

Military Officer Career Preparation: Sales

A career in sales can be a challenging but very rewarding field for former military leaders. A successful salesperson should be driven, able to work autonomously, an achiever, and somebody with outstanding communication and presentation skills. You should be goal-oriented. Companies want driven individuals to be the “face” of their organization.

A sales career can be very rewarding financially. Typically, a top performing individual in sales can make more than his or her counterpart in the Operations or Management fields. Sales is a pay-for-performance field. The better you perform, the more you earn.

Sales is a very autonomous career. You may work for a company as part of a sales team, but getting the job done on a daily basis is strictly up to you. Research, client calls, scheduling, presentations, follow-up, and closing a deal are ultimately driven by you alone. An individual’s success in sales is primarily defined by his or her personality, drive, ability to influence people, and time management skills.

Why Sales?

Sales is not a career field most military leaders immediately consider as an option during their transition from the military to civilian life. As military leaders, we tend to gravitate naturally towards operations, management and project management - because that is what we are comfortable with. But, those things that made you a great military leader are exactly what make a good sales representative: your intelligence, drive, your goal-oriented and competitive nature, great communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, a desire to be the best, and a desire to be challenged. Why not sales? We strongly recommend that you at least explore the option. Here are the facts:

Compensation: You are almost certain to make more money in sales than in most management or operations positions. Companies need to sell products or services to survive, and reward successful sales people extremely well. The compensation is designed to reward and retain performers. The better you do, the more you earn. Professional level sales roles are paid a base salary plus commission and usually include benefits like car and cell allowances and an expense account.

Route Into Executive Leadership: 85% of chief executives and senior managers either started their career, or at least have spent some time in their career in sales and felt that their roles in sales were critical to their professional development and career progression. It gives you an appreciation of what happens at the ‘tip of the spear’—at the customer interface. As a military officer, you have already developed leadership skills and have solid leadership experiences. After performing well in a sales role, former military officers are routinely selected for promotion into leadership positions faster than their peers. Not all great sales people are good leaders; this can be a great advantage to you starting a new career.

Personal Control: In general, you are in control of your schedule. You make your own appointments, and run your own day the way you think is best. As long as you are producing positive results and meeting or exceeding your established goals, you have the freedom to set your own schedule.



Job Security: Companies know that *successful* sales people are not expendable. If you were to lose your job, or choose to leave it, it is relatively easy to get a new job if you can demonstrate a 'track record' of success in sales. A successful sales person should always be able to get a job and make a living. Sales is also a great way to build your reputation inside your company. The CEO will know who the top sales representatives are within their organization.

Helping Others: Sales is mainly about relationships between business professionals. Sales is about assisting others in achieving their goals and solving their problems by introducing your company's products and services. It is not about forcing others to buy goods and services that they do not want. Sales is about working diligently to discover areas where your company's products and services will add value, having a clear understanding of the needs and desires of the other party, and then working to fill that need. When done properly, problem solving in this way will earn their respect, gratitude and their business.

Typical Positions

Listed below are some of the most common positions available to transitioning military officers in the Sales field:

Industrial/Technical Sales: Industrial or Technical Sales is a specialized business-to-business sale of generally high cost technical products (machinery, specialized equipment, etc). Candidates should possess a strong sales profile and typically have some technical experience. The technical experience required can vary greatly from some basic technical aptitude to an engineering degree and hands on experience. Compensation generally consists of a base salary with commission or a bonus plan.

Pharmaceutical/Medical Sales: Pharmaceutical and Medical Sales are client focused sales careers with the primary end user being doctors and medical professionals. Candidates must possess a strong sales profile and outstanding communication and presentation skills. A strong technical or medical background is usually preferred. Both of these fields require significant preparation and research.

Outside Sales Rep/Account Manager: Most sales positions not mentioned above are generally classified as an outside sales representative. These positions are available across a broad swath of industries and while the products you represent vary widely, the position requirements do not – represent your company and products to clients in a professional manner through direct contact with potential clients. Strong communication skills and customer service skills are a must.

Career Progression

A position in sales can also open up a lot of doors for you in the future within an organization. An individual with a successful sales background and strong leadership experience from the military can successfully move into a wide range of roles in other areas of the company such as training, brand management, marketing or operations. Some JMOs that enter a sales career when leaving the military choose to spend their entire career selling or in a sales manager role due to the great work/life balance that can come with a sales career, as well as the fairly unlimited earning potential.

Challenges

There is always a place for a sharp and enthusiastic sales person, and given the correct training and support, most bright people who are willing to work hard and learn will succeed in sales and make a better than average living. However, as in all things, every silver lining has a cloud or two.

Hard Work: A successful career in sales requires hard work and a strong overall work ethic. If it were easy, more people would be doing it. It is commonly said that for every one person who says 'Yes!', there are nine who say 'No!'. If you need to find five people a day to say 'Yes', you will have to talk to fifty people a day. If you aren't extremely motivated and have a great work ethic, a career in sales is likely not for you.

