they are offered an interview, then they can work on preparing with that mock interview with their career coach so that's really helpful as well.

It's really important to note that this is not a guarantee of employment with these referrals. The spouses will still have to apply and they still have to interview with the MSEP partners, but if they do apply, we really encourage them to let the career coach know that they applied because our partners have a dedicated Job Search Navigator contact and we will let them know, "Hey, you have a spouse that applied for this position." And we'll let them know the position and further details that they need and they'll be able to locate that spouse's application. And that's great because they know this is a qualified spouse, that the JSN team has already looked through to make sure that they are meeting all the qualifications so they're going to pull that application and look it over.

And I'd also like to note that if they would like another set of referrals, we can absolutely do that. We ask that it's just every 30 days just to make sure that we can really support all the spouses that are looking for this service. It's become increasingly popular, just it's been really a wonderful program that we've seen grow. So, we want to make sure we can support as many spouses as possible, but we are more than happy to run another search either with the same criteria or if the spouse has learned they may want to change it up a little bit, or look in a different direction, or maybe they're moving and they just have to change different things like that. So, they're definitely able to submit another request. And I think it's just a great service for those spouses that are moving to those new locations. And even those overseas spouses, they have limited resources. So, it's really nice to be able to have a team that's dedicated to knowing all their skill sets and looking and seeing what's available in a location that they're probably not very familiar with.

Bruce Moody:

This is awesome. This is a great tool, but as you mentioned, you're also working one-on-one with these individuals as they're trying to either maintain or restart their career. So, when I have conversations with the career coaches, they always have a ton of amazing stories to share. And I'm really hoping that both of you have a story or two to share. And I'm going to start with you, Kristina.

Kristina Santos:

Yes, Bruce, thank you. I would love to share some success stories and just my experience in working as a SECO career coach very closely with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. MSEP partners have hired more than 220,000 military spouses across every employment sector. So, when I first think of success, I think of the spouses that I have worked with who have a variety of backgrounds, qualifications and interests. They're in a variety of locations and they've gone on to find jobs with MSEP partners. I did work with one military spouse in our SECO Career Readiness Coaching Package. So together we met several times so we strategized elements of networking messages, we completed a federal and private sector resume review, discussed some interview preparation, utilized the MSEP job search tool and the Job Search Navigator service, as

well as some additional resources through Military OneSource to support them through a move. And this spouse has actually accepted a position with the Internal Revenue Service, which is a federal agency and also an MSEP partner, so that was a huge success for that military spouse. And I just hopefully contributed to a small part of that incredible journey.

But I really think about the success stories of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership, I constantly go back to what you said earlier, Bruce, about just the spouses that I've worked with that are hearing about MSEP for the very first time. Just the burst of hope and confidence and enthusiasm and motivation that they get from discovering these companies and organizations that see all of them, that see their abilities, but also see their military spouse role. And they want to honor that and they're committed to that. I believe pursuing your job search journey and your military life journey from a place of worthiness like that, that feels like the true victory to me. As a career coach, all of our sessions through SECO are conducted virtually over the phone, but I have been doing this for almost nine years now, and I feel like I can actually tell when a spouse that I'm working with is starting to stand more and more in their power. It feels like I can see them standing a little bit taller.

Another way that I've witnessed success is actually in having the opportunity to observe the long-term impact that being employed by an MSEP partner can have on countless military spouses. So, through our SECO specialized coaching packages, many military spouses that I've worked with might continue to pursue career coaching even after they have found or landed a job, because they may be interested in other opportunities like entrepreneurship or professional development. So, in our continued relationship, I've also witnessed how being employed by an MSEP partner just allows military spouses to feel seen and accepted and supported and valued for their role as an employee, but also valued for being a military spouse as well. And I think that this profound support really allows, again, military spouses to show up at their best. It allows them to flourish and thrive, and really make the biggest impact possible on their organization.

I am also, as I mentioned, I'm a military spouse and I'm employed by an MSEP partner. So, through experiencing three deployments, two, soon to be three military moves to date, being granted the opportunity to work on my own and achieve my own professional aspirations while navigating life as a mom, as a military spouse, it's really changed my life, and my family and it motivates me every single day to keep showing up for other military spouses and to stay hard at work. So really the impact of MSEP, it's remarkable. I really believe that its influence is infinite, and in this way, the Military Spouse Employment Partnership really adds value and sparks success for both its partners, but also for many military spouses as well.

Bruce Moody:

I'm getting energy just listening to you. Oh, wow. Anne, your turn. What have you got for us?

