

FOURTH EDITION

PCS

TO CORPORATE AMERICA



From Military Tactics to
Corporate Interviewing Strategy

Roger Cameron
with Chuck Alvarez and Joel Junker

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HOW TO GAIN THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

In 1990 I wrote the first edition of *PCS to Corporate America*. Since then I have received very positive feedback from JMOs regarding the book's value in helping them prepare for corporate interviews and a transition to the business world. However, the interviewing world is very dynamic—a world in which better methods of identifying and selecting talented employees are constantly evolving. I rewrote *PCS* in 1994 and 2000, identifying changes that had occurred, clarifying points, and bringing up new issues. Again, I received positive feedback both times I rewrote it. Due to the changes in both the business world and military environment since September 11, 2001, I am excited to work with Joel and Chuck to write the fourth edition of *PCS*. I feel confident that this updated edition includes new information that will benefit you and increase your opportunities for interviewing and business career success. As always, you must take *action* to gain the full benefit of this book.

My intent for this book is to address the bottom line. You won't find any fluff. I felt it best to write a book you could get into immediately, one that focuses on what you need to do to be successful in interviews and to make a successful transition to the business world.

You won't find in this book what you, as a military officer, already do so well. Many things are so innate to you that I don't need to discuss them. Often after having gone through Cameron-

Brooks interviewing workshops, military officers come away feeling as if they will never do anything right. In this book we address only the issues you have a tendency to miss or approach incorrectly. Reading a book about things that are natural to you and that you already know how to do would be a waste of your time and mine. Some of the suggestions in *PCS* may challenge you. However, I feel strongly that it is my responsibility to cover topics that could prevent you from making a successful transition. I am proud to be one of the originators of the process that transitions military officers successfully to the business world. My goal is to help you do just that.

Throughout this book I recommend ways of addressing specific questions. It is not my intent that you repeat the verbiage word for word. Instead, use the suggested ideas and develop your own answers. Be yourself. If you allow a company to hire you while you hide behind a facade, it won't work. Ultimately, the company will wonder why they hired you. Make sure a company hires you for who you are rather than what you might pretend to be during your interviews. If some of the concepts in this book are new to you and you agree with them, begin immediately to use them at work and in your life. In this way, by the time you begin interviewing, you will be giving credible information to the recruiter.

Hopefully, you are reading *PCS* long before you make your transition. While the book is valuable at all times, its value is enhanced the earlier in your military career you read it. I often talk with officers who share with me the value that *PCS* added to their successful transitions and business careers. Without fail, each of these officers recounts a systematic approach to reading the book, along with specific points that enabled them to retain and apply what they learned. I want to share the following three steps with you to help you, too, gain the most from *PCS*.

- 1.** Read *PCS* cover to cover over two to three days. Do not stop to do the recommended exercises. It is important to understand all the points the book covers and the significance given to different issues.

- 2.** Slowly reread *PCS*. If you are reading this in the printed version, use a highlighter or multiple highlighters of different colors to highlight issues of their unique importance. If you are reading this as an e-book, use the highlighter function so you can refer later to key notes. Whether you are reading a digital or printed version, stop and take notes. I highly recommend you do it right in the book versus on a separate pad so all of the information is right there in one place. You can also make special remarks and notes relative to your situation and development.
- 3.** Now read the book again. Practice all exercises using a recording device (in many cases a video recorder is ideal) and a notebook for additional reference. Evaluate each exercise. Listen to and watch the recordings with study partners whose judgment and constructive feedback will be of benefit. Take advantage of all material in the book, including the information in the Appendix. Practice, practice, practice!

PCS will become one of the most important books in your library. As your career progresses and you interview for promotion, do not assume you will automatically recall your interviewing techniques. Reread *PCS*. As you gain the responsibility of interviewing and hiring for your company and are required to identify individuals and recommend them for hire, your credibility is on the line. Reread *PCS*. Utilize *PCS* long-term and make it your primary career resource.

Most importantly, I caution you in loaning out your copy of *PCS* to anyone. You may not get it back! The value of your remarks and references represents an extensive amount of dedicated time, along with important development notes that will make a difference in your career. Direct your friends who want to borrow your copy of *PCS* to our Web site at www.cameron-brooks.com where they can place their own order.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to give a warm thanks to the members of the Cameron-Brooks team who have been “cornerstones” assisting me in writing my books. Each has traveled thousands of miles with me during their careers, offering quality insight and advice. It would have been impossible to experience success without them.

I especially want to thank Chuck Alvarez and Joel Junker, who helped me write this fourth edition. Chuck joined Cameron-Brooks in 1994 and has had a tremendous impact in growing Cameron-Brooks. He is the current president of Cameron-Brooks and future CEO. His insight and depth of experience from his work with our client companies added a lot of value to this edition. Joel joined Cameron-Brooks in 1999 right out of the U.S. Army. He worked closely with Cameron-Brooks client companies for over 10 years and now leads our candidate recruiting effort. He has interviewed thousands of military officers, providing advice on their business marketability and helping them reach their personal and professional goals. The future of Cameron-Brooks is bright with their leadership.

To my friends, business associates, clients, and Cameron-Brooks alumni who continually encourage and support our organization and me, a special thank-you and appreciation. I have had the best job in America, having the opportunity to interact with so many exceptional people.

Those of you who have written words of praise as readers of

PCS deserve a special acknowledgment. It has been inspirational to hear from thousands whose lives have been and continue to be impacted positively as a result of this book. I cannot count the number of individuals who have told me they consistently refer to PCS for promotional interview preparation and furthering their careers. These individuals espouse the long-term value of the many lessons taught in this book.

I am appreciative of the Cameron-Brooks alumni in corporate America who are passionate about hiring JMOs and hiring them from Cameron-Brooks. At every one of our Career Conferences, it gives me great satisfaction to work with the many alumni who attend our conferences in search of hiring talented JMOs and to hear of their successes in their business careers.

Thank you to the many business leaders in corporate America for believing in the quality of our military officers. Many of our client companies have been hiring junior officers from us for over 45 years and have watched the JMO move up the corporate ladder to the very top.

Finally, thank you to all of the military service members for your selfless service and sacrifices for our great country. I have met so many officers and their spouses who have made tremendous sacrifices as we continue to fight the war on terrorism throughout the world. I am grateful for your leadership, courage, and fortitude! Our country is in your debt.

INTRODUCTION

You are likely reading this book to learn more about a business career, or if you have already made that decision to transition, you want to develop a plan and strategy. Regardless of where you are in this thought process, I want you to first understand your leadership advantage and why companies value the military experience. Our clients value your abilities and experience—in developing teamwork, adapting to change, exercising cross-functional leadership, improving processes, solving complex problems, managing projects, changing behaviors, counseling and mentoring others, focusing on results, and applying a make-it-happen attitude. These qualities are your leadership advantage. Compared to those who graduated from college and have been working in business for four to eight years, you typically have more leadership experience. More and more companies see the value in hiring you for your leadership qualities and then teaching you the fundamentals of their business.