Results Matter: Sales is a profession where you are judged almost exclusively by your results. Being a 'nice guy' does not cut it, on its own. You will be expected to achieve certain levels of performance, and if you do not do this, you will be counseled, and may even lose your job. You must be goal oriented, organized and self-motivated. If that doesn't describe you, you should not consider a career in sales.

Disappointment: As mentioned above, a lot of people will say 'No!' and will not be interested in the products or services that you are offering them. If you are the sort of person who will take these disappointments to heart, then do not consider a career in sales. You must be able to handle rejection and disappointment.

On Call: In many cases, as the Sales Person, you will be the smiling face of the company you represent. In fact, apart from the driver who delivers the products you have sold, you may be the only person from your company that your customer knows in person. So when things go wrong, as they inevitably do, it will be you who the customer calls, demanding satisfaction, even if it is after hours.

But remember, no matter what job you hold in business, you spend a lot of your time selling: selling ideas to your bosses, your colleagues, your juniors, your suppliers and your customers. Spending time in sales prepares you to communicate effectively, and to 'win friends and influence people' (Dale Carnegie).

Keys to Success

As you move through the interview process for sales, remember that the companies are looking for the next generation of professionals to grow their business. They need superior talent and are willing to search long and hard to find the right "fit."

Focus on the following points:

- ✓ During an interview, you must convince an interviewer that you have a record of performance and success, are competitive, have outstanding drive and motivation, and the ability to work autonomously.
- ✓ Convince the interviewer that you are a goal focused problem solver, with the ability to think on your feet.
- ✓ You must show that you possess strong presentation skills.
- ✓ Be able to answer why you are interested in sales and what you have done to prepare for a career in sales.
- ✓ Let them know you are focused on sales.
- ✓ Put together a brag book.
- ✓ Review our prep module for sales interviews and practice your questions

The STAR Format

When developing examples from your career that will highlight the skills, traits and experiences that are commonly explored in interviews, you must utilize the STAR format to help you frame your answer effectively. The STAR Format is:

Situation. The situation is the background story to the example that you are about to provide. Where were you? Who were you with? At what point in your career did this example occur? Paint a solid picture for the interviewer.

Task. The task can be referred to in several ways. The mission you were assigned. The problem that you had to solve. The challenge that you were facing. You need to make it clear to the interviewer what task you were working to complete.

Actions. The Actions are the steps that you took to accomplish the task, or solve the problem that you described above. Be specific! Make it clear to the interviewer what YOU did. You cannot speak in generalities here, because the interviewer will not understand the depth of your experience and thus will not be able to evaluate you effectively.

Results. You seal a solid STAR format interview response with quantifiable results. Were your actions successful in accomplishing the Task? How successful? Can you provide numbers that prove the level of your success? These are key steps to consider.

The STAR format is an extremely useful tool intended to insure that you can communicate your background clearly for the interviewer. We are not looking to provide the content of your interview answer, but rather to insure that the experiences that you have are articulated clearly, allowing the interviewer to effectively evaluate your experience and skill sets against the position.

Keys to Success

When considering what examples that you want to use as you start laying out your experiences, consider the following pointers:

- Focus on developing your best STAR format examples, regardless of interview question / topic. Your best examples will be impactful, and typically will relate to several common interview topics. Find your best examples first, and see what interview topics they match up with.
- Avoid examples that do not translate well to civilian careers, such as targeting or eliminating insurgents. While you can be proud of your military accomplishments and there is no doubt that the planning and leadership that you used to achieve these tasks is relevant, the shock value of such statements may concern the interviewer. Soften the terminology and translate the experience to fit for the general population.
- Focus on what you specifically did in your career. As military officers, we often push recognition down to our enlisted personnel. That is a quality that translates into the private sector, but the employer in the interview is looking to hire you, not your platoon or section. They want to know what you specifically did to accomplish your tasks and achieve results.

Sample Sales Questions

Success in professional sales interviews hinges on your ability to communicate effectively using specific examples. Questions typically focus on three areas: your personal attributes, your professional experience, and your knowledge of the company and sales. The list of questions below is by no means comprehensive, but should be a good starting point for you as you prepare for a sales interview. Practice these questions until you are comfortable verbalizing them. If you are asked something you weren't prepared for, be flexible and think on your feet!

Why are you interested in sales? Focus on your competitive nature and intrinsic motivation under challenging conditions. Make clear that you want to contribute to the success of the business by impacting the bottom line. Express how you thrive in an environment where you can be directly rewarded for your performance.

What have you done to prepare for a sales position? You want to express how you have taken the initiative to lay the groundwork for a sales career. Mention any of the sales books you have read, discuss what you learned on a ride-along (field ride), and explain what type of product research you have conducted. Companies want to see that you have taken the initiative to prepare for a new career and have a true interest in their company.

