

Military OneSource Podcast — Military Spouse Appreciation Day/2024 Virtual Military Spouse Symposium

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. Today we're going to talk about military spouse appreciation. It's something we do this time every year. We have a lot of events coming up to be part of that observance. Joining me to talk about all of that is Josie Beets. Now Josie is with the Department's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. Josie, welcome to the podcast.

Josie Beets:

Thanks, Bruce. It's good to be with you today.

Bruce Moody:

Glad to have you with us. Let's talk about, well, why we honor military spouses. Let's just start it wide open from there.

Josie Beets:

Absolutely. We all are familiar with the service and sacrifices that our military families make. And the military spouse, in particular, is really at the center of that military family, supporting that service member who serves in harm's way.

Last year in the president's proclamation for Military Spouse Appreciation Day, he used a fantastic quote from John Milton, an English poet, and it's, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

And it's really a really elegant way to speak about what happens for military spouses who aren't necessarily the ones executing the mission but support the mission in their own way by supporting the family and the service member. And so Military Spouse

Appreciation Day is really a moment for us to stand back, recognize that service of spouses and the sacrifice as well.

Bruce Moody:

I really like that line. I'd not heard that before, but, yeah, you can easily see how much you can unpack from that.

We have a lot of things to talk about, a lot of events coming up, resources we want to highlight. We have a bunch of stuff happening in the month of May. Let's talk about something called the Virtual Military Spouse Symposium. There we are. The Virtual Military Spouse Symposium. I got it right. What is this event and what is it offering?

Josie Beets:

Yeah, Bruce. It just rolls off the tongue, I know.

Bruce Moody:

Of course. Thank you. Thank you for your support.

Josie Beets:

Well, this is actually the eighth year that we've held, through the SECO program, the Virtual Military Spouse Symposium, each one with a little bit of a different focus, a little bit of a different flavor. This year we are really focusing ... it's all about employment. It's all about being career ready and providing tools and help to military spouses to make sure that they can be career ready.

The goal really is, with virtual events in particular, we want to make this as accessible to as many spouses and families as possible. And so that's really the focus this year. We've got three weeks of events starting on May 14.

We're going to have sessions Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from about 10:00 a.m. to about 4:00 p.m. You can pick and choose which sessions you want to go to. You're under no obligation to come to all of them, although we would love to have you. And then we're wrapping up the month in that last week of May with two days of virtual hiring events featuring our Military Spouse Employment Partnership employers who have active jobs and are looking to hire military spouses, in particular. So we're really excited about it.

Bruce Moody:

There's links in the program notes to the event coming up, and you mentioned in your answer there, SECO. And I will undo that acronym for those who don't know it.

Josie Beets:

Oh.

Bruce Moody:

No, that's OK.

Josie Beets:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

That's OK.

Josie Beets:

Thank you. Look, alphabet soup is my favorite third language to know.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, well, I mean, I will tell you, I will have conversations with people, and I will say DOD, and they look at me like I have to explain. We don't want to assume.

Josie Beets:

Right.

Bruce Moody:

So SECO is the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. That's the program, which is hosting this event. And you're focusing this year a lot on spouse employment. So why are you focusing on the employment situation among military spouses?

Josie Beets:

We — I say the royal “we” in the sort of “DOD we” sense of the word — I think have realized, particularly over the last decade-plus, the importance of providing support when it comes to career to military spouses. Just because you marry someone who has a passion to serve our country as an active-duty service member, or member of the Guard and reserve, does not mean that you should have to sacrifice your professional ambitions as well.

And in recognition of that, the DOD stood up the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program to provide support to make it easier, although not easy. It's important to note. Easier for spouses to continue their employment journey, to have employment prospects no matter where the military may send them and their family.

Bruce Moody:

So employment for a military spouse, not easy, as you're explaining. Why is that? Why do we have such a high level of unemployment among military spouses?

Josie Beets:

Yeah, sometimes it's been referred to as the intractable problem. And one of the reasons is the nature of military service means that military families can expect to move every two to three years. And that mobility makes starting, building and sustaining employment difficult.

And so right now we see about a 21% unemployment rate for military spouses based on our Active Duty Spouse Survey that we have here at DOD. It's been about at that level for the past decade since we've been measuring it in that way. And obviously we'd love to see that number much, much lower. But it's a recognition of the fact that that mobility of the family makes continued employment difficult.

