

Military OneSource Podcast — MilSpouse Job Search Tips

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](https://militaryonesource.mil).

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Today we're tackling something very important to military spouses, and that is seeking employment. It's no secret that hopping from place to place and juggling the curveballs of military life makes job hunting a bit of a roller coaster for military spouses.

But that's why we're here — to talk about turning those challenges into opportunities. So, we're bringing you interviews that I conducted with attendees at the last Military Spouse Employment Partnership annual event, where we were welcoming MSEP's newest partner companies and organizations.

MSEP is a Defense Department initiative that connects spouses looking for careers with more than 700 employers across industries who've committed to recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining military spouses.

So, I'm here at the MSEP annual event and as you can hear, there's a lot of excitement around me — a lot of people around me. I'm going to be talking with some of these people, and we've got some great military spouse hiring success stories and job search tips for you from employers, hiring experts and fellow military spouses to help you in your journey.

So first up, we have Kerri Hill, who is an MSEP specialist. So, first question, Kerri, what myth do you want to dispel for military spouses who are considering getting back into work or looking for a job?

Kerri Hill:

When I worked as a career coach on the SECO side, I would hear spouses say, "I don't have the experience. I don't have the skills." But then when you dig down deeper and talk to them, you hear all of these skills coming out because they have so very many. I was so impressed every time I talked to a spouse. I would just be like, "Wow, you were amazing." And so, I think that's something — just being confident who they are and their skill set — because they absolutely have them.

Bruce Moody:

Really good advice. Question: What initial steps should military spouses start with?

Kerri Hill:

I would really recommend that they reach out to SECO first, the Spouse Education Career Opportunities program. Talk to the career advisors. Talk to the career coaches, and then check out the MSEP portal. Really get in. Log in. Check out the jobs and opportunities. Check out our LinkedIn page. Watch our Partner Connect. Really utilize all those services that we have because we have so many, and we really want you to use them.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks, Kerri. You've mentioned some really fantastic resources like the Spouse Education Career Opportunities program, where people can access the MSEP job search and career coaches. We're going to link to these resources on our podcast page on militaryonesource.mil. So, thank you, Kerri, for being with us today. Really appreciate it.

What we want to do now is transition because what we want to do is dive a little deeper into these resources. And for that, we have a military spouse. Chelsea Pifer is a marketing communications specialist with Navy Federal Credit Union.

Chelsea, I understand that you've benefited directly from a specific initiative. It's called the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot. This is a competitive multi-year program through the DOD and Hiring Our Heroes. It provides spouses with paid 12-week fellowships at employers across industries and locations. And I would really like for you to talk about that in your experiences.

Chelsea Pifer:

Thank you, Bruce. It's great to be with you. I do want to speak directly to the military spouses tuning in right now just to say that this program is real. It actually works. The companies who are hiring are wonderful. I know there are a lot of twists and turns in military life. I know sometimes we can expend a lot of energy working on something that really doesn't come to fruition, but this is not one of those things. It's a 12-week program; it's paid; and you also have a day where you do professional development with Hiring Our Heroes.

But basically, you put in a resume release where companies can see your skills. They are companies that are military-friendly and more specifically, they're military spouse-friendly. They're eager to hire military spouses. You go through the normal interviewing process with those companies, and hopefully you get matched with one. It's mutually agreeable to the company and to the spouse. And one of the most important things is the idea is there has to be a permanent position waiting at the end.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks, Chelsea. Really awesome. Really appreciate your insight on this.

At this point, we're going to pivot. We're going to shift. We have with us now Kat Calvo who we're going to speak with. Kat is a military spouse. She's also chief operating officer for the Folk Institute. This is an organization that helps individuals and organizations acquire the skills and insights needed to achieve success in the workplace.

So, with that Kat, what would be your pitch to military spouses about what they can bring to organizations?

Kat Calvo:

I would say bring their authentic self. At the end of the day, we've had spouses who go into organizations who are reluctant to share that they are military spouses because of the stigma that's attached to being a military spouse. But I would encourage them to be open about it. Be upfront about it. At the end of the day, if you want a career to move with you, you need to be successful in it. So, that's one thing.

And another one is communication. Communication is key. Speak up. If something is not working for you, let the organization know. It would be helpful to share. And we're not saying disclose everything. Of course there's boundaries, but definitely communicate because we cannot read minds. Organizations like ours are more than willing to help out and accommodate when we can, but we don't know what we don't know, basically.

Bruce Moody:

That's great. Thank you so much. Speaking up for yourself and being true to yourself. That's great advice for the workplace and in life. So, Kat, thank you so much. Again, we're going to pivot.

We have with us Jacey Eckhart. Jacey is a transition master coach for military.com — their veteran employment project. So, Jacey, a constant in military life is change. Military spouses face PCSs and frequent separations from their service members, getting settled in new communities, shouldering different responsibilities as they adapt to military life and its demands. So, Jacey, my question is, how can a service member support their military spouse as they navigate their own career pursuits?

Jacey Eckhart:

I think it's about the way you frame this, and it takes no time to frame something the right way. Too often I will hear something from a younger spouse whose service member has told them, "It's Army first, family second." This is the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life. Instead, I like to tell people, you've got to think of the military like a really challenging environment, like Alaska. Nobody's surprised that in Alaska you have to wear a snow suit every day after October because that's just ... it's Alaska. Ditto the military. The military is going to do their thing, and they're the environment. Sometimes they're a natural disaster coming in.

Bruce Moody:

Jacey, what about new opportunities and changes within the spouse's career? Is there a particularly good time or point when you see military spouses able to focus more in their careers?