Describe a time you sold an idea to another individual. Be prepared to make a connection between your military experience and a possible sales situation. Ideally, select an answer where you had to sell either your supervisor or your peers on a plan or course of action. Clearly articulate the steps you took to present the idea, follow up with the result, and how your idea was implemented.

How competitive are you? Start out by stating you are very competitive and transition into your examples. Have several concrete examples to support your statement and use numbers and facts to compare yourself with others to express your competitive nature. Convey that you have a history of setting high goals for yourself and how you attain them with purpose.

When was the last time you faced resistance and what did you do to overcome it? Ensure that you have a recent example (within the past 2 years) that demonstrates how you were able to overcome adversity. Make sure you show how you were able to persevere and accomplish your goal. Lay out the situation, walk through the task you were trying to accomplish, express the specific actions you took to overcome the resistance, and the final result.

Sell me this Pen. This question can be asked with any product, but the pen is the most common. The key is to show the interviewer that you understand the basics of sales. Do not begin describing the pen's features and qualities. Ask the interviewer questions about what he or she is looking for in a pen. What type, size, quantity? Qualify the interviewer's needs, and then present the features of your pen that fit the "client's" need. Remember to close them and ask them for the sale!

Closing is Imperative. In a sales interview, you must be prepared to "close" the interview. Anyone in sales knows that they have to ask for the order or try to gain some commitment from their client in order to move the process forward. You could have a great interview, but if you do not try to close it, the sales manager is going to notice and begin to question whether you will be

able to close once you are hired. You can lead into your close naturally by asking questions. Ask or confirm what the next step is in the hiring process. You can also ask if the manager sees you as a good fit for the role or if there is anything about your background they have any questions about. If they think you are a good fit, then you can confirm your interest in the opportunity and ask if you can schedule the next interview now. If they have any objections, you still have a chance to overcome them.

Personal Attributes

- Describe a situation in life where your request / demand was rejected. How did it feel? What did you do?
- Describe an experience in which you felt you gained something because you persisted long enough and saw it through to success.
- To what or whom do you compare yourself?
- What is the one thing that really motivates you?
- I am... (Fill in the blank with traits)
- How do you feel when you lose?
- What are your three greatest weaknesses?
- What are your three greatest strengths?
- What has been your greatest disappointment?
- Describe a time that you have...
 - Demonstrated creativity
 - Took initiative
 - Worked without a lot of direction
 - Sold an idea to another individual (discuss how you convinced that other individual)
 - Set a goal for yourself and the steps you took to achieve it
- In 60 seconds list as many descriptors of yourself as possible.
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Define stress. How do you relieve stress?
- Define pressure. How do you relieve pressure? Is pressure different from stress?
- How do you impact your family, your friends, your associates?
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Why? (Measures Ego & Drive)
- Would you prefer to follow the rules or make the rules? (Measures Ego & Drive)
- What has been the toughest decision you ever had to make?
- Have you ever been aggressive to the point where you pushed someone too far?

Professional Experience

- What is the most difficult aspect of your current position?
- Why have you been successful in the past?
- Under what conditions do you work best?
- What do you consider your most significant achievement?

- What is the most stressful situation you have encountered in your current position? How did you handle it?
- How are you measured where you work? How do you work with your peers?
- Explain how your boss would describe you.
- What are the two toughest decisions you have had to make? Which was the best decision? Which was the worst?
- What are some of the additional responsibilities you have taken on recently that are not in your job description?
- What is the most striking fact about your present company?
- Do you see yourself in your current job 6 months from now?
- What has been the biggest disappointment in your professional career(s) to date?
- What was the most important thing you learned from your last job?

Sales Knowledge

- Why Sales?
- Why should I hire you over an individual with sales experience?
- Do you like to control the conversation in selling?
- When was the last time you faced resistance and what did you do?
- What have you done to prepare yourself for pharmaceutical / medical equipment selling?
- What are the top two attributes you bring to the company?
- If your sales were published to the sales force, would you like them published: Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Annually?
- What are your goals for the month of _____?
- When do you decide what you will do each day? How do you do it? How do you track it? Show me tomorrow.
- Tell me the last self-improvement book you read or tape you listened to?
- Tell me the last Sales book you read or tape you listened to?
- Tell me about my company and pharmaceutical Sales. (You must cover: Company, Product Line, Typical Sales Day, R&D efforts)
- How do you continue to improve your skill level? In what continuing education or personal activities do you participate?
- How do you go about understanding and learning technical information quickly? What methods do you use?
- How long did it take you to become familiar with the technical information needed to sell your current product or services? What methods did you use? How might you improve your learning?
- What methods do you use to keep informed of what is going on in your area of responsibility? What are their benefits? Why do these methods work for you?



