



Teamwork

ACP 4: This article was written for and originally published on the ACP AdvisorNet site. The site is no longer available.



Online Community
Assisting Veterans

One of the challenging aspects for veterans entering (or returning to) the civilian workforce is the transferability of skills. I've been asked, and frequently see, questions about how do portray military experiences on a resume or in interviews. Here is some background and a key recommendation.

According to hiring guru Lou Adler, hiring managers looking for top performers are looking at some key things. The first is: "Talent x Energy²." A candidate must have some level of the skills needed to get a specific job done – but the "Energy²" is more important. It is the "energy-based" traits: enthusiasm, commitment, passion, etc. Understanding this is simple. Everyone knows someone with just an average level of talent who's clearly seen as a peak performer. The difference? Their enthusiasm, commitment, etc. At the same time, everyone knows someone with an unbelievable level of talent who's not a peak performer. In this case, what's missing is the "energy-based" traits.

The second important element is "Team Leadership" – for all jobs. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing work environment, every job requires the ability to work with others at different levels within the organization – and with vendors, consultants, customers, and... Everyone needs "team leadership" skills. Moreover, this is where every veteran should have multiple accomplishments that demonstrate their work with teams – most should also have solid examples of leadership.

A Very Real Example

When I reported to my first assignment after MP training, as a Private E2, I was shocked and a little scared when the MP School Commander (I still remember his name) was "waiting" for me to report. I reported to him, and he quickly stated: "Schreier – you've got a

business degree, right?” “Yes, Sir.” “I’ve got a mailroom that’s completely messed up (not his exact words) – can you fix it?” “Yes, Sir.” An hour later I was placed in charge of a Spec4 and a PFC for the mailroom of the MP School – a mailroom with literally 1000’s of pieces of unforwarded mail for long gone school attendees, a completely messy-disorganized mailroom under threats by the U.S. Postal Service for serious violations of postal rules. I was suddenly in charge of two people who had a longer time in service than my total of fewer than four months – who officially outranked me.

However, I had seven years of work experience in retailing from high school through college – and multiple college experiences of team projects. I felt I knew a little bit about leadership and teamwork. Left alone with my new assignment and two young men who’d been read the riot act by the company commander, I did three things. First, I spent just a few minutes getting to know each of the guys, home towns, how they came to be in the Army... Second, I challenged them with a clear goal: if we solved the problems of the mailroom and straightened out its operations, there would be no more attention from the Postal Service and more important, no more criticism from the company commander. The problem was clearly presented to me as very serious. It was not being addressed by the company’s First Sergeant; it was not being addressed by one of the company’s Lieutenants; the threats from the Post Office had attracted the Captain’s focus. And the third step was simple: I suggested we get to work!

I left the MP School four months later because of a re-assignment to South Korea. The mail room was re-organized, re-painted, with any mail needing to be forwarded to former students “cleared” within days of receipt. And I left with an official recognition, including “spirit of cooperation,” for my work from the Company Commander.

Fast Forward to Today

For decades, this experience has been an accomplishment that I’m proud of – and I’ve used as evidence of my ability to lead teams with a vision, with respect, and with hard work. In 2002, Jeff and Jon Cannon wrote an outstanding book, “Leadership Lessons of the U.S. Navy SEALs.” Many of the lessons of the book are valuable for veteran job seekers, but the following paragraphs make the most important point:

A resume that tells about the person and not the team shows that the person views a job as just that, a job to be individually completed, not as a job to be completed as part of a team or a job to be completed in the service of a larger goal. And that is the perspective of someone who hasn’t yet learned

the importance of working within a team. That is the perspective of a person who is an employee and not a potential team leader.

How do successful leaders respond when someone congratulates them on a good job? They start talking about the great team they've got working for them. How this person or that person stepped up in the effort. Or how everyone really came together to pull through. Why? Because they know what it takes to succeed. It takes a team.

One of the strongest talents you can bring to a potential employer as a veteran is your ability to work with and lead within a team environment. Make sure the accomplishments on your resume – and the stories you prepare for your interviews – reflect these team leadership skills.

Including Team Accomplishments

Most resumes focus on individual accomplishments—it is important for you to change that. For each position, one of the standards for a quality resume is to list three-four specific accomplishments. Let's say your resume lists four different positions you've held. It does not matter if it is all military or a mix of the military and private sector. For each of these positions, you carefully select three key accomplishments, each worded with strong action verbs indicating what you accomplished, how you did it, and the result. For each of these positions, make sure that one of the three accomplishments is clearly a team accomplishment. That means there will be at least four strong team accomplishments on your resume – or in your LinkedIn profile.