Even though there are many companies who hire junior military officers, not all companies value your military experience for the same reason. Not all companies know how to fully utilize your JMO background. Generally, there are three ways for JMOs to transition from the military to the business world:

- 1.** Transition *down* into a business career. In this case the JMO takes a position with a company that does not value the JMO experience and therefore ends up in a position that

has less responsibility than he or she had in the service. I am sure these companies have good intentions, but to value your experience means the company knows how to utilize the JMO's unique skills and abilities developed while in the military and offers the JMO positions that build on top of that experience. To transition down, the JMO usually interviews and accepts a position that he or she could have earned right out of college or a few years after college without the military experience. You might ask, "Why would a JMO do this?" Every career choice you make has trade-offs. Most often I see JMOs make a decision to do this because they want a specific geographic location or perhaps because they want an industry that predominantly recruits off the college campus. Unfortunately, I hear from a few every year wanting to start a career search all over because they are not fully utilized. It's a tough way for a talented young leader to launch a new career.

2. Transition *across* into a business career. In this case the JMO takes a position with the responsibility and career upside that is equivalent to what he or she had in the military. Companies who hire these types of military backgrounds will hire any JMO, regardless of how successful the JMO was in the military. In other words, the company places value on the JMO's military experience (unlike the first situation), but does not distinguish between different-caliber JMOs. While this type of career will utilize your skills, it will take time to move into a position that is considered developmental, and potentially you might not ever have the opportunity to get into a development track. Very often we see this type of hiring in positions that require security clearances. The company is not interested in your military track record, but rather, it just wants to take advantage of your clearance. These are usually easy transitions, but seldom provide much career opportunity.

3. Transition and *accelerate* into a business career. In this case the JMO takes a development position with a company

who values the military officer experience, starts in a position that will build on top of the JMO experience, *and* offers significant promotional opportunities based on performance. The companies who offer these types of opportunities value top-caliber JMOs because of their leadership track record and leadership potential. These are extremely competitive positions to obtain, and companies look for the best of the best. While these types of positions are highly desirable, they also require the highest level of preparation and skill development.

Cameron-Brooks recruits only for development positions in corporate America, positions that will allow you to *transition and accelerate*. Therefore, our clients are selective and require us to partner with officers who have the demonstrated *ability* and *desire* to grow into senior leadership positions in a company. Military officers who form a career transition partnership with Cameron-Brooks read numerous business books, increase their communication skills, improve their objective skill base, and prepare for competitive interviewing. It seems the better the candidates are, the earlier they start their preparation. They are not procrastinators. They know it takes a lot of time and preparation to be at their best and to transition and accelerate.

In order to earn an employment offer from a company where you will accelerate into your next career, *you must be at your best by the time you start your interviewing*. These types of leading companies expect you to interview at 100 percent. After all, they can be very selective because they have highly desirable career opportunities. To be successful in this type of a transition, you must start early in your transition process to prepare to be at your best. It is critical that you understand this concept. Companies will never believe you are better than what their recruiters see or hear in the interview. *Your goal as you prepare for a career transition is to prove you have the ability and desire to be a future leader in business.*

How do you achieve “being at you best”? Preparation. Hard work. Realistic preparation. Recruiters have said to me, “Roger,

if an individual won't work hard to accomplish one of his or her own objectives (a great career), why should I assume he or she will work hard to accomplish objectives that we give them?" I have to agree. Amazingly, some officers will come to the marketplace assuming success without preparation. This is like having an annual inspection on Monday morning but starting preparation for it on the previous Friday, or expecting to be successful in a deployment without first conducting diligent and realistic training. You know what will happen. You will fail. You may say that you should be natural interviewees. That would be great, but it won't work. Most officers I interview want the opportunity to transition and accelerate their career, but not every officer is willing to commit to world-class preparation to accomplish this goal. You have to prepare for tough objectives. And, as you know, the more time you invest in preparation and the more realistic it is, the more successful you are.

You learned this early on in school: The more time you invested in studying and the more you focused on the areas you needed to master, the better you did on the exam. Everything in life is based on preparation. Not one of us is natural at everything we do. I put Cameron-Brooks' success for facilitating transitions to corporate America against any other recruiting firm or recruiter in America. I have listened to what great companies are looking for, and I have seen the kind of individuals they are hiring to lead their companies into the future. I have seen the individuals who have gone to the top of corporate America. I recognize the pattern. It is a pattern created from day one—the pattern of preparation and diligence—of people who do their work thoroughly. It is gratifying to watch the career progression of those officers we have helped transition to the business world.

To transition and interview into positions that will allow you to accelerate also requires strong communication skills. Rarely do company recruiters read your military evaluations. Instead, you must communicate in an interview what you have done, how you have done it, the results you achieved, and how this relates to corporate America. Unfortunately, some people who are probably very good

performers are not going to be hired because of their inability to communicate. Company recruiters will evaluate your interviewing skills to determine if you will have the ability to communicate, to persuade, and to convince or persuade your peers, superiors, team members, customers, and competition to see your point of view. People say, “Roger, if they would hire me, they would see that I’m a good performer.” Sometimes I feel the same way. If they would just hire some military officers, they would discover how talented they are. Unfortunately, recruiting just doesn’t work that way. You will need to be a good communicator to interview successfully.

I am frequently asked, “What is the bottom line, Roger? What is corporate America looking for in development candidates?” This is a good question.

Corporations want people who possess the following:

- Leadership. In general, this means the ability to catalyze actions in others in order to achieve results. The type of leadership (Team, Cross-Functional, Up, Idea, Change, etc.) depends on the position.
- Ability to get real-world results. What do companies mean by “real world?” They mean results that impacted the military’s bottom line (readiness, fighting capability, mission success) and achieved the required results by overcoming obstacles or challenges.
- Self-development. They want military officers who are constantly striving to improve themselves both objectively and subjectively and who lead and develop others to do the same.
- Ability to control their environment, use their time effectively, and are extremely well organized.
- Knowledge of exactly what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how to get it done.

Cameron-Brooks recruiters and I have accepted approximately 15 percent of all the officers we have interviewed. We are looking for those qualities listed above. Often people say, “Roger Cameron and Cameron-Brooks recruiters are tough.” We are tough because

corporate America is very demanding. Companies come to us to hire their future leaders. They want to see only the best of the best. We listen to our client companies. We bring them what they tell us they want. We are selective because our clients are selective.

This book is written in a very direct way, but that is pretty much the way corporate America thinks. I have watched recruiters decline individuals I felt were very capable. In fact, I knew they were good because I had read their performance evaluations, but because they did not have the ability to communicate their successes, recruiters walked away from them.

Even though the book is direct and to the point, I encourage you to read with a positive attitude. Say to yourself, “I’m going to listen to an individual who has worked with military officers and helped transition them successfully to the business world for over three decades.”

This book will help you interview for any position in any organization. I would like to put my plug in for the profit-oriented world, the world of capitalism. It is a world that is exciting and challenging. When I think of how young America is, I realize that our greatness is based on the innovative nature of the United States. We have been leaders in numerous areas for many years. Sure, it is true that some countries have copied products we originated and made them better because of circumstances in their countries, such as cheaper labor. But I will still put America against anyone else. I will put our leaders, engineers, finance people, and information technology experts up against any in the world.

Officers we assisted—10, 15, and 20 plus years ago—are still using many of the techniques our team and I taught them. I am very proud of our alumni. Each time I recruit an individual for corporate America, I ask myself the question, “Do I want to put my name beside this individual as he or she transitions to the business world?” This is important to every member of the Cameron- Brooks team. We want to be proud of every candidate we help transition to the business world. And, of the overwhelming majority, we can be. We have had very few failures over the years.

