



# VETERANS' **LEGAL** CAREER FAIR

The **Veterans' Legal Career Fair** was founded as a unique opportunity for legal employers to meet lawyers who are veterans or active-duty service members preparing for a transition out of the military and military spouses. This and future webinars are meant to help VLCF candidates prepare for the event and any subsequent interviews. We hope you find it to be a useful resource!

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## Getting Started with Your Job Search

Start with self-reflection: What are your **strengths** and **interests**?

Start by thinking about your past experiences – both in the military as well as any other personal or professional experience. What did you enjoy the most about these prior experiences? What did you enjoy the least? What factors are truly important to you? Below are some specific questions you might consider:

- What types of matters do you like to deal with?
  - Are there any academic subjects that captured your attention in law school?
  - Are there any other areas of law that you otherwise feel drawn towards or want to learn more about? For example:
    - family law
    - immigration
    - finance
    - real estate
    - intellectual property
    - trusts and estates
    - litigation
  - What type of legal work do you prefer or is best suited to your strengths? For example:
    - Are you strong on paying attention to detail and would prefer to draft contract language for a corporate deal?
    - Do you have strong oral skills and would prefer to litigate an issue before a court?
    - Do you enjoy research and writing and would prefer to draft legal briefs or memoranda?
- What type of work setting do you prefer? Each type of employer offers a different overall quality of life.
  - government – generally a more predictable work schedule, relatively greater job security, and lower compensation compared to private practice.
  - not-for-profit – opportunity to work on social causes, a more predictable work schedule, and generally lower compensation compared to government or private practice.
  - private practice (large or small) – often more expectation in terms of work hours, diverse practice areas at large firm vs. few practice areas at boutique firms, and generally greater compensation.
  - corporate in-house department – generally smaller, more-focused practices, a more predictable work schedule (although not always) and higher compensation compared to government or non-profit practice.
- What types of clients do you want to represent?
  - individuals – smaller private practice law firms, non-profits, and some government (public defender)
  - corporations – Private practice law firms and corporate in-house departments
  - the government
- How do you want to spend your day?
  - reading and writing
  - going to court

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- advising clients on statutes and regulations
  - working on finance, tax, or bankruptcy aspects of transactions
  - dealing with clients
- Do you enjoy the challenge of an adversarial practice, or would you prefer a more collegial environment?
  - Litigation – more adversarial
  - Tax – more collegial
- What are your lifestyle needs?
  - Do you have any special family considerations?
  - How important is your level of compensation?
  - Do you need or want free time or a flexible schedule?
- Do you have geographic constraints?
  - National private practice law firms tend to be located in large cities.
  - Many government jobs are also located in large cities, particularly Washington DC and state capitals.
- How do you define success?
  - prestige of employer or position
  - compensation
  - making a difference in the community
  - work-life balance
  - enjoyment of your day-to-day tasks
- What trade-offs are you willing to make?
  - geographic location
  - compensation for free time
  - money for responsibility
- Do you like juggling several short-term matters or working on fewer long-term ones?
- How predictable of a schedule to you want to have? Some practice areas allow for more predictable schedules than others.
  - advisory / policy / real estate / tax vs. corporate / litigation / bankruptcy

## Preparing Your Resume & Cover Letter

- Translating your military experience
  - Many of the skills that you developed in the military are valued by the private sector. For example:
    - Leadership – If you had individuals under your supervision, highlight your ability to direct, delegate to, motivate and inspire others.
    - Teamwork – Your ability to work well and collaborate with others to achieve a common goal is a valuable trait in all environments.
    - Effective communication – The ability to effectively communicate, both orally and in writing, and internally and externally to the organization is valued.
    - Adaptability – The ability to quickly adapt to changing environments and situations is a useful skill in many practice areas.
    - Management – The ability to effectively manage the details of multiple assignments is a valued skill.
    - Dependability – Responsiveness and timeliness are important skills which translate to effective time management and the ability to meet deadlines.
    - Striving for Excellence – Awards and other qualifications received during your military career, whether a Combat Action Badge or Navy Achievement Medal, demonstrate your competence and ability to excel. Highlight awards and qualifications that were given for skills that would be valuable to a potential employer.
- Think about what phrases you can use to showcase your transferable skills, such as:
  - Self-starting/proactive
  - Advising
  - Problem solving
  - Conflict resolution
  - Public Relations
- Use action verbs when describing your experience, such as:
  - Advised / Represented
  - Directed / Managed / Supervised
  - Analyzed / Examined
  - Developed / Implemented
- What to highlight in your cover letter vs. your resume: Your cover letter is an opportunity to highlight what cannot be communicated effectively on your resume. It is also your opportunity to try to establish a connection with a particular employer. Rather than simply summarizing your resume, use your cover letter to communicate the following:
  - Why you are submitting your application to this specific employer, how you learned about the employer, and basic information about yourself.
  - Why you are interested in THIS particular employer and the type of work the employer does. This is where your self-reflection comes in. Demonstrate that you've done your research, and highlight how your specific qualifications and skills will make you a good fit for the employer's needs. Focus on why hiring you would be good for THEM. This is an opportunity to talk about specific accomplishments of which you are especially proud which you are not able to adequately showcase on your resume.
  - What NOT to include
    - Use your best judgment. For example, do not talk about how working for the employer would provide you with the chance to develop your skills. Talk about what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you. You are selling yourself to the employer – not the other way around.
  - Close by expressing your excitement at the prospect of interviewing with the employer, and let them know that you will be happy to provide any additional information requested.

