



CAMERON-BROOKS, INC.

Professional Recruiters

Roger's Tip of the Month

"Location is a Big Deal"

Location preference is one of the hardest issues that JMOs face in conducting business career searches, as well as in managing business careers. How should location factor into your career search? If you limit yourself to one city, will you be able to find good employment? If you open up on location preference, will you ever be close to family in the future? Since you have been away from family for years, should you try to get geographically closer to them? Given that you are a talented person with a lot of leadership potential, how should you balance your professional ambition with your personal needs? It is only natural that you wrestle with these issues. The key is to wrestle with them BEFORE you launch into a career search. In other words, do your research to understand the trade-offs that come with location preferences and develop a strategy to help you make good career decisions.

One of the reasons we travel to military bases to meet with military officers face-to-face is to help them understand the issues surrounding career searches, location being one of them. You have invested a lot in your professional life to perform at an outstanding level, to earn good credentials and to establish a successful track record. Without carefully considering the role location will play in your career search, it can end up being a ball and chain around your neck. It is hard for me to watch people who have worked so hard to be successful allow location to hold them back from reaching their potential in the business world. Without good information, a lot of people make bad career decisions in this regard and end up having to conduct another career search 12 months after leaving the service. It is important to get it right the first time.

We also spend a lot of time talking with our Alumni who are navigating career decisions in the business world. Location continues to be an issue AFTER they make their initial career decisions. I spoke this week with an Alumnus who was offered an excellent promotion that was further away from family, and we tried to help her understand the issues and make a good decision.

Here are some things to think about when it comes to location.

1. Everybody has location preferences. I've been in the recruiting business for almost 4 decades, and I have never met a person who did not prefer one part of the country or one city to others. After all, we are all human and if all things were equal, who would not want to be in a familiar location or close to family? As I stated above, the question is not whether you have a location preference, but rather how you will manage location preference with regard to achieving your career goals.

2. What is your vision for your career? Too few candidates really ask themselves this question. Where do you want to be in your career 20 years from now? Do you see yourself as a development candidate, investing in your career and growing to the executive ranks of a company? Or, do you see yourself as a future middle manager, developing an expertise in a certain area of a business (what I refer to as a non-development candidate). Both are viable career opportunities, but the first one leads to future leadership and the second to future managers. Rank your leadership ambition on a 10 scale (10 very high, 1 very low and 5 average).

3. High leadership ambition. If you answer that you are an 8 or higher, then location should not be a discriminator in either your career search or in your career management. Instead, you should prioritize the quality of your experience, your ability to learn and develop new skills, the investment in your track record, etc. The quality of your

opportunity will have a very large role in determining your ability to translate your talent into career success. Am I saying that location should have nothing to do with your search if you have high leadership ambition? Am I saying that there are never exceptions to this? The answer is NO to both questions. Instead, I am saying that you should use geography as a tiebreaker between two equal career opportunities. In other words, location still plays a factor, but it is not a leading or a limiting factor.

4. It works the same in the military. Imagine that you joined the military with the intent of being a general officer some day (i.e., pretty high ambition). With regard to location, you tell the military that you only want to be located in Atlanta or in the Northeast for your career. Even if the military let you manage your career this way, how realistic would it be for you to compete for a general officer position? Making it to the top 10% of the military is competitive, especially if your peers have more diverse experience across the military. How credible of a leader would you be if your subordinates have broader experience than you do? The same holds true for multi-national corporations. Most FORTUNE 500 companies operate around the country and globe. Their best leaders usually have broad and diverse experiences over their careers, requiring good geographic flexibility.

5. Lesser leadership ambition. If you have lesser leadership ambition, then location can be more of a discriminator for you. In this case, the quality of your location can take the lead over the quality of your career opportunity. There are plenty of people who live near family and are content with simply having adequate employment. They are honest with themselves and realize that they may not be competitive for leadership positions, will likely have reduced financial reward and less challenging work, and may have higher risk of staying employable long-term. However, as long as you have lower leadership ambition, your long-term career potential in that location is not as big of a consideration. Again, there can be exceptions to this in major cities like New York City, but it is becoming more and more rare in a global economy.

