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The Top Ten Steps Law Enforcement Personnel Should Take When Transitioning To The Private Sector

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I've spent my entire career conducting fraud and investigations exclusively in the private sector. Throughout that time, I've interacted with thousands of federal agents, detectives and police officers from around the globe. Routinely, I talk to many people in law enforcement who are planning on retiring and express interest in pursuing jobs in the private sector post completion of their law enforcement career. Naturally, they always ask a lot of questions. The main one, however, seems to center around the steps one needs to take in order to successfully transition from a career in the public sector to a career in the private sector. It's a great question. While this type of career transition can definitely be done, it's fraught with challenges. Truthfully, some former LEO's have done it very successfully while others have not.

Attitude has much to do with the success or failure rate in this type of job transition, A newly retired federal agent said to me other day "lots of folks think they remain a former law enforcement professional in a company and forget they need to transition to be a corporate/business professional who was a former law enforcement official."

This inspired me to think about the steps former LEO's interested in transitioning from post law enforcement careers to the private sector should take to increase their odds of successfully making this type of professional move.

Pre-Hire: Before You Start Looking...

1) **Prepare For Success** – Such a transition has to be planned carefully as it's a major endeavor on many fronts. This isn't something you just wake up one morning and decide to do. It requires a well thought out plan. Before you even start looking, there are three things you should do right away and those are included in this article.

Best Advice: Start working on this transition approximately two years before you are thinking about retirement. Seriously contemplate your professional interests, the kind of job you are after and the companies/industries that may offer those kinds of positions.

Two years is enough time to secure industry designations, go to training, network and add to your professional knowledge base. Start planning two years before retirement and when the time comes... you'll be prepared! Wait until the day you retire to start this exercise and you'll be seriously "behind the 8 ball."

2) **Get A Professionally Prepared Resume** - Having an excellent resume is not only an incredibly important part of your preparation process, but it's the foundation. Given the economic outlook, it's extremely competitive out there right now and how you look on paper makes a big difference. You can have all the experience in the world, but if you don't look good on paper, you won't get a second look from the recruiter or hiring manager, who often only give resumes a 15 – 20 second review. Make it count!

Best Advice: Not any resume writing service will do... Use an industry (fraud, criminal justice, investigations etc) resume writing source as they understand the lingo and nuances of that industry and can convert that to private sector speak to make you look your best! Further, an industry resume writing service can help you develop a customizable resume to fit the specific jobs you are applying for. Remember, resumes are not "one size fits all!"

3) **Consult With Industry Sources** – No matter how old you are or what stage of your career you're in, having a professional mentor helps! Find someone who has significant industry expertise and experience in your particular area and empower them to help you navigate these waters successfully. You may have had a successful career in the public sector but a transition to the private sector is challenging and much like

starting over. A career mentor increases your odds of successfully transitioning.

Aside from finding a professional mentor, it's imperative that you do your homework on entities you're interested in working for. I'm talking more than salary and benefits here...what's their culture? What's the ethics climate like? Do you feel comfortable in that kind of environment? There's a lot of information available on publicly traded companies and most of it is available at your fingertips. Let your fingers do the walking. If that checks out then cross check your findings with others in the industry to see what they know about the company. Does the company have sanctions or regulatory actions pending against them? These are the kinds of things that would be helpful to know in advance!

Best Advice: Network, Network, Network!

Post Hire: Once You Land The New Job...

4) **Don't Be A Silo** – in corporate fraud and investigations jobs we routinely work with other departments and cooperation is key. There's a lot of discussion in corporate circles now about how to break down the silos.

Best Advice: Figure out who the key players are in the business unit and when it's appropriate... seek them out and introduce yourself. Develop a rapport with them. This will also help you with # 10.

5) **Learn The Regulatory/Compliance Lingo** – Just like law enforcement, the private sector has its own lingo: AML, KYC, BSA, SAR, CTR, SOX, PATRIOT ACT, GRAMM LEACH, DODD-FRANK, FCRA, FOIA, DPPA, FCPA, HIPAA, ECPA... these are just a few but there are many, many more!

Best Advice: Immerse yourself in the regulatory and compliance environment and learn as much as you can about the regs which affect the particular business you're in or going into. You should also think about this step prior to applying for jobs and interviewing as it can be used to strengthen your cover letters, resumes and interviews.

6) **Understand The Bottom Line** – Everything is bottom line driven. Annual budgets aren't bottomless. If your position involves

management responsibilities than you need to learn and understand the phrase “Return on investment” (ROI) and how it applies to any business decisions you make.

Best Advice: One of the quickest ways to become a “corporate superstar” is to come up with a new idea, improve a process or implement cost cutting measures which demonstrates the success of your business unit and improves the company’s bottom line. See # 10 – you’ll have a lot of people in your corner then!

7) **Learn to operate within the “C Suite”** - Understand the executive and senior management chain of command and the lingo. Much like law enforcement, corporations have “brass” (CEO, CFO, CTO, COO, CAO, CRO etc.) and it is not uncommon for those corporate officers to be referred to as the “C-Level or C Suite.”

Best Advice: Understand the C-level vision. Ensure your style is compatible with the corporate executives. If it’s not, and you are constantly “butting heads” not only will you not have anyone in your corner but you won’t be around long either.

8) **Adapt Your Communication Styles To Fit** – Writing styles – the writing styles used in corporate America are completely different from those used to write police reports. Writing in the private sector tends to be a bit more detailed, formal and flowing vs. the shorter, more succinct writing they teach law enforcement personnel to use in reports.

Best Advice: Figure out what the company’s writing style is and adapt. Remember, you’re now in the private sector and there’s a premium placed on the ability to write.... And that includes professionally written and formatted e-mail messages. Writing is also important because one never knows when an e-mail you sent to someone else gets forwarded by that person to the CEO! It happens. Seriously contemplate both the language used, and tone, of any e-mails written before you hit “the send button”. Unlike when we were kids, there are no “do-overs!”

9) **Seek Additional Training And Professional Development** – in the private sector, simply coming from law enforcement isn’t enough. The training provided to you while in a law enforcement job was

specifically tailored for law enforcement purposes – it was relevant to your position at the time... but significant portions of that training aren't going to be relevant for the private sector and the position you're in now. I once asked a guy if he was attending a training session and he replied "I was in law enforcement for 30 years... there's nothing new to learn!" In actuality, if it's true that the only constant is change...there's a lot to learn. Regulatory and compliance law, rules and requirements in the private sector often change daily so don't be "that guy!"

Best Advice: No matter what level of training you had while in the public sector seek out as much professional training as necessary to get up to speed in the new environment. Continued professional development is imperative to your knowledge base and success in the private sector!

10) **Learn the Culture** – Corporations are political animals and the culture of each one is often completely different. People who can't quickly figure out the corporate culture and political environment don't usually last too long. When asked why someone was no longer around... I cannot tell you how many times I've heard the phrase "they couldn't play nice in the sandbox!" Adapt your style to fit.

Best Advice: Build key relationships and allies. Get the right people in your corner. Who will your supporters be?

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