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Thank the employer for their consideration.

- Proof your resume and cover letter – is it clear, concise, and error-free? Keep in mind that your cover letter will be the employer’s introduction to you as a candidate, and it is also your first “writing sample”, so make sure it’s well written. Your cover letter is your first opportunity to demonstrate your written communication skills and your attention to detail. After you’ve proofed it, ask a couple of other people to review it and provide you with feedback – someone from your law school career services office if possible, a trusted colleague, a friend or relative. If possible have someone who has no military experience proof your resume and cover letter to see if they understand the language you have used and the message you want to convey.
- Speaking of writing samples, some employers may request one during your interview, so be sure to select an example of your best written work just in case. This should be a short document – no more than a few pages of persuasive writing which demonstrates your analytical ability and advocacy skills. Again, this should be well-written, well formatted, and absolutely error free. Spell check, proof, and have a friend review it. Your communication and attention to detail skills are going to be evaluated through this writing sample.

## The Interview Process

The interview process is comprised of 3 stages:

1. preparing for the interview;
  2. participating in the interview; and
  3. following up after the interview.
- Preparing for the interview is absolutely critical:
    - Research each employer. Know basic facts about the Firm or entity you're interviewing with: when it was founded, what departments or practice areas it has, where it has offices, what areas it is best recognized in, recent high-profile cases or deals in the news, recent award or accolades – and be prepared to talk about what it is about that specific employer that excites you. Additionally, you will sometimes know the identity of the person who will interview you – do your research on them as well; try to find a common connection if there is one.
    - Know what you bring to the table.
      - Be prepared to talk about how you will add value and contribute to the firm/company/entity if hired.
      - Emphasize character traits and experiences that have been shaped by the military, such as integrity, discipline, duty, loyalty, working under stressful conditions and under time pressure, and management skills – and translate them into the traits each specific employer is looking for.
      - Be prepared to give specific examples, such as your perseverance in accomplishing a specific task or your supervisory experience leading a team (anything from infantry squad leader to lead Trial Counsel).
    - Mock Interview. Set up a mock interview a colleague or trusted friend. Many career services offices will also be glad to do mock interviews with alumni.
  - The Interview Itself
    - Make a positive first impression:
      - Dress in a conservative business suit.
      - Get there early.
      - Make a connection – greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, eye contact, and a smile.
      - Show your interviewer that you are paying attention and listening carefully to what they say – maintain eye contact and nod
      - Speak clearly – give direct answers, be thoughtful, take a moment to think about your answer if needed
      - Know your audience – be relatable.
        - Avoid military jargon and acronyms, as well as the use of “Sir” and “Ma’am”. The interviewer likely does not know what military terms mean and what military acronyms stand for and they are likely for things not relevant to civilian life. Your use of them might turn off the interviewer and demonstrate a lack of relatability—and flexibility.
    - Handling tough questions:
      - Anticipate tough questions and be prepared with thoughtful responses which showcase your strengths. If you know you have a weakness in your record (for example, a poor grade in a law school course or a lengthy gap in your employment history), be prepared to address it in a forthright and positive manner. A note for military spouses on this point about employment gaps – don't be afraid to address any gaps in an honest and straight-forward manner. Employers will understand if you explain that for a certain period – say related to your spouse's deployment - you took a career hiatus to focus on family obligations.



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- Some other tough questions could include:
  - tell me about the accomplishment you're most proud of in your military experience.
  - what do you like least about your current job / what did you like least about your most recent job?
  - what skills are you lacking? if I were to contact your last supervisor and ask which area of your work needs the most improvement, what will I learn?
  - describe the best boss you ever reported to. If you gave your boss a performance review, what would she or he need to change?
  - what would your colleagues say about you?
  - what sets you apart from other applicants?
  - tell me about the toughest negotiation (or situation) you've ever been in.
  - how do you involve your team when an important decision needs to be made?
  - how long are you willing to fail at this job before you succeed?
  - what questions do you have for me?
- Writing an effective and appropriate thank you note
  - Handwritten, typewritten, or e-mail? I recommend either handwritten (if your handwriting is easily legible) or typewritten (if you have any doubt about the legibility of your handwriting) on stationary. An email can come across as impersonal and does not convey that you were willing to take the time to compose and mail a letter.
  - Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to interview with her or him.
  - Be genuine and let your personality come through. Personalize it, reference something unique that you discussed with your interviewer – a shared interest, for instance. The last thing you want is for your note to sound generic or scripted. This is your chance to remind the interviewer of who you are among a sea of dozens of other candidates she or he may have met with during the career fair.
  - Reiterate your interest in the employer and what it does
  - Remind the interviewer of what you bring to the table and how your contributions can immediately add value to the employer's practice
  - Close with a final thank you, letting the interviewer know that you appreciate the time spent with you and how much you look forward to the opportunity for a follow up meeting.
  - Take your time, spell check and proof your thank-you note!
  - Always send your thank you note promptly (within one or two days) following your interview. One of the worst things you can say in your thank-you note is "I'm sorry it's taken me so long to get back to you."
  - No matter how well you clicked with the interviewer, keep the tone of your thank-you note professional and appropriate. Stay away from coming off as being too eager or effusive in your praise of the interviewer or employer, as this may be perceived as disingenuous.
  - Stay away from grand gestures such as sending a gift, which may make the employer feel uncomfortable, or calling to follow up before waiting an appropriate amount of time – this could be annoying and perceived as demonstrating a lack of judgment.
  - Have a trusted colleague read your thank-you notes and be brutally honest with you.