6. The Law of the “Lid.” I’m borrowing this concept from a popular leadership book (The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership by Maxwell), and morphing it to fit a point on location. Take a minute to rank your attitude on living outside of your location preference for the RIGHT career opportunity (10 is a great attitude, 5 is average and 1 is the bottom). Your ambition ranking (see point 2) can never be higher than your location ranking. In other words, your location ranking will determine the “lid” on your career potential. Too many people rank themselves high on leadership ambition and low on location. This is just not realistic and, invariably, they figure this out after they are “under-employed” and unhappy in their first job after the military. There is nothing wrong with a lower location ranking as long as your leadership ambition ranking correlates. Know yourself! Successful people like to stretch and achieve more success. Leaders gravitate toward leadership. A success oriented person who lives in a good location at the expense of career opportunity will probably not be happy. It may take a year or so to come to the surface, but more-than-likely, it will. The key is to know yourself and develop a strategy to find a career opportunity that matches your nature.

7. Stretch in the first job out of the military. If you want to grow as a leader in the corporate world, pick the best opportunity that will allow you to stretch and learn in your FIRST job out of the military. It is hard to get on a fast track if you have a slow start in your business career. Once you have a successful business track record, it is easier to navigate your career closer to your geographic preference. I always find it funny that about 20% of our JMO candidates turn down job offers in their geographic preference in favor of opportunities in second or third choice locations. Invariably, they chose to aim really high in their first job outside of the military. With 4 or 5 years of top quality business experience, they know they will have more options to move closer to home AND stay on a leadership career path. One Alumnus of ours just accepted a Vice President position with a Johnson & Johnson division in his hometown. He’ll be able to stay there for the next 7 or 8 years around family AND be in a great job.

8. Long-term career planning. The operations tempo in the military has never been more demanding, especially with the War in Iraq. The long and frequent deployments have taken their toll on families. We are very empathetic to this situation. Some talented military officers are getting out of the military and moving home to be close to extended family with little consideration of their long-term career plans. As a result, they work for a year in their first job outside of the military and determine that they are not happy. Please consider two points. First, it is natural that quality of life will improve when you get out of the military (especially a war-time military). I always hear from

our Alumni in the business world that they are home on weekends, are able to take their vacations, are spending more time with their children and have more predictable schedules. Your ability to commit to birthdays, holidays, and family events makes it much easier to manage important relationships. This is NOT a function of your location preference, but rather a function of getting out of the military into the right career opportunity with a good company. Second, work hard to focus on the long-term. As in point #2, begin with the end in mind by considering where you want your career 20 years from now. The key is to try not to make emotional decisions, but rather to do some long-range planning BEFORE you get out of the military. This will help ensure that you reach your long-term goals.

9. Location can be a competitive advantage. Just like in the military, the competition gets worse as you grow in your career. Being willing to relocate to take challenging assignments can help differentiate you from others who won't make this strategic investment. A lot of people talk the talk about being willing to take the hard assignments to invest in their careers. Few people walk the walk. Perhaps that is why so few people grow to be executives in successful companies.

10. Companies will work with you. Approximately 66% of our candidates accept job offers in their REGIONAL preference. The reason for this is that good companies have good attitudes about helping people get in a region of the country that meets their personal needs. Your happiness will be important to a good company. This is especially true once you develop a track record in the business. Most companies have internal job posting systems where you get visibility and apply for any opening in the company (for which you are qualified). During your business career, there will be times that you will accept promotions outside your location preference, as well as times that you will not. The number one reason that business people turn down promotions that involve location changes is due to family considerations. You are free to do this. At the same time, accepting promotions can be excellent strategic decisions. The point is that once you have been in a company and you have a track record of success, you will find that the organization will try to help you balance your professional development with your personal needs. The key is getting in a good organization that takes care of their star performers.

11. The time-proven location strategy. Here is my suggestion if you aspire to future executive positions in your business career after the military. First, define your location preference by region (Northeast, Southwest, etc.). Second, communicate this preference to your recruiting firm. Again, remember that 66% of our candidates end up in their regional preference with top companies and excellent career opportunities. Third, identify a couple of other regions in the country where you would consider EXCELLENT career opportunities (in addition to your preference). If your preference is the Northeast, perhaps consider the Southeast or Midwest as viable second choices provided the career opportunity is a great fit. Fourth, identify areas of the country that you would NOT consider, even for a good opportunity. I commonly hear candidates with young children avoid locations where safety might be an issue or perhaps locations that are so far from family, that starting there would not be a good option. Lastly, once this is done, execute your career search on a "level playing field." In other words, don't bring location back into the picture until you are trying to narrow down offers. Location can be an excellent tiebreaker, but the key is to ensure that you fully understand your opportunities before you start breaking ties.

In the end, career decisions are about opportunity/cost. Living outside of your location preference is a cost, but for the right career move, the opportunity/cost can be a good decision. Educate yourself and avoid making emotional decisions. Try not to let location preferences restrict your ability to realize your full potential in the business world.