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Building a career as a military spouse

Creating a meaningful career can be a challenge when you're constantly on the go, but it's not impossible

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Jamie Lynn Blum's work helping children as a social worker means a lot to her. So even though she knew that marrying a man in the military would likely require multiple moves, it never occurred to her to stop working.

"I'm pretty driven in my career," she says. "Not because I want to move up, but because I'm motivated to help those who are less fortunate. I've had a privileged life, and it would be hard for me not to give back."

That said, it hasn't always been easy finding work across the five different states in which she's lived in the past nine years. Still, she's been mostly successful. During the one move where she didn't immediately find work, Blum enrolled in a master's program to make herself more marketable in the future.

Her most recent move in June, from Washington to Louisiana, is the first time that Blum has been able to keep the job she had and transition to remote work. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, she'd already been working remotely, and the company was willing to let her switch to a consulting role from a distance.

differently from someone in a civilian family.

Blum recognizes that she's been lucky to land work so frequently and says she knows some military spouses who have had a more difficult time.

Military families often need to make sacrifices as part of their service. For many spouses, those sacrifices include their own career advancement. Even before the pandemic drove up unemployment rates for the entire country, the [unemployment rate](#) for military spouses was 24%, according to a Department of Defense survey.

But being a military spouse doesn't mean that you can't also have your own fulfilling career. You'll just need to go about it differently from someone in a civilian family.



Tip: Even if you choose not to work or have combined finances with your partner, it's important that you have some credit [in your own name](#). It might be easier to keep car loans and other large loans in your partner's name, but make sure you are the primary account holder on at least one [credit card](#).

Building a career when you are on the go

Given the demanding nature of service, military spouses often also find themselves doing the lion's share of child care and household duties. Still, 6 in 10 military spouses say they support the "military way of life,"

While it's possible to build a successful career while also being a military spouse, doing so takes dedication and flexibility beyond what may be required of other workers. To do so, you will need to focus on pursuing flexible careers that are not tied to specific cities, building up in-demand skills and having a willingness to tap into all available resources. You'll also need to make sure you're doing as much as you can to increase your marketability:

- **Have an up-to-date resume and LinkedIn profile.** That way you'll be ready to restart your career search as soon as you land at a new base.
- **Focus on networking.** One upside of frequent moves is the ability to build a large network. Staying in touch with both your professional contacts and those you've met in the military may give you access to job opportunities that you wouldn't otherwise know about. More than [70% of new hires](#) had a personal contact at their new company, according to LinkedIn.
- **Lean into your skills.** To succeed at home, military spouses need to be able to adapt, problem solve and communicate. All of those are soft skills highly in demand from employers right now, [according to McKinsey](#).
- **Emphasize volunteer work.** If you volunteer on base or within the military community, add it to your resume. Even though you don't get paid for volunteer work, it is still valuable work experience.



Our Take: At my old job, I edited resumes for a living, so I've seen all kinds of experience and know how to make it look competitive to potential employers. One of the best pieces of advice I can give to those with thinner work experience is not to discount your life experiences. Create an entire "job" listing for volunteer work, personal development like taking classes online, freelance projects, skills you have developed keeping

affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs and a specialist executive at Deloitte Services.

“

Military spouse unemployment and underemployment is ... a national security issue because service members are leaving service because of spousal employment issues.

ROSEMARY WILLIAMS, DELOITTE SERVICES

”

“It’s about who’s going to fight our future wars. Because this generation is marrying at their education and achievement levels. So if you want super warriors and high-tech geniuses, you’re going to get spouses with similar expectations,” she says.

The number of states offering license reciprocity continues to grow. Nineteen states adopted legislation in the area in 2019, and 10 states more states have [done so in 2020](#). The rules, however, [vary by state](#), with some offering complete license recognition and others allowing for expedited applications or temporary licenses.

If you move states due to a PCS order, you might also be eligible for a [licensing reimbursement](#) through your spouse’s military branch. What documents you’ll need for this reimbursement will vary by branch, but make sure you have a copy of your PCS orders and confirmation of your new license.

What are your job options?

more flexibility if you need to take care of things at home.

“You can find out whether a company is military friendly by asking your network, doing informational interviews or looking at reviews on LinkedIn or Glassdoor,” says Doug Nordman, a retired military officer and author of “The Military Guide to Financial Independence and Retirement.”

Remote work is also a good option for military spouses, and it’s becoming more common as the pandemic has pushed many companies to allow employees to work from home. This trend will likely continue post-pandemic, with nearly [8 in 10 companies](#) saying that they expect more remote workers even after the health crisis subsides. For military spouses that means the potential to hang onto a job even after a move.



Tip: If you’re facing an overseas move, you might be able to find a job on base or even work locally off base – depending on the Status of Forces Agreement between the U.S. and your new location.

Watch out for scams in job hunting

Unfortunately, since military spouses are often looking for work, they’ve become a frequent target for criminals looking to take advantage of their situation. Military spouses (and veterans) are more likely than other consumers to fall victim to an employment scam, with those losing money suffering an average loss of [more than \\$1,800](#).

“With employment scams, the criminals are reaching out to hit as many people as possible, and military spouses are more vulnerable because they’re job searching and moving more often than others,” says

avoid scammers by doing background research on each person and company to whom you talk, especially if a job description seems extremely vague. Other signs of a scam: An on-the-spot job offer without an interview, or an employer who asks you to deposit a check and transfer it to another account for training, equipment or some other reason.

See related: [Can you make money with an MLM?](#)

Consider starting your own business

Depending on your family and your line of work, it might make the most sense to [launch your own business](#), so you don't have to look for a new job every few years. That was the case for Tara Falcone, a certified financial planner and chartered financial analyst who launched a business providing financial literacy programs to college and companies, while living with her husband stationed in Japan.

Finding a meaningful career can be harder as a military spouse, but it's not impossible. If you take advantage of available resources and look for flexible opportunities, you can build a fulfilling – and portable – career.

"It's incredibly difficult to continue updating your resume and explaining why there are months or years-long gaps at the beginning or end of a move," says Falcone, whose upcoming move from Rhode Island to California will be her fifth in five years. "That's part of the reason I became an entrepreneur, to have more control over my career trajectory than I might have if I were trying to find finance jobs all over the country."

Bottom line

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Beth Braverman is a freelance journalist writing about personal finance, careers and parenting. She enjoys traveling, cooking and cashing in her hard-earned credit card rewards.

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Credit Card Rate Report

Updated: October 28th, 2020

National Average

15.97%

Business 13.91%	15.75%
Balance Transfer 13.85%	Student 16.12%
Airline 15.50%	Instant Approval 18.38%
Cash Back	Bad Credit 24.43%

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