- What methods of learning (reading, audiovisual, computer/CBT, classroom, etc.) do you find most productive for you? What methods do you least prefer? How do you adapt to different learning situations?
- What ongoing systems or habits have you established to get information on a regular basis? Describe some results of these systems or habits.
- What sources of information do you use to keep up with what is going on in the organization? How do you use this information?

Preparing for a Sales Interview: Creating a Brag Book

Most Sales positions will require that you sell to your client using some sort of literature. Using a Brag Book shows the interviewer that you are able to sell utilizing that literature as a proof source. While most transitioning veterans do not have Sales experience, this document is designed to help you understand the purpose of a Brag Book, how to use it during an interview, and provide the suggested content to help you establish your own Brag Book.

Purpose

There are three main purposes of a Brag Book. First, most experienced sales professionals keep a brag book and many managers will ask to see it during the interview process. As a transitioning veteran who may have no “formal” sales experience, creating a brag book is a proactive step you should take that helps show the interviewer you are truly interested in sales. Second, the brag book is a product that highlights your key professional achievements and can be used to validate what you say in an interview. It can differentiate you from another candidate who does not have one and it can be left behind to reinforce your interview. Lastly, the Brag Book can be used during an interview to show you are comfortable incorporating supporting sales material in your presentation with the interviewer.

During an interview, you must convince an interviewer that you have a record of performance and success, you are competitive, you have outstanding drive and motivation, and you possess the ability to work autonomously. You must also convince the interviewer that you are a goal-focused problem solver with the ability to think on your feet and possess outstanding presentation skills. The Brag Book facilitates *showing* your interviewer that you possess these qualities versus just *telling* them.

How to Use a Brag Book

You should create a professional binder that you will keep and can refer to during an interview. You should also have copies that can be left behind with the hiring manager(s). Each section should be neatly tabbed with one or two significant accomplishments highlighted on each page for quick reference. Make sure you are familiar with it so you know exactly where you can find the information you want to show the manager. During the interview, when you are asked a question that can be aptly responded to using a part of your Brag Book, you can turn to the appropriate section and draw their attention to the highlighted portion as you explain your answer more completely. You should not use the Brag Book for every question, as that interrupts the flow of the interview. Use it to reinforce one of your answers and to let the interviewer know you have it and can refer to it as you may be expected to on a future sales call with a client.

For example, if you were asked about your most significant professional achievement, perhaps you could have the interviewer turn to your deployment award and explain (in STAR format) your achievements during a difficult mission or have them turn to a highlighted bullet in your evaluation report or to an article where the achievement was honorably recognized. It is not necessary to use the Brag Book to answer *every* question that you are asked in an interview, only where you have supporting documents that strengthen your answer.

Contents

A Brag Book should either be professionally bound, or you should use a professional portfolio. Your brag book should contain the following:

- Cover Page
- Your resume
- Your evaluation reports
- College transcripts (unofficial copy is acceptable)
- Awards (military and other)
- Articles where your achievements were noted (newspaper or other publications)
- Any other document showing your track record of performance, success, drive, etc.
- Sales figures (if you have previous sales experience)
- A printout from the DMV webpage (to show your clean driving record)
- A list of your references, including email address and phone number

If you have any questions about your personal Brag Book, please contact your Orion Recruiter.

Military Officer Career Preparation: Operations Management

Why Operations Management?

The operations field consists of general management positions in Corporate America. Operations is an excellent field for transitioning military leaders because of the variety of roles available, and in some roles like distribution or transportation, because of the fact that you can transition from a very similar capacity in the military .

An operations management role will put a premium on your leadership, organization and communication skills. As an operations manager, you are a mid-level manager in the company. Your specific duties will differ from company to company.

Typical Positions

Listed below are some of the positions most commonly available to transitioning military officers in the operations field:

Distribution Manager: A distribution manager is in charge of scheduling operations, personnel management, and day-to-day operations in a distribution environment. You are overall responsible for the timely and efficient movement of products. You typically work in a warehouse or in a section of a manufacturing facility dedicated to distribution. Logistics or supply chain management experience may be preferred.

Transportation Manager: A transportation manager is in charge of scheduling operations, personnel management, and day-to-day operations in the transportation industry. You are overall responsible for the timely and efficient movement of transportation assets in support of company operations. Innovations like satellite communication systems and faster, more efficient transportation have taken this industry into the information age. Transportation or supply chain management experience is usually preferred.

Project Manager: Project managers are the key managers responsible for the overall direction of key projects. The projects differ significantly depending on the industry, from construction to manufacturing to defense, but the overall position requirements are pretty similar – manage resources to get an assigned project done on time and at budget. Most positions in project management require a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification and/or previous project or program management experience.

Retail Manager: A retail manager is responsible for day to day operations of a retail store. Common responsibilities include personnel management, profit and loss, and community relations. Retail often requires flexible working hours, as the company needs to adjust to customer needs. Significant bonuses based off of profitability are not uncommon.

