

Soldiers find success transitioning to civilian life with ACAP

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Aug. 9, 2011- At some point in their career most Soldiers will have to make the transition from Soldier to civilian. To ease the process the Army created the Army Career and Alumni Program, as well as the Transition Assistance Program to provide transition and job assistance services to the Soldiers and their family members.

“The decision to transition out of uniform is as important as the initial decision to put it on,” said Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch, U.S. Army Installation Management Command commander. “Soldiers deserve as much support at this critical point in their service as they do with earlier parts of their career. That is why the Army is working to make ACAP even more effective.”

ACAP services include pre-separation counseling, Veteran Affairs benefits briefings, and Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program workshops, which cover career planning, job searches, resume writing and interviewing. The services are available to separating and retiring Active Component Soldiers, demobilizing Reserve and National Guard Soldiers, family members, retirees, and civilians affected by BRAC, reduction in force or Global Realignment.

The Carlisle Barracks ACAP/TAP programs are run by Jeff Hanks, the Employment & Transition Assistance Program manager, who makes sure that the transitioning Soldiers and their families get far more than the minimum requirements that the Army mandates.

“The program here, by far and away, exceeds the Army standard,” said Elton Manske, the director of the Carlisle Barracks Department of Human Resources.

Under the current guidelines, Soldiers spend 60-70 hours accessing ACAP resources said Lynch. These resources include the pre-separation briefing, the two-and-a-half day Transition Assistance Program workshop, the four-hour VA briefing and individual counseling sessions.

“Our TAP work shop is four and a half days,” said Hanks. “We force feed you like a fire house and give you all the tools you need to put into your tool box and make the transition smooth.”

“There is no way you can cover everything in two and a half days,” said Staff Sgt. Michael Abney, who completed the Carlisle Barracks TAP course in July. “It is still a lot of information for four days but at least in the four days, everything was spaced out to give the Soldiers the opportunity to ask questions and follow up on things. Even though I have already taken the class, I am trying to get into another TAPS class before I retire in April because they through so much information at us, I couldn’t digest it all.”

“During the workshop we cover Veterans benefits and entitlements, as well as resume writing and interview techniques,” said Hanks. “We also teach the Soldiers how to ‘dress for success’ by bringing in local retailers who educate the Soldiers on what types of suits to buy and how to maximize their wardrobe. The workshop concludes with an employer panel made up of six to nine local employers who reconfirm everything we have taught and they also sit on mock-interview boards to help prepare the Soldiers.”

“I thought the ‘dress for success’ class was beneficial,” said Abney. “I thought you could just put on a suit, but there is more to it.”

“The ACAP office is awesome,” said Sgt. 1stClass Pam Murphy, who went through the course in July 2010. “Not only do you get tips on what types of business clothes to wear but Jeff (Hanks) brings in “dressers” from are realtors to show you how to style up your outfits so you can maximize your wardrobe.”

Soldiers are not the only people that can benefit from ACAP.

“We encourage the spouses to come as well, because they are also transitioning out of the Army,” said Hanks. “We can help them understand the benefits and entitlements as well as help them with the transition.”

ACAP also serves a retention tool.

“About four out of 10 eligible Soldiers who start ACAP decide to reenlist or join the National Guard or Reserves,” said Lynch.

“We scare some of the Soldiers,” said Hanks. “They may think that they are the best Soldier ever, but some of the Soldiers are not as prepared as they think for civilian life. While some military jobs have a direct civilian counterpart, many do not. “Those Soldiers may be better utilizing their GI Bill to go to college or reenlisting.”

“This course more than prepared me to transition to civilian life,” said Murphy.

If you are retiring in less than two years, or if you are separating in less than a year, your first step in making a successful transition is to call Jeff Bobo, the Carlisle Barracks department of Human Resources transition technician at 245-3894. Contact Jeff Hanks at 245-3684 to schedule yourself for the next available TAP course.

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