3 Reasons Why I Make Time to Mentor

When I left the military after six years of active duty in 2012, I knew I wanted to start my own business but was unsure of how to apply the expertise and relationships I'd built in the Army to the civilian world. With the help of mentors, I learned how to adapt the skills I developed in the military and have gone on to found two tech startups.

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The mentorship I received was invaluable and I try to pass it forward. I make it a priority to spend time speaking with other veterans and give advice about transitioning from the military to the private sector. Giving back and helping others who are on a similar path to me is incredibly important, and I recommend every professional, no matter his or her background, make it a priority to either find a mentor or become a mentor. Providing or receiving advice doesn't have to take a lot of time – platforms like LinkedIn's Career Advice feature, which I use to connect with other veterans in need of advice, allows anyone to seek out or provide lightweight mentorship. Through Career Advice, I've been able to mentor veterans and answer their questions about transitioning into the civilian working world, provide frank and honest feedback on their career plans, and help connect former active-duty military members to new opportunities

Here are some of the reasons I love being a mentor:

I've made it to where I am today

because of mentors both inside and outside of the military.

The importance of mentorship was stressed to me as soon as I started active duty. During my six years in the military, I worked with several mentors who shaped my experience and taught me about discipline, honesty and integrity.

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When I left the Army in 2012, I soon realized that I needed to find a new set of mentors in the private sector that could help me navigate the civilian working world. I knew I wanted to enter tech, and was able to find a mentor who gave me valuable guidance through my time in tech sales and throughout the experience of founding my first two startups. Though I didn't attend one, other former military members who have become entrepreneurs also found that veteran-oriented training programs like BunkerLabs were a valuable resource.

Knowing first-hand how valuable a mentor can be, I wanted to give others what my mentors gave me. When I approached professionals with more experience and know-how than myself to answer questions and provide advice, more often than not, they were happy to help and share their knowledge. It's important for me to be there for others in the same way.

Veterans face unique challenges when entering the civilian job market.

The Army and the private sector are, to put it lightly, very different. Veterans often face challenges integrating into the corporate world after the structure and sense of purpose the military provides, and I was no exception. I struggled with the lack of candor, a less intense work ethic and unclear

goals when I first entered the civilian workplace, and it took time to adapt the skills I learned during my time in active duty to the private sector.

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My military background benefits my work in tech, and I aim to help my mentees channel the teachings and skills of the armed services into their new roles in the civilian world. Bravery, discipline and directness are all necessary traits in the military, which, when applied correctly, are vital to success in the private sector as well. STEM skills are also key to many positions in the military, meaning that veterans often enter the civilian job market with training in engineering, IT and software development. Veterans like myself can help others transitioning out of active service refine how they communicate their accomplishments and contributions to the military in a way that the everyday professional can understand.

Tech can feel impenetrable if you don’t have big-name companies or a top tier college on your resume

One thing I make sure I share with other veterans who are looking into technology: It’s one thing to transition from being in the military to being a civilian, but going from the military to tech is a whole different ball game. The tech world prides itself on being casual and focusing on fun, two things that aren’t highly valued in the military.

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It can be difficult to build a network in the tech world if you didn’t get your start at one of the big companies or attend a university that is seen as a pipeline for tech

talent, so building relationships that can help you get your foot in the door is crucial. Mentors played a huge part in helping me plan my career path in tech and knowing when to pivot when something wasn’t right for me, and I want to help other veterans who are eager to enter tech discover their most fulfilling path. Companies like Microsoft, Salesforce and Cisco also offer tech training programs for veterans looking to work in tech, which some of my mentees have also found helpful.

Overall, my biggest piece of advice for those I mentor is to be honest with yourself and those you work with. I practice radical candor in all areas of my life, and it’s especially important when I’m giving feedback to someone who recently left the military. While it can be difficult to tell peers something they don’t want to hear, it builds trust and can help others avoid mistakes both within and outside of active service. And ultimately, this is what a mentor needs to do in order to be effective.

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