Other Operations Roles: We also see operations management roles in Marketing, Finance, Consulting, and Human Resources from time to time. These roles are often not the ideal entry point for a military officer, since they may require subject matter expertise in that functional area. But, they are often roles that our candidates move into after gaining experience within the company.

Career Progression

There are several career paths you can follow from all of these types of positions. You can stay in Operations Management or move into Technical Services, Engineering, IT, Human Resources, or Loss Prevention with the right qualifications. A successful Operations Manager can move into a Senior Manager position as early as two years. The willingness to relocate will increase promotion potential significantly.

Keys to Success

Focus On Leadership. You are interviewing for a management position, so you must emphasize your leadership skills and provide examples throughout your interview that show you are a strong leader. Focus on jobs where you held the most responsibility. Also, remember to talk about your soft skills.

Understand What The Company Needs. Every company is looking for something different. Research the company, talk to the Orion Account Executive and your Orion Recruiter, and analyze the job summary to identify the three key attributes a company needs from a candidate in this position.

Tailor Your Strengths. Tailor your strengths to the company's needs. As a successful military leader, you have a number of strengths. Emphasize the strengths that match up with that company's needs throughout your interview.

Examples, Examples, Examples. You must support your answers with specific examples. Those examples will add depth to your answers and make an impact on the interviewer.

Energy And Enthusiasm. Show the interviewer that you want the job. Would you hire someone who seemed disinterested? An interviewer won't either. You must convince an interviewer that you are excited about the company and the job in order to land the position.

Ask Good Questions. Questions equal interest to an interviewer. Ask well thought out questions about the culture, training, employees, and company that demonstrate a genuine interest in the company. Good questions can help build rapport with an interviewer.

Close The Interview. Don't overlook the close. Make sure the interviewer knows you want the job by closing the interview.

The STAR Format

When developing examples from your career that will highlight the skills, traits and experiences that are commonly explored in interviews, you must utilize the STAR format to help you frame your answer effectively. The STAR Format is:

Situation. The situation is the background story to the example that you are about to provide. Where were you? Who were you with? At what point in your career did this example occur? Paint a solid picture for the interviewer.

Task. The task can be referred to in several ways. The mission you were assigned. The problem that you had to solve. The challenge that you were facing. You need to make it clear to the interviewer what task you were working to complete.

Actions. The Actions are the steps that you took to accomplish the task, or solve the problem that you described above. Be specific! Make it clear to the interviewer what YOU did. You cannot speak in generalities here, because the interviewer will not understand the depth of your experience and thus will not be able to evaluate you effectively.

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Keys to Success

When considering what examples that you want to use as you start laying out your experiences, consider the following pointers:

- Focus on developing your best STAR format examples, regardless of interview question / topic. Your best examples will be impactful, and typically will relate to several common interview topics. Find your best examples first, and see what interview topics they match up with.
- Avoid examples that do not translate well to civilian careers, such as targeting or eliminating insurgents. While you can be proud of your military accomplishments and there is no doubt that the planning and leadership that you used to achieve these tasks is relevant, the shock value of such statements may concern the interviewer. Soften the terminology and translate the experience to fit for the general population.
- Focus on what you specifically did in your career. As military officers, we often push recognition down to our enlisted personnel. That is a quality that translates into the private sector, but the employer in the interview is looking to hire you, not your platoon or section. They want to know what you specifically did to accomplish your tasks and achieve results.

Sample Management Questions

The list of sample management questions below is by no means comprehensive, but it should serve as a good starting point when preparing for a management interview. Practice these questions until you can comfortably verbalize your answers. The more preparation you do prior to your interview, the better you will perform in your interview.

Some of the most common interview questions are listed below. We have included tips or sample answers to give you a good idea of what you should discuss. You should personalize your answers with specific examples from your past to avoid sounding over-coached and disingenuous. Your ability to personalize your answers and give specific examples in support of those answers will differentiate you from other candidates who may be competing for the same position, so the key now is to develop these answers further. Write them out and practice them out loud.



Remember three things when you practice questions for a management interview and you will be successful:

- (1) Avoid clichéd answers.
- (2) Give solid, STAR format examples.
- (3) Focus on your leadership skills.

Tell me about yourself? Keep it to 2-3 minutes, and focus on the highlights of your career. Use good transitions. Think of this question as an opportunity to tell your story. Be confident and make an impact.

Why are you leaving the military? Be positive. A response to this question may sound like “I’ve achieved my goal of gaining some immediate leadership experience and I am looking for a new challenge” OR “I like the idea of taking my leadership experience to the corporate world to better my own quality of life.”

What are your strengths? Tailor your answers to the job you are interviewing for: For management positions, focus primarily on leadership, mission focus, communication and planning skills. Always provide an example of how you have used this strength.

