



Futuring Skills: A Veteran Advantage

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Transitioning military and veterans often have an advantage with a critical skill for today's world. They likely have experience and often specific training in a key futuring skill: scouting. This particular skill is being talked about even more today in terms of "focus" and "awareness."

To succeed in today's complex, information overloaded, constantly changing world, career success, including job seeking, depends on multiple skills, for example communications and problem-solving. The importance of futuring skills as a key competency has been recognized by professional organizations like the World Future Society and the Society for Human Resources Management. The goal of this article is to focus on three specific examples of futuring skills that can be developed and used for career success, in addition, recognizing how transitioning military and veterans may have an advantage.

Monitoring

"All the available information means people have to work harder to consume it, categorizing information, sorting facts from opinion, and putting everything into context. Unless we take the time to do that, and have the skills to do it well, we could actually be less knowledgeable."

(Ron Ashkenas, Harvard Business Review)

Multiple skills are called for here but the "futuring" component involves the need for a process to become aware and monitor the "things you should be looking for..." Futurist Joel Barker developed a process, called T.I.P.S. Tracking (Trends, Innovations, Paradigm Shifts). The process enables individuals to focus, organize, and interrogate important information. The organizing component can be driven by software with many different

curation and blogging platforms available. Many can be accessed for free to organize – and share – information relevant to their career field of interest. I use the T.I.P.S. Tracking process to organize, share, and evaluate key information for career work, leadership, trends, and other topics. This empowers me to monitor several sources with automated searching for career keywords like resumes, interviewing, and then select (and comment if desired) only those items that I think meet the criteria I've created for more hard-hitting career advice.

Scouting the Future

It's standard advice for job seekers to have support, from someone reviewing resumes to coaching for interviews. But a futuring skill takes it further and involves learning the value of scouting – a time-honored skill, definitely in the military, that recognizes the importance of looking over the horizon. Learning guru Elliott Masie called on his followers to draft five scouts – and meet with each of them once a month. He suggested scouts from a generation older, a generation younger, technology, global, and faith. Good career advice would suggest that every person seeking career success, identify at least five different areas where having someone scouting and reporting on important topics from different perspectives would be valuable. Using T.I.P.S. Tracking, particularly with organizing and sharing information as mentioned above, makes it possible to “follow” the information begin generated from key people I know, my scouts, professionals in particular fields, or specific topics. Focused, important information is directly tied to my needs.

A Formal Scouting Process

Think for a moment of the value of having better information about the future based on the characteristics of scouting. The scouts who worked with the wagon trains in the old west:

- Were fast. Slow scouts provide information too late to be useful.
- Sought quality, not quantity. Surveyors went later to get the detail on selected areas
- Sampled. In today's world, if you try and cover everything, you'll never act.
- Mapped. Scouts present information in an organized way.

Futurist Joel Barker takes the scouting metaphor to a powerful new level with a strategic exploration tool, The Implications Wheel®, that can help any job seeker better explore the short and long-term consequences of any change. It can be used to explore questions like: “What are the possible implications of pursuing this career field, or accepting a particular job offer?” It is a process for “finding the future faster,” scouting over the horizon of time. It asks a participant to examine both the positive and negative implications by asking a question that explores possibilities: “what might happen next?” Then ask the question again for these possibilities identified: “what might happen next?” And ask the question again. The Implications Wheel process includes scoring for desirability and likelihood. A recent job seeker that I coached reported that “understanding this process made every decision clearer.”

The first questions I get when introducing these techniques are how to determine topics to “scout,” and which sources to follow. This is exactly why futuring is a skill to be developed. “Scout” the topics that are most important to you. Think about what topics you might place on your radar screen. Using the “radar” concept, think about which topics are closer or further out in time. Think about – and become aware of – which topics, particularly trends, are approaching at a faster rate. For a job seeker, look for specific information on resumes and interviewing. Look for information on a particular field or industry. Be critical when just using search engines. They reveal the universe – you want more focused information. Use the results of searches to identify sources of information you can trust and sources that challenge your thinking.

A closing point, perhaps the most important characteristic for career success, the futuring techniques discussed here provide information to enhance decision-making. They do not – and should not for job seekers – provide answers. That’s your decision, your job choice, your career, your future!

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