

# MILITARY TO CIVILIAN IT PRO



**Moving from the military to civilian work can be daunting in any field but especially in a fast-moving industry like IT.**

But you've got help. At CBT Nuggets we're honored to help those who have served their country transfer their skills. This guide will help you with everything you need to start your civilian career in Information Technology, from study strategies, to resume writing, interviews and corporate culture.

## **CONTENTS**

- 2 MAKING THE MOST OF THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL (MGIB)**
- 4 RESUMÉ BOOTCAMP**
- 5 ACE YOUR INTERVIEW**
- 6 GREEN TO GREY: GUIDE TO CORPORATE CULTURE**
- 8 BACK TO THE BASICS: TRAIN LIKE YOU FIGHT**
- 10 MILITARY TECH RESOURCES**



# MAKING THE MOST OF THE MGIB

The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) was established following World War II as a way to ensure that service members had educational opportunities that led to successful careers. As a veteran eligible for the Chapter 30 (MGIB-AD) or Chapter 33 (Post 9/11) Montgomery GI Bill, you have some great benefits coming to you. Whichever benefit you qualify for, you can use it to pay for your IT certification exams.

## MGIB AND YOUR CAREER

As an IT professional, you'll likely need to continue learning throughout your career, often in the form of training for certification exams. The cost of certification exams really adds up, so it's a good thing that the VA reimburses for them! Here are some factors to consider as you plan for your IT certifications.

### EXAM COST

The cost of your exam must be under the VA's financial cap. The MGIB covers approved exams that cost \$2,000 or less, which should cover most IT certifications. You won't be able to use the GI Bill for certs like the Cisco Certified Architect (CCar) exam (\$7,500), but it will cover pricey tests like the lab portion of the CCIE exam (\$1,400).

### EXAM APPROVAL

Your exam must be approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA provides an [online list](#) of approved licenses and certifications. (Pro-tip: search by "Country" rather than "State," and then perform a keyword search for your exam.) A cursory search reveals that the VA covers the most common Cisco, CompTIA, VMware, Microsoft, Oracle, and PMI certifications.

### WHAT THE MGIB DOESN'T COVER

Unfortunately, the MGIB does not cover the costs associated with training bootcamps, exam courses, or test materials under either version of the MGIB. Nor will they reimburse administrative or registration fees.

## APPLYING FOR EXAM REIMBURSEMENT

If you're using your VA benefits, then you'll need to apply for them through the [VA's online portal](#). It's a fairly simple process to initiate, but approval might take some time, so plan ahead. You'll need a copy of your **DD Form 214** and **banking information** to setup a direct deposit to receive your benefits funds.

If you've already applied for and received benefits in the past, you can apply for reimbursal for new expenses, like certs, by filling out **VA Form 22-0803, Application for Reimbursement of Licensing or Certification Fees**, and mail it to your [VA Regional Processing office](#). As soon as it's processed, they'll direct deposit the requested amount in your bank account. They do not require documentation that you took the exam.

Once approved, the VA will charge the cost of the exam against your remaining benefits according to the rules of your GI Bill program.

## POST 9/11 GI BILL (CHAPTER 33)

The wording is a little confusing, but essentially the VA will charge you one month of benefits for every \$1,832.96\* that they reimburse, rounded up to the nearest full month. So, even inexpensive exams will cost you one month of benefits. For example, if the VA reimburses you for a \$400 exam, they'll charge you a full month of benefits. If they reimburse you for an exam that costs between \$1,832.97 and \$2,000, then they'll charge you two months of benefits.

\*This is the 2016 [monthly entitlement charge rate](#), which will change every year.

## MGIB (CHAPTER 30)

Chapter 30 benefits are a little easier. The VA will only charge the cost of the exam proportionately against your remaining monthly benefits. In 2016, one month of benefits equals \$1,717, which means that if you take a \$400 exam, they'll charge you seven days.