What are your weaknesses? Keep this answer to one weakness and ideally something not critical to the job you are interviewing for. Your answer should be genuine, something that you have identified and are actively working to overcome. Be prepared to discuss how you plan to improve on this weakness.

Tell me about a time you have failed? Everybody has failed. Do not say “I’ve never failed.” Focus on a specific event that shows how you have learned from that mistake and have grown professionally as a result. Use specific names and places.

What is your biggest professional achievement? An ideal answer should be a professional achievement that is significant, makes an impact, and somehow relates to the job you are interviewing for (i.e. shows significant leadership under stressful conditions like combat).

Which job did you like best in the military and why? Tailor your answer. If you are interviewing for a management position, focus on the job where you held the most responsibility and was the most leadership intensive. An interviewer wants to know that the job you liked best is similar to the position you are interviewing for. Make sure you highlight the skills that you learned in the past and how they translate to a career in the civilian workforce.

What is your leadership style? You must overcome the military stigma. Show them you are a strong leader, but have a flexible leadership style and great communication skills. Companies want a mature decision maker who is able to motivate a team of diverse individuals.

Give me an example of dealing with conflict. Be specific. Focus on an actual event where you dealt with conflict in a workplace. An ideal example will show your ability to mediate a hostile situation and maintain a positive work environment. Your ability to provide a good example will show the interviewer how you will react at their company, so make sure you are sending the right message.

Are you open to shift work? Many management positions occur in a shift work environment, such as a distribution center or a manufacturing facility. The flexible candidate, open to shift work, will typically take the lead in the interview process for these roles. Remember, off shift work is not expected to last forever, as often folks move to the day shift with career progression.

What are your long and short term goals? Companies hire military officers because they are goal driven individuals. Define short and long term, and then state your goals. They should be professional and related to the company as best as possible. A good example of a short term goal would be to come on board, learn quickly and make an impact and demonstrate your ability to take on more responsibility. In the long term, you can look to continually learn, be challenged and keep building the value you bring to your organization so you can be selected for increasing roles of responsibility.

More Sample Questions

The following questions are examples of more complicated questions that may be asked in the interview. Utilizing your best examples developed previously, you should be able to adjust the presentation of your experiences to answer these just as effectively.

- What date are you ready to start your new career?
- Why are you interested in management?
- Why did you join the military?
- What are your location preferences?
- Have you interviewed with any companies in the past 6 months? If so, which ones and for what locations?
- Do you currently have any other offers? If so, which companies and for what salary?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years?
- Name three of your strengths.
- Name three of your weaknesses.
- How do you deal with stress?
- Are you open to shift work?
- Are you open to working overtime?
- How many days in a month are you willing to travel?
- What is a long day to you?
- How many hours a week are you open to working?

- Tell me about a project you led from start to finish.
- Have you ever had a mentor? If so, what did he or she do for you?
- What was the last book that you read and why?
- What was the last movie you watched and why?
- Describe a time that you...
 - Took a risk
 - Led a team through a challenging situation
- How would you characterize your leadership style?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a poor performer.
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Who is your favorite leader and why? How did they handle conflict?
- How do you motivate people?
- If you had to give me a 5K “window”, what would your annual salary expectations be?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you know about our company?
- What makes you qualified for this position?



Military Officer Career Preparation: Manufacturing Management

Why Manufacturing Management?

Manufacturing management is a great place to begin a second career, as the U.S. manufacturing sector is a robust, dynamic industry. The U.S. manufacturing sector by itself is the eighth largest economy in the world per the Manufacturing Institute, producing more than 21% of the world's goods. It employs more than 12 million Americans (9% of the U.S. workforce) and U.S. manufacturers conduct two-thirds of all research and development in the U.S.. A management or engineering position in manufacturing can provide you an excellent understanding of the core business operations required to move on to more senior leadership roles in the company. Manufacturing management is very well suited for JMOs with a very strong leadership background. A technical background is sometimes required to fully understand the operations and maintenance of mechanical, electrical, and hydraulic devices that are typically found in a manufacturing setting.

Each manufacturing plant varies in the complexity of its machinery and the skill level of the people on the production line. Some plants are very labor intensive, requiring strong managers to motivate the work force. Other plants vary from semi-automated to fully automated plants where computerized machines do the manufacturing and the work force is limited to those machine operators that maintain quality assurance aspects. As companies introduce newer and faster equipment, the production line constantly changes. An individual in manufacturing must be able to adapt to changes. It is the job of the Production Supervisor and the Plant Engineers to maximize efficiency of operators, assemblers, and machinery to increase production, lower cost, and improve product quality. The transition to Manufacturing is one of the best areas for JMOs due to the direct correlation of your military experience and leadership style. Unlike many other career paths, you can hit the ground running and make an immediate impact on the organization's bottom line and profitability.