People have often asked how I could stay in this business for

over 45 years. I always give the same answer. In all these years, I have had thousands of jobs presented to me, yet I have never seen a job that interested me enough to take more than a casual look at it. I'm not so sure that there is a more exciting business than that of recruiting talented young men and women for top development positions with some of the best companies in corporate America. It has been exciting to watch these young men and women move up the corporate ladder, have their successes, and become key leaders within their companies. I have received thousands of letters and e-mails of appreciation over the years, and every one of them made me feel good. They made me realize how fortunate I am to be in this business.

Working with the quality of companies I have represented over the years is very exciting. I have companies today who have a 10 percent growth rate, and some of them even higher. When you take a highly sophisticated company that has this kind of growth, you need to have outstanding people to accomplish and manage it. The military officers I have introduced to the business world have loved the fact that they are not practicing but are, in fact, *doing*. What they learn on a daily basis, they can apply. When they go home at night, they can measure the fact that their company has been able to take a step closer to its objective. It is challenging but also satisfying to be in an environment in which you know you must constantly be changing and improving. It is also gratifying to work with positive-minded people who come to work in the morning because they *want* to be there, who are excited about what their company does and what their products can do for mankind, and who find it exciting to be paid and promoted based on performance.

Recruiting military officers for corporate America has always been interesting. I cannot say it has always been fun. I remember when I helped originate this business; I talked to companies about why they should hire military officers. I also remember some of their comments: "Excuse me, Roger, you're suggesting that we should hire somebody who operates in the world of nonprofit, in the world of appropriation instead of the world of profitability?"

Roger, what are we supposed to do with this individual who, for the last five years, has been involved with tanks, guns and artillery, airplanes and ships? I'm a little confused as to why we should hire this person. We should hire someone who is proud that he or she spends the entire budget? As a matter of fact, they even put it on their resumes."

That's the way things were when the military recruiting industry started. Interestingly, it has grown over the years—grown to the point where today military officers have demonstrated their value to corporate America. Today we can point to military officers who are presidents and CEOs of some of the nation's top companies. Suddenly, corporate recruiters who have been cynics over the years about military officers are starting to take a very hard look at them. Today companies are calling us rather than us calling them.

You've been good. As a matter of fact, you've been great! I don't know of any individual who has had more impact on corporate America than the military officer. We admit to you that we made a lot of mistakes over the years in evaluating military personnel, but today we know you very well. We know what makes you successful and what your weaknesses are as you leave the military. We have developed programs that will bring you up to speed quickly in areas where you need more development. We know where to recruit to find a particular background. We know what you need to do in the military to make yourself successful in business. Today we know the kind of private lifestyle you need for success in your business career. You were an unknown when we started this business. It has been fun to watch the progress of our candidates and yet agonizing to observe some of their failures. Fortunately, these failures are at a minimum in relation to what they were when we first started recruiting military officers.

I ask many of the Cameron-Brooks alumni who have been in the business world for a while what, if anything, they feel they have gained or lost by transitioning to the business world. Typically their comments pertain to three significant positives that never seem to change.

The first positive is the improved quality of life—the ability to tell your sons or daughters with confidence that you are going to be at Little League at 6:00 p.m., to tell your family you’ll be home for dinner, to know that evenings and weekends are yours, to set a vacation six months down the road and know that you will be there. I have rarely seen a vacation canceled by a company in all the years I’ve been associated with corporate America.

The second positive relates to the input and control you have over your career. Companies ask you: “What is it you want to do? What kind of positions will enhance your career? What do you expect your company to do to ensure that you have a successful career?” You have a lot of input—veto rights for locations, positions, and the timing of promotions. When this veto right is exercised, it will *rarely* have a negative influence on your career.

Third, our candidates have told us that they have more ability to affect their compensation. Why? Because companies promote and pay based on performance; they have exceptional retirement plans such as 401(k) plans, with company-matching, and other savings vehicles as well. Now, this should not be the main reason you should make the transition, but it is a fact that business rewards are based on performance, and companies have much less rigid processes for promotions and compensation increases than the military’s time-in-grade promotion program.

We get many other positive comments, but these three comments are the most significant in encouraging officers to make a career transition to the business world.

The Cameron-Brooks Alumni Association, made up of thousands of our candidates who have successfully transitioned to business, is a powerful influence in making the transition easier for our candidates. It is virtually impossible for you to come to corporate America without being touched by Cameron-Brooks, either by being hired, mentored, or managed by one of our alumni. This alumni network offers tremendous support to newly transitioned officers, their spouses (or significant others), and families. Our alumni will go out of their way to help make the transition as smooth as possible for you. One of the major reasons we

have become such a powerful force in our industry is our alumni. Cameron-Brooks alumni are adamant about hiring junior officers for their positions and about hiring them from Cameron-Brooks.

As I've always said to military officers, it's not that one environment is good and the other bad. They are different. Some of you will determine that the military is better for you than the business world. We understand that. We like to think that as some of you read this book, you will feel more confident that corporate America is where you want to have your career. For those of you who make this choice, here's a word of caution. Do not think that corporate America is going to be a cure-all for the problems you might have had in the military. We have our problems. Some of the things we do are not always smart. We are influenced by economic conditions and have our ups and downs, just as the military has its own challenges.

There is no ideal company, job, or environment. However, I feel it is critically important that you come to corporate America as an individual who intends to go to work for a great company and have a career with that company. I know that this is considered the old-school way of thinking. However, I have seen way too many people leave companies at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, without ever discussing the decision with their boss and thus not having all of the information. I am a strong advocate of conducting thorough and proper analysis to determine which company is right for you. I do not encourage moving constantly from one company to another. Sometime during the course of your career, some personal challenges will arise that will divert you from your job. These challenges will cause you to need special focus on your family. You want to know that your company will support you during these difficult times. Too many times people switch from one company to another, looking for that better situation, only to find greater difficulties. If you expect the company to remain with you during the difficult times of your life, it is only fair that you stay with the company during difficulties it might have. Many employees want to leave a company when they see the product lose market share. They reason that it is okay for the company

to support them during *their* difficult times, but they don't want to reciprocate when the *company* has difficult times. That is not fair. I encourage you to be loyal. Switching from one company to another will not always advance your career. All you have really done is to change the problems. Every time you make a move, it is difficult for you and your family emotionally, and it says many things about you that you may not want said.

I hope you find this book a valuable tool for preparing for corporate interviews and a career transition. Anytime you have a question on an issue discussed in the book, feel free to contact Cameron-Brooks at candidates@cameron-brooks.com. I wish a book could cover everything, but I know it can't. It's similar to the preparation prior to our Career Conferences. We try to prepare for every question we think a candidate may encounter in an interview, but after years of experience, I have found corporate recruiters can still surprise me. I think you will find the major issues for military officers considering a transition to business covered in this book.

PCS is a career reference book. It is a book we hope you will read, refer to, reread, and refer to again as your career progresses. Do not loan it or any other reference book from your personal library. Throughout your career these books should never be out of arm's reach. There are some books I reread every year to remind me of valuable points. Every quality book should be read, referred to, and reread. Have fun reading it, and the best of success to you in your career search.