Whatever benefit you qualify for, the VA will reimburse you for as many exams as you take, including any you don't pass, and re-certification exams

## MAKING THE MOST OF THE MGIB

Think about your benefits as money you've earned (because it is), so plan ahead. If you have even the slightest inkling that you might go back to school (even community college), it might be wise to hold off on requesting reimbursement. After all, a single month of Post-9/11 benefits are worth considerably more than a \$350 exam. That month of benefits is likely worth more like \$2,500 or more. It all depends on your future plans.

As a lifelong learner, you'll want make your remaining benefits last as long as possible without letting them expire, so use your benefits strategically to meet your career goals.



# RESUMÉ BOOTCAMP

## PREP YOUR RESUMÉ

If you spent your entire career in the service, you may have never written a resum  or interviewed. But don't panic! You already have the information and skills to be successful in a civilian job search, and this guide will help you get them into the right format. Whip your job search into shape with ... Resum  Boot Camp.

## GETTING STARTED

You can find plenty of resum  templates online. Search for examples from the field you're applying for. For example, [this one](#) for an entry-level helpdesk position. Here's how to fill in the blanks:

- **Education:** If you haven't gone to college, you can list certifications that are recognized outside of the military. Be sure to use civilian names for the military certifications whenever possible. Relevant technical training often has civilian equivalency.
- **Experience:** Begin with the duties and responsibilities of your military job description. You can find full descriptions by searching your military occupation code in the [American Council on Education Military Guide](#). Your Enlisted Performance Report, Enlisted Evaluation Report, Fitness Report or equivalent documents may also have valuable quantitative descriptions of your accomplishments. Numbers often speak louder than adjectives!

## CUSTOMIZING

A resum  is not a "one-and-done" document. You should be customizing it for every new application. As much as possible, adapt descriptions of your experience to the requirements of the position.

- **Cut the Fat:** You may have aced Jump School, but that's a skill that's unlikely to transfer to the average SysAdmin position, so there's no need to mention it. The same editing process works for the experience you do want to include. It may be relevant that you worked with Cisco systems, but the base where those machines lived is less relevant. Only include experience that will help employers understand your ability to contribute to the work they do.
- **Stay Honest:** It may be tempting to fib and expand your skill set to include technologies you plan to learn, but haven't yet. Don't. This only creates trouble down the road.
- **Look Forward:** If there's a skill or technology missing from your experience, but mentioned in the job posting, you can still address it by noting your enthusiasm to learn within the position.



# ACE YOUR INTERVIEW

Whether or not your military job is directly related to the position you're applying for, your service likely equipped you for the challenges of a civilian career. We asked Outside the Wire Certification Scholarship winner David Su to outline his strategy for discussing military service in job interviews. He recommends focusing on skills and values developed during service:

## GRIT AND INGENUITY

Su says, "Starting in basic training, 'mission achievement' is always the number-one priority. We didn't always start with the right equipment or skillset, but this taught us to adapt and innovate as we pushed forward to complete the task at hand. This trait is a crucial selling point when you interview in the civilian sector. Being a well-rounded team player who embodies the 'mission achievement' mentality is tremendously valuable to the demands of civilian enterprises."

## ADAPTABILITY

According to Su, "Eight years in the military taught me to adapt very quickly to changing environments. My first job involved working long-haul telecommunications in a cozy tech control facility in Tokyo, Japan. My next assignment was down in the trenches, setting up fly-away communications packages in remote locations around Europe. I think veterans profit from this range of experience as it shows future employers that you're able to handle changes and adapt quickly. Business solutions, especially in the IT industry, are always evolving. In an interview, highlighting the variety of experiences and accomplishments in your military career communicates your ability to adapt and conform."

## PROFESSIONALISM

Even if you don't have years of career experience in the military, you learned professional skills that transfer to the corporate world. Su says, "At 19, I was already challenged everyday to overcome unexpected problems, exhibit initiative and leadership, and professionalism ... sometimes in dangerous and austere conditions. Many young service members are put into situations which require them to learn new skills and concepts quickly, integrate with team members from all corners of the world, and perform tasks under pressure with tight deadlines and limited resources. These are all traits and skills highly sought in the civilian sector."