Typical Positions

Listed below are some of the most common positions available to transitioning military officers in the Manufacturing field:

Production Supervisor: A Production Supervisor, also often called Area Manager, Team Leader or Shift Supervisor, is a mid-level manager that leads a team of plant operators or assemblers and is overall responsible for day-to-day operations in their area of responsibility. Production Supervisors ensure maximum production by regulating schedules, ensuring safety, and assigning operating quotas. These roles often require candidates to be open to shift work. You also work closely with the Maintenance Supervisors, Quality Assurance Personnel, and Inventory Control to maximize efficiency. Strong leadership experience is required.

Maintenance Manager: A Maintenance Manager is responsible for maintenance personnel to ensure routine maintenance and emergency maintenance is taken care of quickly and efficiently to minimize "line-down" time. A solid background in maintenance operations is typically required.

Process /Manufacturing Engineer: Process Engineers establish and monitor ongoing processes, and look for problems within a company's processes and offer solutions to increase efficiencies where possible. Process Engineering also involves developing new processes and troubleshooting existing procedures. Process Engineers are typically trained in, or receive training in, Six Sigma and other Lean Manufacturing processes.

Career Progression

From these roles, you can expect to move into other roles of increasing responsibility to include Operations Manager, Engineering Manager, Plant Manager and ultimately into executive leadership positions within a company. Due to the robust nature of manufacturing in the U.S., workforce aging, and a resurgence of domestic manufacturing, starting a career and gaining experience in manufacturing in our current economy will prove to be a very rewarding decision.

Keys to Success

Focus On Leadership. You are interviewing for a management position, so you must emphasize your leadership skills and provide examples throughout your interview that show you are a strong leader. Focus on jobs where you held the most responsibility. Also, remember to talk about your soft skills.

Understand What The Company Needs. Every company is looking for something different. Research the company, talk to the Orion Account Executive and your Orion Recruiter, and analyze the job summary to identify the three key attributes a company needs from a candidate in this position.

Learn Manufacturing Concepts. Most industries use process improvement methodologies, but manufacturing relies on them. Familiarize yourself with terms such as 5S, Lean Six Sigma, the Theory of Constraints, Kaizen, and others. You do not have to have experience with these systems, but you must be able to articulate a basic understanding and a willingness to learn. Lean Manufacturing refers to finding efficiencies and improving quality. Look closely at your own military experiences and try, where possible, to relate any of your own process improvement examples to the interviewer.

Tailor Your Strengths. Tailor your strengths to the company's needs. As a successful military leader, you have a number of strengths. Emphasize the strengths that match up with that company's needs throughout your interview.

Examples, Examples, Examples. You must support your answers with specific examples. Those examples will add depth to your answers and make an impact on the interviewer.

Energy And Enthusiasm. Show the interviewer that you want the job. Would you hire someone who seemed disinterested? An interviewer won't either. You must convince an interviewer that you are excited about the company and the job in order to land the position.

Ask Good Questions. Questions equal interest to an interviewer. Ask well thought out questions about the culture, training, employees, and company that demonstrate a genuine interest in the company. Good questions can help build rapport with an interviewer.

Close The Interview. Don't overlook the close. Make sure the interviewer knows you want the job by closing the interview.

The STAR Format

When developing examples from your career that will highlight the skills, traits and experiences that are commonly explored in interviews, you must utilize the STAR format to help you frame your answer effectively. The STAR Format is:

Situation. The situation is the background story to the example that you are about to provide. Where were you? Who were you with? At what point in your career did this example occur? Paint a solid picture for the interviewer.

Task. The task can be referred to in several ways. The mission you were assigned. The problem that you had to solve. The challenge that you were facing. You need to make it clear to the interviewer what task you were working to complete.

Actions. The Actions are the steps that you took to accomplish the task, or solve the problem that you described above. Be specific! Make it clear to the interviewer what YOU did. You cannot speak in generalities here, because the interviewer will not understand the depth of your experience and thus will not be able to evaluate you effectively.

Results. You seal a solid STAR format interview response with quantifiable results. Were your actions successful in accomplishing the Task? How successful? Can you provide numbers that prove the level of your success? These are key steps to consider.

The STAR format is an extremely useful tool intended to insure that you can communicate your background clearly for the interviewer. We are not looking to provide the content of your interview answer, but rather to insure that the experiences that you have are articulated clearly, allowing the interviewer to effectively evaluate your experience and skill sets against the position.

Keys to Success

When considering what examples that you want to use as you start laying out your experiences, consider the following pointers:

- Focus on developing your best STAR format examples, regardless of interview question / topic. Your best examples will be impactful, and typically will relate to several common interview topics. Find your best examples first, and see what interview topics they match up with.
- Avoid examples that do not translate well to civilian careers, such as targeting or eliminating insurgents. While you can be proud of your military accomplishments and there is no doubt that the planning and leadership that you used to achieve these tasks is relevant, the shock value of such statements may concern the interviewer. Soften the terminology and translate the experience to fit for the general population.
- Focus on what you specifically did in your career. As military officers, we often push recognition down to our enlisted personnel. That is a quality that translates into the private sector, but the employer in the interview is looking to hire you, not your platoon or section. They want to know what you specifically did to accomplish your tasks and achieve results.