Chapter 1

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

In the early days of recruiting military officers, corporate America believed that the officer would have a difficult time being competitive in the business world as a Development Candidate. There were three basic reasons for this belief.

First, when we first started recruiting the military officer, most were leaving the military five to seven years after their age group graduated from college and entering the business world. That meant officers spent five to seven years in the nonprofit world (the military) and were then entering the world of profitability. Given the difference in experiences, how could the military officer realistically catch up to his or her business world contemporaries in minimal time?

I compare this situation to a track race in which you are competing with recent college graduates. To be considered a winner, you have to finish in the top 10 percent. No problem, you say. But when you get to the track and you're in the blocks, I reach down to tap you (the military officer) on the shoulder and I say, "By the way, when I pull the trigger, you stay at the blocks. Wait until all the college graduates in your age group get a fifth of the way around the track. Then you may start." Undoubtedly, you would stand up and say, "Come on, Roger, that's not realistic." Similarly, it makes sense that you, the military officer, would have a hard time catching up with your age group as you entered the business world. You notice that I said *age* group, not *year* group.

In the military you need to be concerned about being competitive with your *year* group. In contrast, when you begin a career in business, you are measured by your *age* group.

Second, as we examined the bulk of officers coming out of the military, we discovered that the majority had never used their college education as it was designed to be used. In other words, the military was not taking advantage of officers' education. For example, you could be an engineer in a military operational role that does not build on your engineering education. Additionally, many officers either did not plan for a career after their military commitment or believed they would make the military a career and did not earn a degree relevant to business. This was a second strike against you, especially compared to your peer group in business who were building relevant experience on top of their education.

The third reason companies believed military officers were going to have difficulty being competitive in the business world was that we had a difficult time making a connection between many of your positions in the military and what you had to offer corporate America. What could a Surface Warfare Officer, Field Artillery Officer, Infantryman, or Intelligence Officer do in the business world? We knew there existed some relatable knowledge, but we were not sure it was enough to overcome the disadvantage of time.

Corporate America Discovers the Military Officer

What forced recruiters to rethink this situation? The Vietnam War. During the Vietnam War corporate recruiters discovered that when they went to the college campus to hire Development Candidates, there weren't enough students available due to the draft. Suddenly, recruiters had to reassess the military officer as a potential hire. Corporations started hiring officers, but reluctantly, because they felt officers would have a hard time competing with their age group. Because of this, officers interviewed for only a small fraction of the positions they see today. But as corporate America measured your performance in the business world against the very best from the college campuses around the United States, they discovered you were catching up very quickly.

This was an exciting discovery for the corporate world. All of a sudden, companies had another source for hiring Development Candidates—the military. It’s proven so successful that many companies today have made recruiting military officers a strategic talent initiative. They have witnessed military officers effectively transfer their military skills to the business world, immediately make an impact, and assume higher levels of leadership responsibility.

Over the years, interest, enthusiasm, and excitement for the military officer have grown. Corporate America increased its interest in the military officers after the first Gulf War in the early 1990s. This awareness significantly increased again during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The junior military officer was even highlighted in the March 22, 2010, issue of *Fortune* magazine with the picture of a JMO on the cover and a cover story titled “Meet the New Face of Business Leadership.” The article described companies like Pepsi and Wal-Mart having a shortage of leaders and hiring JMOs for their leadership and potential to assume higher levels of responsibility. This article noted that companies specifically seek out military officers to fill unique leadership roles with more responsibility, more opportunity for upward mobility. We completely agree, and today we see more military officers starting their careers in a wider range of job positions and career fields than ever before.

I cannot tell you how proud we all were of seeing a JMO on the cover of *Fortune* (one cover featured a Cameron-Brooks alumna). Being one of the originators of this recruiting channel, I knew first-hand how far the industry had come since the early days in the late ’60s. The credit literally belongs to the thousands of former military officers who have made a big impact on the business world.

Types of Career Paths—Development and Nondevelopment

Not all career paths are the same in the business world. Industry to industry and company to company, there are differences in the way a company will structure a career path. Fundamentally, there are two types of career paths—development and nondevelopment.

The *development* career is designed for candidates who will be future leaders in a company. While you will always fill specific jobs as a Development Candidate, the company will expose you to various functions within a corporation to develop you as a generalist. Regardless of where you start your development career, as your career progresses, the company will provide you opportunities to develop broad knowledge in finance, accounting, information technology, supply chain management, manufacturing, sales, marketing, human resources, etc. The intent of such broad knowledge is to develop your skills to be a future leader in the company. Without these general management skills, a person cannot lead a company (just as a general or admiral cannot lead in the military without excellent knowledge of or experience in a wide variety of military functions and operations).

A Development Candidate needs to have the ability and desire to rise to the top leadership positions of leading commercial corporations (those that earn their revenue from selling or providing a product or service primarily to other businesses or consumers). As you enter the business world, it is important that you understand how you, as a commissioned officer, fit into a major corporation. Corporate America will spend a lot of time, money, expertise, and effort getting you, the Development Candidate, to the point where you can have a major impact on the direction of your company.

A *nondevelopment* career is designed for people to fill jobs in a specific area of expertise. These managers are not targeted to be the future top leaders of a company but rather are oriented toward developing an expertise in one functional area of a company. It is not that they can't be Development Candidates but rather that their goal is to develop along the line of a specialist. Regardless of where you start your career as a Nondevelopment Candidate, your career path is designed to make you a future expert in one area of the company (engineering, IT, finance, HR, etc.). As an example, let's say you begin your career in finance. As your career progresses, you will learn more and more about a company's financial structure, perhaps specializing in reporting, compliance, tax, or accounting. As a Nondevelopment Candidate, you will stay within a specific

area and not move up into positions leading other people or broadening your responsibilities like a Development Candidate would. These positions are important in any company because experts ensure that the organization executes at a high level, but the key is that functional experts rarely get promoted to lead divisions or entire companies.

I am not saying that one career path is more important than the other, but rather that they are radically different. As you consider your options in the business world, it is important that you determine the type of career that interests you. Remember, not all companies hire Development Candidates. Some companies and industries have no programs in place to develop future leaders and thus have no interest in recruiting Development Candidates. These industries and companies “pool-promote,” which means all hires jump into the pool and whoever floats to the top when a management spot becomes available gets promoted. Many (but not all) new companies start out this way, as they do not have the depth of personnel to develop leaders from within the company. However, as companies mature and become more sophisticated in their talent management, they tend to move toward the hiring of high-potential Development Candidates as a means of developing future leaders within the company.

Career progression in a company is not an overnight venture any more than it is in the military. Advancing from O-2 through O-3 to O-4 and up the ranks takes time and a considerable amount of investment. There are many things you need to learn and experiences you must have to become a top-level leader in a company. It is important to realize that these steps are necessary, and it takes time for them to happen. No matter what the size of the company or the type of business, there are few “overnight sensations” in corporate America. The media has popularized this quick-success notion. Nothing could be further from the truth. My belief is that business schools have acted irresponsibly, promising students that their two-year classroom curriculum can ensure a fast track to leadership. Can you imagine going to school for two years and learning how to be a Brigade Commander in combat? Leadership

is learned and earned by executing consistently over time. People follow leaders they trust.