# GREEN TO GREY: GUIDE TO CORPORATE CULTURE

Transitioning from serving in the military to civilian life can be daunting. One of the toughest tasks can be adjusting to corporate life. The structure, chain of command, and even the camaraderie, it's all just a little different. Here are several tips to help you make a smooth transition out of the uniform.

## BE AWARE OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT

This one sounds familiar, right? Before you start that new IT job, learn as much as you can about the organization and its people. Try to get a sense of the culture and how employees interact with each other. Or at least be aware of what to expect. For example, maybe you'll find that dressing as formally as you did while in uniform will make you seem intimidating. Many IT environments tend to be quite casual, so be intentional about understanding the environment!

## MAINTAIN ROUTINE

We are fairly certain that nothing compares to the consistency and routine of military life. Working in IT requires a lot of flexibility, whether you are responding to a network outage or a not-so-tech-savvy coworker. That said, develop a routine of some sort to maintain a sense of familiarity. Here's a suggestion: because IT pros can do a lot of sitting, keep up an exercise routine. Or find a routine that will work for you!

## LEAN ON YOUR OLD NETWORK

There's nothing quite like the camaraderie you develop while in the service. A lot of those buddies end up becoming friends for life. With that in mind, as you set about building a network (social) at your new job, don't be afraid to maintain connection with familiar faces. They can keep you upbeat as you try to break into the IT crowd.

## SPEAK UP

Your time in the military has equipped you with some great experience! Put that experience to work. More likely than not, people will be turning to you for help. Conversely, if you have a suggestion that could save the

organization money or make the IT team more efficient, share it with the boss. They should be open to your feedback, as long as it's delivered respectfully and framed positively.

## PLAN AHEAD

The military provides you with time to prepare for life post-separation, so take advantage of it and figure out your next steps. Does that Server 2008 certification need to be upgraded? Do you need to get on board with the cloud? (By the way, the answer to that last one is: Yes. Yes, you should!) Start researching what IT skills are in demand, what companies you'd like to work for, etc.

Being able to adapt is the key to success in IT, as is a constant desire to learn. At the rate technology and IT evolves, you'll easily fall behind if you don't make training and learning a top priority. The good news is that you already know all about discipline, staying alert, and moving forward, all of which are essential to learning new technology and best practices.





# BACK TO THE BASICS: TRAIN LIKE YOU FIGHT

Train like you fight. Fight like you train. You've probably heard that a time or two. While you were in, you trained, trained, and then trained some more. Basic training. Technical training. Exercises. Why? Because when the real-world scenario happens, you'll be ready.

Now your mission is to train for your career and anything your career throws at you. Get more out of your CBT Nuggets experience by following these training recommendations.

## PREPARE FOR SUCCESS

To be sure that you're getting everything you can out of your training experience, start with the expectation of success.

- **Keep the Right Attitude:** Keep the purpose of your training at the forefront of your mind. Remember that you're working to improve yourself, your professional opportunities, and ultimately, your life!
- **Set SMART Goals:** SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Before you start training, take some time to create SMART goals to ensure you're getting everything you can out of your training experience.
- **Create Time and Space to Train:** Designate a specific time and place where you will train consistently. By training at the same time, in the same place, you are creating a habit of training, which can only lead to good things!
- **Be Accountable:** Share your training goals with friends and family, colleagues and coworkers. Or join the [CBT Nuggets Accountability Coaching program](#)! Going public with your training goals allows others to understand your training process and gives them the opportunity to follow up with you on your training progress.

## USING THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE RIGHT JOB

Most learners need to use a variety of learning tools in order to truly master the content.