Sample Management Questions

The list of sample management questions below is by no means comprehensive, but it should serve as a good starting point when preparing for a management interview. Practice these questions until you can comfortably verbalize your answers. The more preparation you do prior to your interview, the better you will perform in your interview.

Some of the most common interview questions are listed below. We have included tips or sample answers to give you a good idea of what you should discuss. You should personalize your answers with specific examples from your past to avoid sounding over-coached and disingenuous. Your ability to personalize your answers and give specific examples in support of those answers will differentiate you from other candidates who may be competing for the same position, so the key now is to develop these answers further. Write them out and practice them out loud.

Remember three things when you practice questions for a management interview and you will be successful:

- (4) Avoid clichéd answers.
- (5) Give solid, STAR format examples.
- (6) Focus on your leadership skills.

Tell me about yourself? Keep it to 2-3 minutes, and focus on the highlights of your career. Use good transitions. Think of this question as an opportunity to tell your story. Be confident and make an impact.

Why are you leaving the military? Be positive. A response to this question may sound like “I’ve achieved my goal of gaining some immediate leadership experience and I am looking for a new challenge” OR “I like the idea of taking my leadership experience to the corporate world to better my own quality of life.”

What are your strengths? Tailor your answers to the job you are interviewing for: For management positions, focus primarily on leadership, mission focus, communication and planning skills. Always provide an example of how you have used this strength.

What are your weaknesses? Keep this answer to one weakness and ideally something not critical to the job you are interviewing for. Your answer should be genuine, something that you have identified and are actively working to overcome. Be prepared to discuss how you plan to improve on this weakness.

Tell me about a time you have failed? Everybody has failed. Do not say “I’ve never failed.” Focus on a specific event that shows how you have learned from that mistake and have grown professionally as a result. Use specific names and places.

What is your biggest professional achievement? An ideal answer should be a professional achievement that is significant, makes an impact, and somehow relates to the job you are interviewing for (i.e. shows significant leadership under stressful conditions like combat).

Which job did you like best in the military and why? Tailor your answer. If you are interviewing for a management position, focus on the job where you held the most responsibility and was the most leadership intensive. An interviewer wants to know that the job you liked best is similar to the position you are interviewing for. Make sure you highlight the skills that you learned in the past and how they translate to a career in the civilian workforce.

What is your leadership style? You must overcome the military stigma. Show them you are a strong leader, but have a flexible leadership style and great communication skills. Companies want a mature decision maker who is able to motivate a team of diverse individuals.

Give me an example of dealing with conflict. Be specific. Focus on an actual event where you dealt with conflict in a workplace. An ideal example will show your ability to mediate a hostile situation and maintain a positive work environment. Your ability to provide a good example will show the interviewer how you will react at their company, so make sure you are sending the right message.

Are you open to shift work? Many management positions occur in a shift work environment, such as a distribution center or a manufacturing facility. The flexible candidate, open to shift work, will typically take the lead in the interview process for these roles. Remember, off shift work is not expected to last forever, as often folks move to the day shift with career progression.

What are your long and short term goals? Companies hire military officers because they are goal driven individuals. Define short and long term, and then state your goals. They should be professional and related to the company as best as possible. A good example of a short term goal would be to come on board, learn quickly and make an impact and demonstrate your ability to take on more responsibility. In the long term, you can look to continually learn, be challenged and keep building the value you bring to your organization so you can be selected for increasing roles of responsibility.

More Sample Questions

The following questions are examples of more complicated questions that may be asked in the interview. Utilizing your best examples developed previously, you should be able to adjust the presentation of your experiences to answer these just as effectively.

- What date are you ready to start your new career?
- Why are you interested in management?
- Why did you join the military?
- What are your location preferences?
- Have you interviewed with any companies in the past 6 months? If so, which ones and for what locations?
- Do you currently have any other offers? If so, which companies and for what salary?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years?

- Name three of your strengths.
- Name three of your weaknesses.
- How do you deal with stress?
- Are you open to shift work?
- Are you open to working overtime?
- How many days in a month are you willing to travel?
- What is a long day to you?
- How many hours a week are you open to working?
- Tell me about a project you led from start to finish.
- Have you ever had a mentor? If so, what did he or she do for you?
- What was the last book that you read and why?
- What was the last movie you watched and why?
- Describe a time that you...
 - Took a risk
 - Led a team through a challenging situation
- How would you characterize your leadership style?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with a poor performer.
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Who is your favorite leader and why? How did they handle conflict?
- How do you motivate people?
- If you had to give me a 5K “window”, what would your annual salary expectations be?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you know about our company?
- What makes you qualified for this position?