The business world wants Development Candidates who understand this mind-set. This is what having that “burning desire” to be a top leader is all about. In other words, *you understand the investment that it takes to be a leader in a successful organization*. Hoping for or simply wanting success is worthless without the burning desire to prepare for it.

Over the last 45 years, I have interviewed literally tens of thousands of JMOs. So many of them will say they want to be successful, but, unfortunately, only a small percentage realize the investment in personal growth that it is going to take to get there. Find any group of the top leaders in the business world, and I promise that you will find people who are constantly reading and expanding their knowledge base and skill set. These individuals know the importance of a diverse skill base, and they work on becoming knowledgeable in all areas of a company, not just their specific position or function. They seek higher degrees as they advance in age, keeping their formal education current so they remain competitive and in position for promotion. They know there is no substitute for knowledge, so they are constantly in the learning mode. They have outstanding leadership ability and interpersonal skills. They are mission-oriented leaders with a track record of making significant contributions to their past organizations. This is what I mean when I talk about having a burning desire to be one of the top leaders of a company.

Should You Use a Recruiting Firm?

Anyone reading this will feel it is a biased, opinionated statement. To a degree, it is. Nevertheless, the answer is “yes.” Without fail, the first thing you should do once you have made the decision to enter the business world is to become associated with a quality recruiting firm.

Why? The answer is simple. You are a nontraditional hire for the business world. Many traditional sources (like friends and family networks or online application tools) are designed

for traditional resumes. There are simply too many gatekeepers using these sources to find the top developmental opportunities. Plus, most military officers are too busy and often in more remote locations (or at least not in locations where they want to stay) to invest the hundreds of hours that it takes for effective networking. Bottom line: if you are making an industry change (i.e., DoD to the private sector), you are going to benefit from a good quality recruiting firm.

A quality recruiting firm will help you get through the “filters” a company puts up to screen its candidates. Absolutely, you can go out on your own and apply for positions, but recognize that you will have to clear several hurdles in the evaluation process before a real human being thoroughly evaluates you. Because companies receive so many inquiries for open positions (especially online), they set up a series of filters to screen people out (see Figure 1).

The first filter is posting or uploading your resume to a company’s Web site. If you are lucky, a human will actually review this, but most likely some software program will search for key words and phrases or experience that most military officers do not have. If you are fortunate for a human to view it, it will likely be for about a minute or less, which also puts nontraditional resumes like a military officer’s at a disadvantage. The second filter is the application, which is again there to screen out applicants and, once again, likely evaluated by a software system. The third filter is an interview. However, this is not the “real” interview. In fact, I like to call it an interview with a small *i* because it is a screening interview typically done by a talent acquisitions person or contract recruiter. This type of interview is usually completed in 30 minutes and over the phone. Its purpose is to further weed out. Finally, you get to the real interview, what I call the interview with the capital *I*, where you interview for positions in which you are interested and for which you are qualified, the timing of the open position fits with your potential start date, *and* you are interviewing with the decision makers. A high-quality recruiting firm will get you right to the Interview—the one with the capital “I.”

I recall one time when a Fortune 500 telecommunications

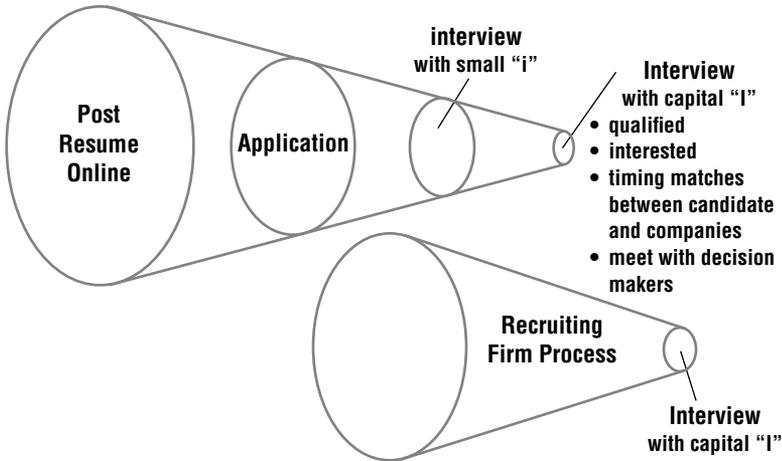


Figure 1. Comparison of candidate screening processes

company interviewed and *verbally* offered two Cameron-Brooks candidates Project Engineer positions. In order to make them the written official offer, the company asked the two candidates to post their resumes on the Web site and apply for the open positions. Once they did this, they would receive an e-mail of their written offer. You know what they received first? A rejection e-mail! They didn't make it through the filter system of this company! Now, because this was all administrative, they still received their written employment offers, so it worked out fine for them. However, the story illustrates that if they had been applying on their own through an online filter system, the company would not have seen the unique value in their military backgrounds from their resumes or applications. This is the true value of the recruiting firm for both the company and the candidates.

In fact, many companies prefer to hire through recruiting firms. If their normal ratio for hiring is one out of 200 interviews, the company is going to invest a lot of time and money to get to this point. They would much rather attend a Career Conference and interview 10 to 15 high-quality people over two days who meet their specific qualifications. Additionally, a company is going to be very reluctant to turn down 199 people who are going to be out on the street and have a negative impression of the company's product

or service. For the company, it's much more efficient to have a recruiting firm say no to the majority of applicants and present them with a group of well-qualified and interested candidates.

Quality recruiting firms are evaluated by the client company's success in terms of the number and quality of talent the company hires. The measuring tool companies use to judge recruiting firms is based on the factor of 10 interviews. When a company seeks the help of a recruiting firm to fill its openings and interviews 10 people, on the average how many do they say yes to? Of every 10 people they pursue beyond the first interview, how many receive offers? For every 10 who are offered jobs, how many accept? And for every 10 who accept, how many are successful and promotable? Companies judge recruiting firms very carefully. In making your decision, it will be important for you to determine the recruiting company with whom it will be best for you to partner (depending on your needs, interests, situation, openness to location, etc.). In making your choice, I encourage you to use a recruiting firm that has developed outstanding relationships with its client companies.

As I said, you can make your career search on your own and find some success getting through the filters. However, there will be other challenges. For example, it will be difficult for you to verify that a position matches your background and interests and allows you to accelerate your career by growing into higher levels of responsibility. I'm not sure how you would do this. If you ask, and I would, you would probably want further verification.

Other disadvantages to conducting a search on your own are that (1) it is difficult to explore as many diverse opportunities as a quality recruiting firm will show you and (2) as you interview with companies individually and receive offers individually, you will be able to evaluate only one offer at a time. In other words, it's hard to tie your career search together when you are going at it on your own. There is simply too much guesswork on the timing of interviews and offers. Most companies won't allow you to consider an offer for a long period. A good recruiting firm can show you several opportunities at one time and help facilitate the timing of your interview results. Also, quality recruiting firms will

work closely with you during the follow-up interview process (the weeks that follow an initial interview in which companies invite candidates for second and third interviews and extend offers to those candidates who best fit their criteria and culture). During the follow-up process, quality recruiting firms will help you evaluate your different offers and arrive at the career decision that is best for you.