You must also make sure that these team accomplishments are specific. The fact that you “led a team” doesn't focus on what you did even if the statement contains what the team accomplished. Let's use the example from my experience earlier to understand how to make this a key part of your resume. Here is a simple way to put this on a resume:

- *Led a team to bring a unit post office operation from a serious state of non-compliance with U.S. Postal codes to full compliance within 60 days.*

This statement could be improved – as a personal accomplishment – by adding some additional details on the state of non-compliance and by adding how I accomplished it. Moreover, while it appears that it was a team accomplishment because I “led a team,” it says nothing about what I did to lead the team. Let's focus on improving that part of the accomplishment:

- *Led a team of two junior enlisted men, by establishing team and individual goals, challenging them with an overall vision of successful compliance, and coaching them regularly with positive feedback, eliminating a backlog of 1000+ pieces of unforwarded mail and completely refurbishing the mailroom while implementing new procedures for tracking mail flow.*

There's a powerful way to add specificity to your team accomplishments – through awareness of the stages that every team experiences. It is based on a model developed by Bruce Tuckman in the 60's and states that all teams not only do go through the stages, but they are also inevitable for the team to grow and meet challenges. The four stages are:

1. **Forming:** the team members get to know each other and get started on the tasks. For a leader, it is time to learn about the behaviors of the members and provide clear direction.
2. **Storming:** Disagreement will erupt in any team, maybe for just a short time, maybe as something that will destroy a team. Conflict over goals or participant roles challenges a team leader to stay in touch with each team member and actively resolve issues.
3. **Norming:** At this stage, members begin to understand clearly their roles and buy into the goals of the team. However, there are still challenges and the leader needs work closely to work with the individual differences of team members.
4. **Performing:** At this stage the team is competent and becoming more self-directed. For a leader, it means letting go and not micro-managing. A strong leader adjusts his or her leadership style for both the individual team members and the team stage.

It is possible for a team to go through these stages over a couple days, or weeks, or even months. It is possible for the teams to start over if new members or challenges are introduced to the team. However, observations of teams have proven the stages and the value of understanding them for team leadership. There's much information available for learning about the team stages – and then applying this information to your team accomplishments.

Your resume will be stronger and your potential to be a good contributor to an organization will be much clearer if your team leadership skills are highlighted on your resume and LinkedIn profile. Moreover, a final point: team leadership skills, if they are specific, are some of the easiest to transfer from your military experience to the private sector.

One of the challenging aspects for veterans entering (or returning to) the civilian workforce is the transferability of skills. I've been asked, and frequently see, questions about how do portray military experiences on a resume or in interviews. Here are some background and a key recommendation.

According to hiring guru Lou Adler, hiring managers looking for top performers are looking at some key things. The first is: "Talent x Energy²." A candidate must have some level of the skills needed to get a specific job done – but the "Energy²" is more important. It is the "energy-based" traits: enthusiasm, commitment, passion, etc. Understanding this is simple. Everyone knows someone with just an average level of talent who's clearly seen as a peak performer. The difference? Their enthusiasm, commitment, etc. At the same time, everyone knows someone with an unbelievable level of talent who's not a peak performer. In this case, what's missing is the "energy-based" traits.

The second important element is "Team Leadership" – for all jobs. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing work environment, every job requires the ability to work with others at different levels within the organization – and with vendors, consultants, customers, and... Everyone needs "team leadership" skills. Moreover, this is where every veteran should have multiple accomplishments that demonstrate their work with teams – most should also have solid examples of leadership.

A Very Real Example

When I reported to my first assignment after MP training, as a Private E2, I was shocked and a little scared when the MP School Commander (I still remember his name) was "waiting" for me to report. I reported to him, and he quickly stated: "Schreier – you've got a business degree, right?" "Yes, Sir." "I've got a mailroom that's completely messed up (not his exact words) – can you fix it?" "Yes, Sir." An hour later I was placed in charge of a Spec4 and a PFC for the mailroom of the MP School – a mailroom with literally 1000's of pieces of unforwarded mail for long gone school attendees, a completely messy-disorganized mailroom under threats by the U.S. Postal Service for serious violations of postal rules. I was suddenly in charge of two people who had a longer time in service than my total of fewer than four months – who officially outranked me.

However, I had seven years of work experience in retailing from high school through college – and multiple college experiences of team projects. I felt I knew a little bit about leadership and teamwork. Left alone with my new assignment and two young men who'd been read the riot act by the company commander, I did three things. First, I spent just a

few minutes getting to know each of the guys, home towns, how they came to be in the Army... Second, I challenged them with a clear goal: if we solved the problems of the mailroom and straightened out its operations, there would be no more attention from the Postal Service and more important, no more criticism from the company commander. The problem was clearly presented to me as very serious. It was not being addressed by the company's First Sergeant; it was not being addressed by one of the company's Lieutenants; the threats from the Post Office had attracted the Captain's focus. And the third step was simple: I suggested we get to work!