Mobility isn't the only reason. Our military spouses are asked to shoulder a lot of the burdens of the homefront. They are typically the primary parent, responsible for kids in order to provide the service member with the maximum flexibility to serve our country. They are often before and after those military moves acclimating to a new community, finding a home, finding schools for kids, dialing into a new network, finding a new church.

All those sorts of things can take time and are really crucial to the readiness of our families and the comfort our families need when they arrive in a new community. So all of those things impact the ability of a military spouse to be career ready.

Bruce Moody:

You referenced the Active Duty Spouse Survey. I really want to make kind of a sidebar here. For military families who get these surveys, I really encourage, we really encourage, you to fill them out. They really matter. Your results from those surveys get funneled into reports, which literally go to Congress and then Congress authorizes us money.

So go ahead when you get these surveys, please respond to them. It helps define what it is that we're trying to do. And then in turn gets us the money that we give to provide the tools, the resource, the connections ... in this case to help spouses build their careers and their employment prospects.

So, Josie, let's talk about some of those tools and the resources that you'll be showcasing during the month of May.

Josie Beets:

Absolutely. Like I said, we're really excited about the different sessions that we've got. In particular, one that I personally am excited about, is talking about the employment strategies, the tools that we have in the SECO program, for every stage of your professional career seeking journey. So that means ... what services and supports do we provide for someone who may be entry level, who may be younger, just coming out of college or maybe out of high school and doesn't really know what they want to be when they grow up?

To be honest with you, Bruce, I'm much older than that at this point, and I'm still not sure what I want to be when I grow up. So it's an exercise that's helpful for everyone, but the supports that we provide for mid-career folks who maybe have a little bit of experience but are looking to really accelerate their career, folks who are more senior and are looking for leadership roles, and how we can support them through the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program at every step along the journey.

And so that session's actually running twice during that first week, and that's going to be a real opportunity for us to connect resources with the experiences that military spouses are having today in their lives and how we can serve them. So that's one way.

We're going to talk about remote employment. We're going to talk to some employers about the interview process and how can I ace my interview with you. We're going to talk about negotiating salary and compensation. That's something that always feels very mysterious sometimes, and so we're going to break that down and make it easier for spouses to understand that process.

We're also going to talk about entrepreneurship and how spouses can dial into that. And we're actually going to bring in spouses who have been successful in their entrepreneur journey and hear from them about the resources they used, the support that they had, what was successful and what maybe wasn't.

We're also going to close that first week of sessions with an incredible roundtable with some of the branch winners of the Military Spouse of the Year program. I think we're going to have the Army, Navy and Space Force Spouse of the Years talk to us about their career journeys and what they want other military spouses to know about spouse employment and the challenges and the successes that are out there.

Our second week, we are actually going to dive deeper into some of these topics in preparation for the virtual hiring week that's going to be in week three. And those sessions are really framed around discussion and question and answer.

And so there'll be short presentations from some of our SECO career coaches that provide one-on-one coaching to spouses. And then we have built-in time for discussion Q&A: bring your problems so we can help you solve them.

During that week, we'll also have what we're calling our "drop in anytime" sessions, which are sort of two-hour blocks of time where spouses can come and have their resume reviews or conduct a mock interview to get that practice under their belt for the Virtual Hiring Fair in week three.

Bruce Moody:

So there's a lot going on. Yeah, you're going to be busy. I have to tell you, another sidebar. This is a really interesting conversation, because I was having a conversation with a college age student who was very, very concerned, very concerned because she didn't know what she wanted to do with her career. And I was like, "None of us do."

Josie Beets:

None of us do.

Bruce Moody:

It's a journey and there's opportunities and you just take them. And before you know it, you've taken twists and turns, and it's a great adventure and just enjoy the ride. And I think that you guys really get it, especially when you're dealing with a highly mobile population like military spouses.

So with that, you mentioned prep sessions for the Military Spouse Employment Partnership Virtual Hiring Fairs. Would you please tell us a little bit ... what is the Military Spouse Employment Partnership? Well, it's sometimes called MSEP, but what is this partnership and how does it help military spouses?

Josie Beets:

MSEP, as we call it. Always have to have the acronym.