Some officers will not earn the right to be represented by a recruiting firm. That's not a harsh statement—it's an honest statement. Every recruiting firm that agrees to represent an officer must ask itself, "Do my client companies need to pay me a fee to find this person?" Unfortunately, many times that answer is "no." We are not suggesting that the person is not a quality person and a potential good hire for a company, but client companies are very specific about the skill set of individuals they want to hire through a recruiting firm.

Using Multiple Recruiting Firms

Some candidates come to us suggesting that two or three recruiting firms represent them. We understand the reasoning that sometimes it feels good to spread risk over two or three recruiting firms. It's just that some recruiting firms that work with candidates over an extended period of time and prepare them for corporate interviews invest a tremendous amount of time and effort on each candidate's behalf. Obviously, these recruiting firms are not willing to develop individuals so they can interview on their own or through another recruiting firm. If you're going to choose one of the best recruiting firms, it is to your advantage to be loyal to that company until it has had the chance to show you to its client companies. I know of no recruiting firm in America that asks for 100 percent exclusivity. If they do, walk away from them. However, for a quality recruiting firm to ask for exclusivity until after they have shown you to their client companies is simply good business.

At our recruiting firm, we have said over the years, "We

have the knowledge and capability to show candidates many high-potential positions in the business world for which they are qualified and in which they are interested. We know how to guide candidates through successful transitions, and we know how to develop them so their start in the business world is on a track accelerating their careers.” Candidly, it is fair then that our client companies have an equal opportunity to pursue the candidates with whom we partner.

If you apply to a recruiting firm, it is important that you present a quality picture of yourself to the firm. Officers sometimes make statements that cause me to rule them out. They will rationalize, “Well, I wouldn’t say that to a company.” Let me emphasize: “You have just said that to a company.” You must remember that a recruiting firm is retained by the corporation. If you make the statement to us, it’s like making it to the company. We can’t ask you not to make a statement. We can’t be unprofessional and suggest you cover up the statement by saying, “Don’t say that in front of the company.”

Before Companies Invest in You, They Want to Know You’re Committed

Officers have told me they’re not sure whether they want to go into the business world as a Development Candidate, remain in the military, pursue other government employment, enroll in law school or other full-time graduate education, or perhaps pursue other options in the world of nonprofit. In other words, they really don’t know their career objective, and this will make any high-quality private sector company nervous. I’m not saying these other options are bad, but it will make a company question your commitment. The business world and the Development Candidate path are not for everyone. Can you imagine a company saying, “Roger, we want to pay you to find us an individual who’s not certain whether he or she wants a career in the private sector or something as different as the nonprofit world.” We can only agree to partner with you as you transition

if you are someone who has a burning desire to enter the profit-oriented private sector and rise to the top. Our clients must hear that desire before they will make an investment in you.

Some of you may want to explore the business world while you also apply to defense contractors and government agencies such as the FBI, CIA, Department of Homeland Security, etc. I do not believe that this is fair to your recruiting firm or its clients. As I stated earlier, being a Development Candidate means having the burning desire to be a leader in the private sector. You either have this desire or not. There is nothing wrong with a career with government agencies or defense contractors, but they are very different careers from the Development Candidate business career. Sometimes candidates tell me, "Well, it is my backup plan." I understand wanting a backup plan, but the companies do not view it this way. It makes them question your long-term commitment. When companies hire a Development Candidate, they are committing time and money to the candidate's development and growth. They want the same level of commitment in return. Over the years, before the recruiter has made the offer, I have been asked easily over a thousand times, "Roger, is this candidate committed?" With pursuing options in government or defense, neither the candidate nor the recruiting firm can honestly answer, "Yes."

I recall a specific company recruiter requiring Cameron-Brooks to ensure the candidate had "burned the ships." When he first requested this, I had no idea what he meant by this phrase. Then he went on to give me a history lesson about Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés. The story goes that when Cortés landed in the New World, he set his ships ablaze right in the harbor to prevent his men from returning home. He sent a message to everyone that there was only one path forward and no going back. The recruiter's point was that his company would commit to and invest in the candidate and wanted the same commitment from him or her. Submitting applications or resumes to government agencies and defense contractors is the same as "leaving the ships in the harbor." There will be challenges and difficulties in switching from the public sector to the private sector. Company recruiters want

candidates to be focused on and committed to moving forward, and not run back to the comfortable and familiar ships anchored offshore.

Some individuals say to me, “Several years down the road, I want to have my own business.” I have to decline individuals with this objective. You wouldn’t want someone to walk into your place of business and say, “I want you to invest in me, develop my skills, educate me on your business and industry, and pay me a good salary. Then I can go across the street, open my own business, and go into competition against you.”

I’m not asking you to be dishonest and game this answer. I am asking you to evaluate what you want to do with your professional career. If it is to open your own business or to stay in the public sector by applying to government agencies or defense contractors, I respect that. After all, I own my business. But don’t use somebody else to do it. Just go open your business or apply on your own to the other agencies and be successful. To start a high-potential development career with a company knowing you’re going to leave them in the near future to start your own business is unprofessional. If you want a career in corporate America, then commit to that as your objective and work your heart out achieving it. Use all of the development opportunities companies will offer. Be a leader within that company. Go to the top.

Be Thorough with Your Applications

Online applications are a big part of the recruiting process. Be thorough as you navigate these applications. Give the recruiting firm the information it needs to professionally represent you. Produce quality applications and supporting file material. Never refer to your resume on your application. Companies review thousands of resumes and applications every year. It is time consuming, and they don’t have time to review dozens of different resume formats to find the information. Companies and recruiting firms deliberately design their applications to elicit the information they want. You need to be deliberate in completing it. Take time to fill out your application and other forms thoroughly, carefully,

and accurately. Show us you believe your application material is important. Don't wait until the last minute to get your academic transcripts. Get everything ahead of time. Document everything you send to your recruiting firm or a company, and keep a copy yourself. Watch your spelling and sentence structure. Your career transition is too important for you not to be extremely organized, timely, thorough, and willing to work with the recruiting firm regarding the material in your file so it can best represent you to its client companies.

WEAK APPLICATION & SUPPORT MATERIAL = DECLINE

Cameron-Brooks and our clients will decline candidates for poor applications. I say to myself, "I don't even want to take the time to write a decline e-mail or call the candidate." This file doesn't warrant our time, but, as a professional courtesy, we do it anyway. When sloppy application material is sent to us, we say to ourselves, "Obviously, this wasn't very important to the candidate because it is so sloppy." These applications could misrepresent you—on the other hand, they may not!

If you want to work with a quality recruiting firm, check out the firm. Ask to speak with former candidates with whom they partnered and successfully transitioned to business. Ask the recruiting company about their program and success rate. How do they prepare candidates for a transition? What percentage of the candidates are successful at a conference? You have every right to know this information. It's important for you to select a recruiting firm that works in partnership with you. Unfortunately, some recruiting firms send only your resume to different companies and hope they respond. Unless a recruiting firm is doing a lot for the company—screening your background thoroughly and working with you to educate you about business and to build your skill package—it is doubtful the recruiting firm represents much value to a company. The great companies in corporate America are smart. They put their money where they get the best value.

