

A “Must Do” -- Career Planning -- Made Simple  
By Anne Wight, GCDF, CFLE, and CCRR  
Military Spouse Corporate Career Network

The old saying “Those who fail to plan, plan to fail” certainly applies to career planning. Many people simply don’t understand what it involves and go from job to job in a haphazard way, failing to plan their own careers. Military spouses are especially vulnerable to the haphazard trap, often feeling like a leaf caught in the wind without any control or known destination. As “trailing spouses,” those who want to work must be capable of establishing and maintaining a career while relocating multiple times to destinations not always conducive to their chosen line of work.

Career planning basics focus on two elements 1) the individual and 2) the current labor market. A few years ago, the current labor market that concerned most people was their local one, but the global economy created a global labor market. Career planning starts with individuals examining what they love to do, determining what their skills are, identifying their interests and values, and gaining education and training appropriate for them. It can be re-stated as “know thyself” first. Then career planners need to know what type of work is in demand, both locally and globally. What complicates everything, and why planning is essential, is that often the two elements do not match or even complement each other. For example, when Silicon Valley became famous, the great demand for computer gurus far exceeded the supply. After a few years, the supply was greater than the demand and computer gurus were no longer guaranteed work. Now, many computer experts are finding that numerous computer-related jobs are being outsourced to other countries.

Military spouses who tackle career planning will be most successful if they acknowledge the changing world of work and make themselves adaptable to become and stay more competitive. That involves assessing and reassessing one’s capabilities and how they fit into the flux of work. If someone has strong skills in an area that is no longer in demand, new skills must be added. If my passion has been in one area and I have spent time and money becoming in that area, I want to continue to work in that area. With no demand for that particular skill, I might now feel that life is not fair or wonder why I have to start over. Too often, people dig in and refuse to change or grow. It is far easier to complain about the changes around us than to acknowledge the problem and try to solve it. The winners are the ones who have gauged the labor market’s needs and have slowly been adding to their skills and experience to meet those newly developing needs.

Recent articles in business journals have indicated that many workers today lack the mathematical ability to make change or the grammar to communicate effectively. Basic math and grammar skills must be in place for anyone seeking a good job in any field. What else is needed in today’s labor market? Computer literacy remains a top need and for those working in an office environment, skill in using the Microsoft Office Suite, including Excel and Access, will add to their value as an employee. Communication and computer skills are also included in the top 12 transferable skills or qualities listed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers:

- |                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Communication skills     | 7. Interpersonal skills   |
| 2. Honesty/integrity        | 8. Motivation/initiative  |
| 3. Teamwork skills          | 9. Computer Skills        |
| 4. Strong work ethic        | 10. Detail orientation    |
| 5. Analytical skills        | 11. Organizational skills |
| 6. Flexibility/adaptability | 12. Leadership ability    |

The Wall Street Journal ran an article titled “Labor Picture is Clouded” on August 27, 2007 (page A4) about the demand for temporary workers declining, but without an accompanying overall higher demand for permanent workers. The article explained that “The weakness in demand for temps lately has been most pronounced for lower-skilled office workers and for workers at factories and construction sites. This has been offset in part by strong demand for professional services, such as accounting and computer specialists.” Likewise, professional and specialized skills for permanent workers will remain in demand overall. The problem is that local needs vary. A large metropolitan area with many types of businesses will have different employment needs and opportunities than a small rural community or a small military installation that is not close to the general population. Anyone who can demonstrate the 12 transferable skills listed above will have less difficulty adapting to a new local labor market and landing a temporary or a permanent job.

There is another key step for any career-minded military spouse to take. The ideal career is to find what you love and do that for the rest of your life. Keep that dream and build on that career. Meanwhile, work on the transferable skills AND find a second and third area of work to gain proficiency. These additional areas may be related to the primary career field and should use many of the transferable skills, but need to be marketable globally or at least in the majority of labor markets. For example, a talented office secretary might chose to increase skills on the computer or delve further into the business world and take courses in a specific area of interest. Typing term papers might be a short time job while looking for a better one. Becoming a virtual office assistant might also be a good choice.

While career planning seems complicated, it is actually very simple for those who know themselves, know the local and global labor markets, develop “fall-back” career areas to meet changing demands, have developed transferable skills, and are flexible and adaptable enough to land on their feet career-wise anywhere in the world.

Editorial by Deb Kloeppe, President & CEO  
MSCCN & Pinnacle Foundation

Anne Wight is hands down the expert when it comes to career planning. I can add my absolute respect and admiration towards those military spouses who chart their course for financial independence, career management, and executive management, or begin their entrepreneurial spirit when starting a business or creating their own line of products! Allow me to be blunt with MSM’s readers: everyone believes they are prepared to work from home. The MSCCN and Pinnacle Foundation have witnessed otherwise. Working

from home is indeed a privilege and luxury for me. However, there are definite draw backs, and if you don't prepare yourself and your family for these draw backs, you will be miserable in your new home office setting. When charting your career course for Independent Contracting in a home office or running a business out of your home, please take it from the virtual office experts at MSCCN and Pinnacle Foundation: know exactly what you are getting yourself into 3 months prior to your start date of a virtual office environment.

If your career is fast tracked to executive management currently, please voluntarily write to the MSCCN and allow us to print your career journey. It's our duty to mentor and provide guidance to our fellow military spouses who are charting their career course to follow in your executive management or entrepreneur footsteps.