I left the MP School four months later because of a re-assignment to South Korea. The mail room was re-organized, re-painted, with any mail needing to be forwarded to former students "cleared" within days of receipt. And I left with an official recognition, including "spirit of cooperation," for my work from the Company Commander.

Fast Forward to Today

For decades, this experience has been an accomplishment that I'm proud of – and I've used as evidence of my ability to lead teams with a vision, with respect, and with hard work. In 2002, Jeff and Jon Cannon wrote an outstanding book, "Leadership Lessons of the U.S. Navy SEALs." Many of the lessons of the book are valuable for veteran job seekers, but the following paragraphs make the most important point:

A resume that tells about the person and not the team shows that the person views a job as just that, a job to be individually completed, not as a job to be completed as part of a team or a job to be completed in the service of a larger goal. And that is the perspective of someone who hasn't yet learned the importance of working within a team. That is the perspective of a person who is an employee and not a potential team leader.

How do successful leaders respond when someone congratulates them on a good job? They start talking about the great team they've got working for them. How this person or that person stepped up in the effort. Or how everyone really came together to pull through. Why? Because they know what it takes to succeed. It takes a team.

One of the strongest talents you can bring to a potential employer as a veteran is your ability to work with and lead within a team environment. Make sure the accomplishments

on your resume – and the stories you prepare for your interviews – reflect these team leadership skills.

Including Team Accomplishments

Most resumes focus on individual accomplishments—it is important for you to change that. For each position, one of the standards for a quality resume is to list three-four specific accomplishments. Let's say your resume lists four different positions you've held. It does not matter if it is all military or a mix of the military and private sector. For each of these positions, you carefully select three key accomplishments, each worded with strong action verbs indicating what you accomplished, how you did it, and the result. For each of these positions, make sure that one of the three accomplishments is clearly a team accomplishment. That means there will be at least four strong team accomplishments on your resume – or in your LinkedIn profile.

You must also make sure that these team accomplishments are specific. The fact that you “led a team” doesn't focus on what you did even if the statement contains what the team accomplished. Let's use the example from my experience earlier to understand how to make this a key part of your resume. Here is a simple way to put this on a resume:

- *Led a team to bring a unit post office operation from a serious state of non-compliance with U.S. Postal codes to full compliance within 60 days.*

This statement could be improved – as a personal accomplishment – by adding some additional details on the state of non-compliance and by adding how I accomplished it. Moreover, while it appears that it was a team accomplishment because I “led a team,” it says nothing about what I did to lead the team. Let's focus on improving that part of the accomplishment:

- *Led a team of two junior enlisted men, by establishing team and individual goals, challenging them with an overall vision of successful compliance, and coaching them regularly with positive feedback, eliminating a backlog of 1000+ pieces of unforwarded mail and completely refurbishing the mailroom while implementing new procedures for tracking mail flow.*

There's a powerful way to add specificity to your team accomplishments – through awareness of the stages that every team experiences. It is based on a model developed by Bruce Tuckman in the 60's and states that all teams not only do go through the stages, but they are also inevitable for the team to grow and meet challenges. The four stages are:

5. **Forming:** the team members get to know each other and get started on the tasks. For a leader, it is time to learn about the behaviors of the members and provide clear direction.
6. **Storming:** Disagreement will erupt in any team, maybe for just a short time, maybe as something that will destroy a team. Conflict over goals or participant roles challenges a team leader to stay in touch with each team member and actively resolve issues.
7. **Norming:** At this stage, members begin to understand clearly their roles and buy into the goals of the team. However, there are still challenges and the leader needs work closely to work with the individual differences of team members.
8. **Performing:** At this stage the team is competent and becoming more self-directed. For a leader, it means letting go and not micro-managing. A strong leader adjusts his or her leadership style for both the individual team members and the team stage.

It is possible for a team to go through these stages over a couple days, or weeks, or even months. It is possible for the teams to start over if new members or challenges are introduced to the team. However, observations of teams have proven the stages and the value of understanding them for team leadership. There's much information available for learning about the team stages – and then applying this information to your team accomplishments.

Your resume will be stronger and your potential to be a good contributor to an organization will be much clearer if your team leadership skills are highlighted on your resume and LinkedIn profile. Moreover, a final point: team leadership skills, if they are specific, are some of the easiest to transfer from your military experience to the private sector.

James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR
212-Careers.com

Career and Leadership Coaching
Special Assessment and Coaching Rates for all Military and First Responders