I've heard officers say, "I've already been accepted by another

recruiting firm.” I say, “When were you interviewed?” They answer, “I haven’t been interviewed in person. I’ve only talked with them over the phone.” High-quality companies want their recruiting firms to do face-to-face interviewing. I assure you that when it comes time to interview with the company, they will do it in person. If a recruiting firm isn’t willing to commit the time and expense to come to your base or post, meet you, and work with you over a period of time, what message are they sending to you about the investment they are willing to make in you? Plus, do you really need them in your search?

Many of you tell me that recruiting firms don’t want to talk to you unless you’re within three to six months of getting out of the military. Do you realize what these recruiting firms are saying? They don’t want to do the work it takes to develop you and set you up for success in the business world. They don’t want to look into your background and help you do what you need to do to transition “up.” They don’t want to invest time and effort into developing officers; they simply want to place you with a company. They’re saying, “No, we just want to show you to a company, hope you get placed, and receive our fee.”

Make sure the recruiting firm is willing to do the kind of work it will take to develop you over a period of time. You don’t need a recruiting firm that looks at you with a dollar figure in mind. Unfortunately, too many recruiting firms do just that. When you know major companies are paying top dollar to recruiting firms to select, interview, develop, and bring talented people to them, you have every right to demand certain standards. It is your professional future you are placing in the hands of a recruiting firm, and you owe it to yourself to work with a recruiting firm that is going to give you the best possible start and future in a business career.

Evaluating Three Categories of Your Life: High School, College, Military

Each year Cameron-Brooks recruiters travel around the world looking for Development Candidates for our client companies. They interview an average of 2,000 officers from the Navy, Air

Force, Army, and Marine Corps annually. Out of these candidates, they only accept and bring to one of our Career Conferences approximately 15 percent. This is not by design but by normal evaluation of each candidate's credentials and interview results against the needs and requirements of our corporate clients. Why do Cameron-Brooks recruiters accept only 15 percent of the officers they interview? Let's look at the evaluation process.

If you were to look at the profiles of the top 10 percent of management in business today, you would find certain commonalities (behavioral traits, attributes, skills) that go all the way back to high school. If you come to an interview talking only about what you have done in the military, you're attempting to stand on only one of three legs, the other two being your high school and college careers.

We evaluate the performance factors in your high school, college, and military careers. First, we evaluate high school records on quantifiable factors: the grade point average, the size of your class, your ranking within that class, and SAT/ACT scores. This gives us a good indication of how your performance compared to that of other students. We look at the difficulty of the curriculum. Was it an honors program? Did you challenge yourself all four years of high school? Then we look at extracurricular activities. What did you do outside of academics? In extracurricular activities, our most important questions are "Were you elected to leadership roles by your peers or superiors?" and "What contribution did you make?" We would also like to see the beginning of a positive work ethic, including summer employment. Overall, we look to see how motivated you were to do more than only what was required of you.

After looking at your high school accomplishments, we evaluate your college years. We cover the same areas and questions used in evaluating high school performance, but we add two critical factors—the reputation of your college or university and the quality of your curriculum.

What is the first thing we look for in the military? The positions you've held. In your particular branch were these positions career

enhancing? Did you get them at the right time? Did you hold them for the right length of time? We then proceed to your officer evaluations. We look for impact statements—statements that indicate high achievement and set you apart from your peers.

Each of you is familiar with the evaluation inflation factor in the different branches of the military. So are we. We know every nuance, every idiosyncrasy, of individual statements made in your officer evaluations. We also look at your academic performance. Remember that corporate America is an academic environment. Therefore, your performance in military schools is important.

Then we look at more subjective factors. This is the conversational portion of the interview. Here are some of the factors we evaluate:

1. Interpersonal skill
2. Rapport-building skills
3. Communication skill (verbal and nonverbal)
4. Professional development and growth

We start with poise, self-confidence, and interpersonal skill. This is important because you will be placed in a new environment and be expected to make an immediate impact. You must have the poise, confidence, and people skills to move into an unknown situation and perform quickly. You need to be able to get buy-in from people across the organization (your team members, peers, and superiors) and have the ability to create a positive work environment.

You must be able to communicate succinctly and persuasively in order to make an impact in as short a period of time as possible. Show us you use time effectively. There are many ways to make that determination, even though, for the most part, it is a subjective evaluation.

Finally, we look for a person who is constantly striving to grow. Sometimes when we evaluate an officer's high school and college experiences, we find extremely outstanding credentials. We ask ourselves, "How did they get it all done?" However, when we get to the military, we discover they do *nothing* but their job. We don't

see the growth outside the job. The military encourages you to design your life around your job. We're not saying the military is wrong in that. We're simply saying that's not what we're looking for in corporate America. We seek individuals who have continued to develop their family interest, extracurricular activities, and life outside the military. We want to see continued academic growth. We have little interest in a person whose age has advanced but whose formal education has not.

We look for people who have developed outside interests. We like to see a good balance between intellectual and activity-oriented interests, but we don't care whether it's running, hiking, golf, family outings, reading, computers, writing, chess, flying, boating, camping, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Young Life, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters. We like to see a diversity of activities. We're not looking for carbon copies. We want to see people who are involved—people who are growing. We are interested in your personal life as well, so when you are discussing extracurricular activities, be honest with us. Tell us what you do. Don't create an answer for us. Don't tell us what you think we want to hear. Tell it the way it is. We want to know about all aspects of your life. Learn to be comfortable with yourself as an individual as well as with your ability to perform and make an impact.

Companies cannot mandate that their employees work well with others. At any time, employees can resign and walk out the door. Therefore, we look to hire people who are professional and have good interpersonal skill—people who are respected by others, who work well with others, and who are eager to come to work each morning. Companies want individuals who have the ability to create positive work environments. We're not interested in the cocky person whose self-confidence controls them. We want people who have total control of their self-confidence. They don't have to wear it on their sleeve. They know they're good. They don't have to act as if they're the best.

I have learned that the really good people do not inflate numbers. The confident officers are not afraid to tell me that on a

scale of 1 to 10, they're an 8 in leadership ability, a 6 in computer and information technology skills, or a 5 in mechanical aptitude. Only those who lack self-confidence feel they must tell me they're a 10 in everything they do. We want people who know themselves and can honestly identify their strengths and weaknesses. They want a company to hire them for who they are, not what they pretend to be in an interview.

Do we always get a perfect candidate? In all my years of recruiting, I probably have not seen one, though some have been very close! We take an individual's entire history of background material from high school through the military and put the positives on one scale and the negatives on the other scale. We do, however, want the positive side of the scale to crash to the floor. This is the type of talented individual who makes it to the top of corporate America and gets us very excited about recruiting.

Developing Specific Business Knowledge

Since beginning my career in business in the late 1960s, I have never seen such speed of change or degree of competition as I see today in business. Companies have many more competitors and customers due to globalization. Those companies who react and adapt to the market the best are the leaders. To do this, companies have to have leaders who can make decisions and lead efforts with minimal guidance. Today's leaders understand information technology tools and other concepts such as Six Sigma, Lean, and project management. I highly encourage any military officer wanting to transition to business today to become familiar with these concepts and start applying them in his or her military career in order to discuss them knowledgeably during an interview and apply them immediately in his or her new career. Below are recommendations to help you build your objective skill base.