Bruce Moody:

Of course.

Josie Beets:

The Military Spouse Employment Partnership is just this really fantastic tool that we have to connect employers, primarily in private industry, although we do have some great federal partners as well, to military spouse talent. To provide that one-to-one linkage in between the two.

And so we have over 700 employer partners in the Military Spouse Employment Partnership with every single one of them looking to hire military spouses. They are interested in you. And so what we're doing is we're bringing 75 on each day, so 150 total, hopefully, to participate in a Virtual Hiring Fair where spouses will actually get to connect with employers looking to hire.

They will have open jobs available for spouses to investigate prior to the hiring fair, which is really, really exciting. So you can do some research and you can find out which employer looks best to you and bookmark those and go back to them.

And what we're doing in that prep week, in particular, is one, we want to provide you with the tools needed to navigate the hiring fair. For anyone who's used a Zoom meeting platform, it will be very familiar to them, but how to navigate that to maximize your efficiency and effectiveness. We also will have live resume reviews from our SECO career coaches.

We will have interviews, mock interviews, where you can get immediate feedback on your interview skills and tips in how to improve or what to emphasize. We're also going to be reviewing federal resumes, which are sometimes challenging for folks to navigate the different requirements of a federal resume versus sort of a more private sector-focused resume.

And then finally, we're going to talk about networking, primarily in the virtual environment in platforms like LinkedIn, but also how you can network with these employers that you're going to be connecting with through the hiring fair.

And then finally, we also have built in time to that prep week, what we're calling the Ask Me Anything, just an open Q&A for an hour where spouses can come and ask any questions of our SECO career coaches or our SECO program staff to make sure that they're ready as possible for that Virtual Hiring Fair in week three.

Bruce Moody:

Interesting. So May is going to be a busy time, but of course you guys are available all year-round, 24/7. So we have in the program notes the number to Military OneSource,

the toll-free number. Also the link to MySECO. Josie, what I'd like you to do as we sort of wrap up this conversation is to talk about the SECO career coaches, the advisors. Who are these people, what are their backgrounds and what do they offer military spouses and how can they connect with them? All of that. I want you to talk about the whole thing.

Josie Beets:

I am so glad you asked that, Bruce, because sometimes it feels like a well-guarded secret, but it's really, really not. And so one of the most amazing things we offer, as part of the SECO program, is the SECO Career Center staffed by our SECO career coaches and advisors. And what that is, is as a spouse you have the ability to connect one-on-one with an individual career coach on anything career related that you need.

We have some career coaching packages that you can dial into if you're not sure where to start, but you get assigned a career coach when you call in and that career coach will be with you all through your journey. And so some things that our career coaches have helped spouses with: They've helped spouses find federal careers; they've helped spouses navigate a Myers-Briggs results; they've helped spouses determine what it is they want to be when they grow up; they've even helped spouses prepare personal essays for graduate school applications. Really anything that's going to advance your career, that career coach and advisor can help you with.

And it's so funny, I'm at the stage in my career where I have peers who have engaged with career coaches that they have hired, that they have paid money for, my fellow military spouses. And I say, "Ladies and gentlemen, please, come and receive my free career coaching at SECO."

And I will tell you a little peek behind the curtain, Bruce, is one of the things that I'm honored to do is I get to listen to calls every month and sort of listen in and make sure everything's going well that our career coaches and advisors are doing.

And I am always blown away with the support these coaches are providing for our spouses, the empathy that they bring to the table, the knowledge base that they bring to the table for military spouses that have incredibly varied interests and experience. It's just always really wonderful to hear.

And so I really encourage folks, you can call in to the Military OneSource number and get connected with those career coaches. You can also use our live chat feature on myseco.militaryonesource.mil to schedule that first appointment with a career coach. It's just an incredible resource that more and more people need to be tiling into.

Bruce Moody:

Josie, thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you come back.

Josie Beets:

Oh, absolutely, Bruce. You can't keep me away.

Bruce Moody:

All right. Deal. We're going to be making the arrangements as soon as we finish this. All right, great. Josie Beets is with the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Josie Beets:

Thank you for having me, Bruce. It's been great.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely.

And want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. Click on the link in the program notes to send us a comment, a question, maybe an idea for a future episode. And 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.