Jacey Eckhart:

Well, I think there comes a point in families, and this is especially when you've had a spouse who's been a stay home parent. Your kids start to age out of that. And I think it's when your oldest kid gets a driver's license — that's the moment that all of a sudden you can see a moment where you are not absolutely necessary. And that's the moment for sure that you should start looking for a job. Because what ends up happening is if you wait and wait and wait until your kids all go to college and your spouse gets out, it's actually too late. It's not too late to get a job, but the kind of job you really want. We have been taught so hard — figure it out yourself; do it yourself; don't complain. And people think that asking for help is giving up. Asking for help is not giving up. Asking for help is you refusing to give in.

Bruce Moody:

That's it. Good advice. Thanks, Jacey. I think that your take on military life being a challenging environment is something that we can all relate to. So, we appreciate your advice.

Once again, we're going to shift gears because I have more people to talk to. We have with us Veronica Serantes. We're going to be talking with her. She's going to be sharing her advice on understanding one's worth in the job market. Veronica is a military spouse of more than 20 years, and she works with RecruitMilitary. This is a military to civilian recruiting company that connects military veterans, transitioning military members and their spouses with employment opportunities. So, Veronica, my question is, what are some of the basic questions that military spouses can really ask themselves, which might be helpful in helping them to realize their career goals?

Veronica Serantes:

I think the first question we have to ask is what are we passionate about? What will enhance me as a person? What will add value to my mission? For me, it was understanding the struggles transitioning service members face when it comes to finding employment opportunities. My spouse transitioned out of active duty back in 2007 when the whole financial crisis started. We struggle financially to find employment, and that's when I found my new meaning in life. I wanted to be able to work with organizations that connect the military community with meaningful employment opportunities. And that's how I started working with the transition program.

I do think that every spouse first needs to understand what they have to offer the workforce. What are your skills? What are you good at? And from there, start building a network, so that they understand once again what their worth is. What their value is,

and also understanding the gaps that you have to be able to reach those professional goals. And when I say that, it's understanding, okay, do I have to go back to school? Do I have to get a certification? There's dozens of opportunities or programs that will give you free certification as a military spouse.

Bruce Moody:

Really good information. Thanks for sharing your insights, Veronica. It's so important. Military spouses need to understand how to tap into these resources, so thank you.

Again, we're going to transition. This time around, we're going to talk with Alice Heimerle. She's with VA USA. She's a matching and a recruiting specialist. Alice, the question I want to ask — I want to get deeper into the diversity of skills and talents that military spouses bring to the table. I really want to talk to you about this and maybe get you to shed some light on this topic.

Alice Heimerle:

So, military spouses are an amazing group of people because due to the lifestyle and the challenges that we face, whether that be ... I don't want to say that in a negative sense, but a lot of things in the life can be challenging. And so ...

Bruce Moody:

It's okay to say military life is rough and pretty awful sometimes, and it throws a lot of challenges at military spouses. We speak truth. So, you're dealing with military spouses who have had to really respond to a lot of stuff thrown at them.

Alice Heimerle:

Yeah, I mean, I think in general, that's just what comes with being a military spouse. So, I think as a military spouse, you want to put your best foot forward, and so often they have skills or they have degrees that they aren't able to utilize all the time because of the moving and changing of the frequency of that. I just want to say to military spouses that they have so much to offer and there is the right position out there for them.

Bruce Moody:

Thank you so much. Great talking with you, Alice. Finding your place in a new community can be daunting, of course.

We're going to move on this time around. We have Rona Jobe. Rona is the CEO of LVL-Up Strategies. If you're looking for them online, it's LVL-Up Strategies. This is an organization that helps women start their own businesses. Cool. So, Rona, what would be your message to military spouses who have moved to a new community but don't see any opportunities?

Rona Jobe:

Well, No. 1 would be get connected with MSEP obviously. No. 2 would be take a look at what skill set you can start to hone maybe online, maybe in your community, and how these skills could be transferable after your post. Or take a look at what it is that you

really enjoy, and if that's something that you would want to go into business. Then look to your right, look to your left at the other spouses in your installation or at your post, and see if any of these folks could be your potential business partners.

Bruce Moody:

Whether you're starting your own business or looking for a job, it's getting connected and making the most of where you are. That's critical. So, thank you for that. Appreciate it.

Finally, our final guest with us on the podcast, we have Rachelle Chapman. And Rachelle is director of the Adecco Group US Foundation. Rachelle, what we're looking for is a parting message that you would like to give military spouses as we wrap up this podcast.

Rachelle Chapman:

I would encourage them to know that you are not alone. Whatever your needs are as they relate to employment, career readiness, education, I promise you that there is — out of 700 employer partners that are here at the Military Spouse Employment Partnership Summit — there is somebody here that can help you and certainly many that want to help you.

Bruce Moody:

Perfect. Perfect way to end this podcast. Thank you so much Rachelle and thank you to all the MSEP partners who have joined us today. So, as you've heard from our speakers today, the journey for military spouses in seeking meaningful employment, it's filled with unique challenges and opportunities from embracing one's authentic self to strategically identifying as a military spouse in applications. Adaptability and a proactive approach, these are key. View the military life as a challenging environment that can be navigated successfully. Here it is with the right tools and resources available to you. Understanding the importance of identifying your passions, your skills and the wealth of resources available to you. It's so important while you're on this path. Remember, you're not alone in this journey. There are plenty of resources, communities, opportunities, ready to support you.

All right, so we're going to end it there. I want to thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you to everybody.

And I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always love to hear from you, so go into the program notes. There's a link.

You can send us a question, a comment or maybe an idea for a future podcast. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.