- **Good, Old-fashioned Books:** Books can help fill in any gaps in your understanding as you proceed through your CBT Nuggets video training. Use them for reference during your training and beyond.
- **Hands-on Experience and Practice:** Nothing beats hands-on experience as you train. Take advantage of CBT Nuggets' [virtual labs](#) or build your own home lab to get the real-world practice you need to be successful.
- **Industry Blogs, Forums, and Videos:** Supplement your CBT Nuggets training with industry blogs, forums, or videos to help round out your training experience.
- **Offline Training:** Take advantage of your long ride on the commuter train or flights with CBT Nuggets apps for your favorite mobile device. Our apps allow you to train anywhere, anytime, regardless of internet connectivity.
- **Practice Exams:** [Practice exams](#) can demonstrate your progress in training and measure your preparedness for certification exams.

## STUDY HABITS

Effective study habits can make the difference between success and failure.

- **Create a Study Plan:** Make a plan for each week, including when you will train and how much time you will dedicate to watching video Nuggets, hands-on practice, and book study. Ensure that your plan includes occasional practice exams to measure your progress.
- **Avoid Multitasking:** Many of us are proud of our ability to multi-task, but to be most effective and efficient in your training, avoid distractions like email, the phone, chats and instant messaging, etc. Make your training time sacred time!
- **Learn from Failure:** Robert T. Kiyosaki said, "Failure is part of the process of success. People who avoid failure also avoid success." Learn from your mistakes throughout your training and use them to make you better and to learn more deeply!
- **Celebrate Success:** Train with the expectation of success! Make a plan for how you will reward yourself when you reach training milestones such as successfully completing half the training course, earning 90% on your practice exam, or earning your certification.

These tips can help you get more out of your training with CBT Nuggets. Conquer your training like you conquered your military service: with distinction and success!



# TECH CAREER RESOURCES

There are legions of online resources specifically designed for vets as they reenter civilian life. This list includes some of the best, most helpful resources to help you transition from your military career to your civilian career with success.

## [WARRIORS4WIRELESS.ORG/TRAINING](https://www.warriors4wireless.org/training)

Warriors4Wireless (W4W) bridges the gap between military service and civilian careers. W4W provides training, advanced certification and transitional support, giving veterans the building blocks they need for an exciting and fulfilling career in the telecommunications industry.

## [VET-TECH.US](https://www.vet-tech.us)

Vet Tech transforms the lives of veterans by empowering them to build successful tech companies.

## [VETSINTECH.CO](https://www.vetsintech.co)

Vets in Tech supports current and returning veterans with reintegration services, and by connecting them to the national technology ecosystem. ViT brings together a tech-specific network, resources, and programs for our veterans interested in education, entrepreneurship, and employment.

## [USTECHVETS.ORG](https://www.ustechvets.org)

USTechVets.org is a US technology industry career portal created to connect veterans, including transitioning military personnel and their family members, with meaningful jobs in America's technology industry.

## [LAPTOPS4VETS.ORG](https://www.laptops4vets.org)

Laptops For Veterans is a nonprofit organization providing working computers, free-of-charge, to US military veterans and military families in need.

### [JST.DODED.MIL/SMART/SIGNIN.DO](https://jst.doded.mil/smart/signin.do)

JST is a computerized transcript system that produces official transcripts for eligible soldiers by combining military education and job experience with descriptions and college credit recommendations developed by the American Council on Education (ACE).

### [MILITARY.COM/VETERAN-JOBS/SKILLS-TRANSLATOR](https://military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator)

Translate your military skills, experience and training to find career opportunities that best align with your capabilities.

### [MILITARY.COM/VETERAN-JOBS/SEARCH](https://military.com/veteran-jobs/search)

Veteran employment center, giving vets the opportunity to search for jobs based on keywords, locations, and categories.

### [REDDIT.COM/R/HIREAVET](https://reddit.com/r/hireavet)

This Hire-a-Vet subreddit community is dedicated to helping vets find jobs. Opportunities come from all over the country and cover a broad spectrum of job types. Job opportunities are not limited to those in the IT industry.

### [BENEFITS.MILITARY.COM/VCN/SEARCH.DO](https://benefits.military.com/vcn/search.do)

Join the largest Veteran Career Network and get connected with more than a million veterans. Find veterans working in companies, government agencies, career fields, industries or locations that interest you.



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