Anne Kelly:

Yeah, we absolutely love and look for the opportunity to share our spouse's successes. I have one I think really shows how we all work together on their behalf. So, we have a partner, Premise Health, and they've been a partner since 2017. They received an application from a spouse that went through our JSN program and the spouse applied for a health screening coordinator position. They notified the career coach that they were working with after they applied and that coach was able to notify the JSN team who works really closely with the MSEP specialist. And so that specialist was able to connect with Premise Health and let them know that they had a spouse application waiting for them for consideration. And since she was a JSN referral, the partner knew the spouse was qualified and a great candidate, and she was offered the job.

And I have another one that I think just shows how it can really enhance your job search when you're using the JSN program, and there's that dedicated contact with the MSEP partner that is looking for these applications from our spouses. So, another partner of ours since 2012, Wellness Corporate Solutions, they received a spouse's application for a registration coordinator. They called the spouse within a day of receiving the application and with two different job offers. Both roles allowed a lot of flexibility and gave the spouse options to see which was the best fit for her. So that was amazing to see that not only did that partner see the value in that spouse, but they wanted to provide her with more than one opportunity to consider working for them.

Bruce Moody:

That's so awesome. We could go on. I'm just really excited about all of this. So, let's actually back up a little bit. So, we're talking about engaging MSEP, but what would you recommend for spouses before they engage with MSEP partners? And I guess you want to start with that, Kristina.

Kristina Santos:

Yeah, sure. Military spouses, it's a great idea to contact a SECO career coach. They can do that by calling Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 anytime they have questions or need assistance. SECO career coaches, we can recommend tools for you to use as a military spouse, such as the MySECO Resume Builder, our On-Demand Resume Review service, the Job Search Navigator service that we spoke a lot about and many others. Military spouses should also visit the MySECO website to learn about networking, career options, interview preparation and much more. So, through connecting with SECO and other resources and services and tools that Military OneSource provides, I believe you'll find a network of support that can really help you thrive in your career aspirations and enhance the quality of life for your entire military family.

Using this kind of support, I think it is one of the most courageous things that military spouses can do. They are so used to working hard independently and being resilient, but using the support and benefits available to you, it really means that you're taking action,

that you have a growth mindset and that you trust that the best is yet to come. So once again, reach out to a SECO career coach. We're really here to help you throughout your MilLife employment journey, and we look forward to working with you.

Bruce Moody:

It has been a pleasure talking to the both of you, but I want to just end this by giving you each a final opportunity for a word of motivation or encouragement. I wonder if you have one.

Anne Kelly:

Yeah, I'll start and give Kristina a break from talking. Yeah, I would definitely say that I think when spouses see all the resources that are offered to them through SECO and through MSEP, and through all these different things that are just so plentiful when they're looking through either through their career coaches or there's so much self-directed resource information on the portals that they see that they are not alone. They have so much available to them. So, I would hate for anybody to ever limit themselves and think that there's just nothing available for them or something is too hard to overcome. So, Kristina mentioned that phone number, and when in doubt, please call it and just let us know your story, let us know what you're trying to accomplish. And I can almost guarantee that there's going to be a resource available for you during that conversation that will help you with whatever situation you're in. So certainly, know that these resources are there for you, they're free for you, they're available 24/7, and feel free to just reach out, look on the portal and connect with us whenever you have a question.

Bruce Moody:

Kristina, last words from you, please.

Kristina Santos:

Yes, I think Anne said it perfectly, just to end everything with the idea that you are not alone. This military spouse life, it can be very demanding and be very difficult, but there are services and resources in place where we understand what you're going through. And we also want to honor your role as a military spouse but we also want to honor all the parts of you that were there before military life and that might be there after military life too. And so, as Anne mentioned, even if you're not sure if it's something that we can help with, please contact us, contact Military OneSource, ask to speak with a SECO career coach. We do want to hear your stories to honor and meet you where you are and help you either discover where you might want to go, or help you get there and really live the life that was always meant to be yours. So just remember that you're valuable and worthy today, but we're also here to help you have that hope and reach for tomorrow too.

Bruce Moody:

Kristina Santos and Anne Kelly, thank you for the amazing work that you do for military spouses and thanks for joining us today on the podcast.

Anne Kelly:

Thank you, Bruce.

Kristina Santos:

Yeah, thank you.

Bruce Moody:

Thank you. Want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, we're a call center, we're all over social media, and now we're a podcast covering all sorts of topics to help military families navigate military life so please subscribe. I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.