Information Technology

Microsoft Excel is a great tool for gathering and analyzing data. You can develop formulas, graphs, budgets, and more. You

should become comfortable enough with Excel that you can utilize the Pivot Table tool to analyze and manipulate data. Learning how to use the Excel statistics plug-in tool is also time well spent. You can use Excel to identify the root cause of maintenance problems, improve work flow, reduce bottlenecks, and improve results. In an interview you will then be able to demonstrate your knowledge of Excel using a specific accomplishment.

Microsoft Access is a database application used by many companies. You should learn to become at least an intermediate user with this application. Once you learn some basics, you should learn how to link Access tables with other relational databases. Access is very often a front-end database tool for aggregating data in a company's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. You need to learn how to write simple Access queries and be able to move data between Access and Excel for statistical analysis.

Microsoft Outlook is a front-end application that organizes your e-mail, contacts, appointments, tasks, and calendars and syncs with your smart phone as well. It is a feature-intensive application that you will most certainly use consistently if you leave the service. Learning this is time well spent. Although Apple computers are popular for personal use and e-mail applications like Gmail are prevalent, most of the private sector uses Windows and Microsoft Exchange.

Once you have developed knowledge of Microsoft's Excel, Access, and Outlook, I recommend you move on to the other subjects listed below. However, if you have extra time, you can take time to learn programming languages as well as networking.

Project Management

Companies will expect you to have a good understanding of project management and ask you questions regarding project management during your interviews. A project, defined by the Project Management Institute (PMI) is "a temporary endeavor undertaken to produce a unique product, service or result." Dr. J. M. Juran, a quality guru, defines a project as "a problem scheduled for solution." Based on that definition, you can see why companies

need all Development Candidates to lead projects. Companies constantly have to deliver new or modified products, implement new processes to reduce costs/increase efficiencies, deliver better service, and reinvent themselves to meet customer needs and stay ahead of the competition.

Leaders add value by leading projects in addition to carrying out their traditional responsibilities. Tom Peters, business author and project management proponent, says people must think, “I = My Projects.” Companies recruit Development Candidates who can lead peers, build teams, maintain a budget, and take initiative in order to lead projects. They also want to know if you can work with change, manage risk, be customer-oriented, and maintain enthusiasm for projects. During an interview, you can expect questions probing into all of these areas. Reading about project management is a start but will not provide the depth you need for the answers. You will have to identify projects at work, assume the lead, and drive them to completion.

I highly recommend you study project management. At a minimum, I recommend reading *Fundamentals of Project Management* (4th ed.) by Joseph Heagney. You can also take classes on military bases and posts on project management, as well as earn educational certificates in project management from various institutions. My team and I often recommend Villanova University’s Executive Education for Veterans, a distance learning program. You can earn an Executive Certificate in Project Management from Villanova or other institutions, and then take exams from the Project Management Institute (www.pmi.org), the governing body for project management professionals, to earn professional certification. PMI is also the author of *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (known as The PMBOK Guide). It’s a great guide for those who are really into project management and have a lot of time before the transition to dive deep into the subject.

Six Sigma and Lean

Companies put a lot of emphasis on continuous improvement to streamline operations, become more efficient, and improve

quality. Six Sigma and Lean, sometimes put together and called Lean Six Sigma, are widely used concepts throughout the business world. You will want to be familiar with these topics, and ideally learn about them and apply some of their concepts or principles in your military environment *prior* to a transition. I talk to more and more corporate recruiters who ask candidates, “What do you know about Lean or Six Sigma? What have you done that relates to these?”

Six Sigma is a quality management initiative that identifies and reduces the number of defects and errors in a process. You will want to learn more about Six Sigma because almost every company is trying to better serve its customers and achieve the highest quality. This applies to all career fields—manufacturing, supply chain, engineering, sales, etc. You can use Six Sigma methodologies to solve problems while in the military and be ready to deliver answers that connect with Six Sigma and follow the DMAIC problem-solving methodology.

To learn more about Six Sigma and DMAIC, you can choose from many books. One of my favorite books is *What Is Six Sigma?* by Pande and Holpp. It is short and straight to the point. For those with more knowledge of Six Sigma, this book will be too basic for you.

Lean is the practice of adding more value and eliminating waste in a process. Initially, Lean was applied to manufacturing processes in order to eliminate non-value-added work. Today Lean is applied to production, supply chain, and service work. It is a much broader business practice that is used to improve the flow and efficiency of work, eliminate waste, and deliver a product or service that the customer wants. A great book on Lean is *Lean Thinking: Banish Waste and Create Wealth in Your Corporation* by Womack and Jones.

Many military officers today are taking the initiative to get formal education in Lean and Six Sigma. Numerous military installations offer classes through the education center, and some units invite instructors to provide courses; often the opportunity

to earn a Yellow Belt or Green Belt certification is also offered. For those who do not have the military option, Villanova University also has Executive Certifications in Lean and Six Sigma.

Only you can improve your knowledge and skills. No one can do it for you. Do not rely on what you learned four or five years ago in school. It is outdated. If you are not able to leave the military for several years, make sure you are getting good advice about how to keep up with cutting-edge technology. Develop a plan to improve your skills while you are in the military so you remain on par with your peers in the business world. You will dramatically improve the number of development opportunities with which you can interview upon leaving the military. As mentioned, get with a high-quality recruiting firm that can provide guidance that helps you build your objective skill base and prepare for a successful transition.

Immediate Impact

As you enter corporate America, you will be expected to bring your leadership and problem-solving skills to the job immediately. Officers often say, “Roger, could you tell me how a company in the business world is going to train me?” I encourage you to be cautious in overstating the need to be trained.

Corporations *train* fresh college graduates. Corporations do not expect to spend a lot of dollars or time to train military officers. You received training and a lot of real-world experience in the military, and you bring that valuable training to corporate America. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t be able to have an impact on profitability (the bottom line) instantly. You’ve learned how to accomplish difficult objectives. You’ve learned how to prioritize, organize, and effectively manage time, to break tough objectives down into component parts, and to motivate your team members and peers to help accomplish those objectives. Whether you’re applying your expertise to solve a problem in the military world or a problem in the business world, the methods are the same. You need to suggest that, as a military officer, *you can make*

an immediate impact. Companies will pay you more than a recent college graduate and other entry-level hires, and you will expect to be promoted faster than they are because you already have had “training” that is valuable and costly. Most other entry-level hires do not bring this training and experience to the table.

After all, if you’re going to catch up with your age group, you’ll want to get in and get started immediately. The less time you take to become effective, the more quickly you can move ahead of your age group into significant management roles.

Most companies provide you with some orientation to the new work environment, but orientation is different from training. Orientation is basically what is considered as “on the job training” in the military. At the same time you are performing, you also are learning.

So, rather than emphasize the need for training, show that you, the military officer, have the flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing, highly competitive corporate environment. You have the right attitude, and you will succeed in making an immediate impact in this environment. Give a recruiter proof and evidence of these qualities in your interviews.

Throughout this book I talk about characteristics or competencies, such as problem-solving skills, flexibility, and a positive attitude, which companies look for in Development Candidates. This does not mean you need to possess all or be strong in each of the characteristics I mention, and not every company looks for the same characteristics or competencies. Every candidate is unique, and every company and position is unique. I mention them to you to get you to think about the characteristics and competencies you possess and to know which ones are important to bring to light in an interview. As you read this book, refer to Appendix A for a list of key competencies that recruiters look for in the Development Candidates they interview.