
PRE-RETIREMENT AND TRANSITION PLANNING:

A GUIDE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL WITH AT LEAST 15 YEARS OF SERVICE



IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START PLANNING





My Fellow Brothers and Sisters in Arms:

The vision and journey for retirement is personal for each of us. However, it is important that for all of us to understand that retirement is a process; not an event.

There is a plethora of information and resources available to assist us with successfully retiring from the military and transitioning to a civilian lifestyle. The information can be overwhelming and the transformation journey to becoming a full time civilian can offer more routes than ever imagined. For this reason, retirement experts strongly recommend constructing a personalized framework at least three to five years before your reaching your career milestone.

Just like there are commonalities of what successful people do in their work life, there are a list of things that successful people do to prepare for retirement. The purpose of this booklet is to offer advice and tools for you to implement, while still serving. These suggestions are valuable tools that will assist you with being better prepared to define and outline your next chapter in life.

Because retirement is considered a major life change for many individuals, planning and preparation must be deliberate and intentional. While preparing for my retirement, I attended classes, and now almost 4 years later, still attend classes sponsored by the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) of each branch. Overall, the military is doing a phenomenal job with continuously updating TAP and equipping us with tools and resources that will help us transition from military to civilian life on either the work or school track. However, equally important, but not given enough attention, is our non-financial portfolio (psychological portfolio).

Developing your 5-year personal strategic and action plan, while still working, will serve as your retirement compass. Your plan will provide the focus, guidance, and direction you need to increase your ability to achieve your retirement goals. Researchers have found the loss of professional status (self-image, self identity), lifestyle changes, and finding ways to manage the additional unscheduled time can lead to boredom, depression, anxiety, restlessness, and feelings of uselessness. Understanding the hidden emotional and psychological stages, that accompany retirement, helps with recognizing, responding, and resolving the challenges you may face.

Although my clients and workshop participants receive more detailed information and guidance on how to successfully prepare for retirement than offered in this guide, I hope this booklet will serve as a useful tool and assist you with your pre-retirement planning. If you would like information on how you can begin creating the title and outline of your new life chapter, please contact me at Tanya.Smith@lifeinqtrs.com.

Soldier For Life!



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"Achieving Goals - One Quarter At A Time"

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WRITTEN BY TANYA SMITH, FOUNDER & CEO
LIFE IN QUARTERS, LLC



“Achieving Goals, One Quarter At A Time”

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Retirement and Transition Is a Process

A Personal 5-Year Pre-Retirement Plan Is More Than Just the Size of Your Nest Egg

If you have already served 15 years or more, and planning to retire from the military, **NOW** is time to develop your Military Pre-Retirement and Transition Plan. Your rank, position, degree level, or size of your financial portfolio should not preclude you from preparing early. Preparation is the key to successful retired living.

*Even if you plan to serve beyond 20 years, pre-retirement planning is highly encouraged. Life **IS** Unpredictable.*

I have spoken to military members, at their 17th year of service, who declined engaging in a conversation about retirement planning. Often the reason is they plan to serve beyond 20 years (usually seeking retirement after 26 years of service). So, they believed it was too early to think about retirement planning.



Life **IS** unpredictable. By laying the groundwork now, you will prepare yourself to have a smoother transition to both civilian life and retired living. Many who planned to retire, but received a denial of continued service notification, were not prepared for the unexpected career trajectory. Depending on cause for separation: Medical Evaluation Board (MEB), Qualitative Management Program (QMP), or Qualitative Service Program (QSP), 7 months to 2 years is the time allocated to prepare for separation. Retirement can be stressful and emotional enough without having to address an unplanned halt in your career.

Note: U.S. Code 1176 protects service members who have reached 18 years of service. Personnel may continue to serve until they reach 20 years of service in order to meet retirement eligibility and receive their pension. However, the federal sanctuary law is not extended to service members with medical cases who have less than 20 years of service. Personnel being separated via MEB at 18 years may not remain to meet retirement eligibility and receive their pension. See article: <https://www.stripes.com/news/europe/medical-retirement-can-leave-servicemembers-fighting-for-their-pensions-1.516643>

Identifying and establishing checkpoints along the way prepares you for a rewarding and successful transition as you celebrate your career milestone. Proper retirement planning entails more than just employment, education, VA benefits, family, and financial readiness. Emotional, physical, mental, social, and community shifts WILL occur AFTER transition. Identifying new interests, learning how to develop non-military professional and social networks requires time. So, before surrendering your CAC and taking off the uniform for the final time, it is crucial you become familiar and comfortable with the transformation journey. Preparing, reimagining, and rebranding yourself as a civilian is not an overnight event; it is a process.

In addition to evaluating assets: your age at retirement, desired retired location, marital status, spouse/partner's employment, children's educational levels, resources and support for exceptional family members, are also key factors to consider when preparing for retirement.

Having a five-year plan affords you the time for assessing and determining your retirement needs and goals so you can become your future desired self. **Regardless of what year of service you plan to retire, beginning to prepare after serving 15 years allows you to have more clarity, less anxiety, increased confidence, and a better line of sight during your transformation to civilian life.**

Begin Positioning Yourself To Take Charge Of Your Post Military Life

Retirement Plan Ideas:

Gap Year*/ Fellowship, Internship, Apprenticeship / Gradual Retirement Options / Volunteer

Although you cannot officially utilize SFL_TAP services until you are 24 months away from retiring, you can begin preparing earlier. Seek out retired veterans, civilians, and/or coaches (career, life, retirement). They can provide valuable insight about the retirement process. Veterans who are at different stages of retirement can offer lessons learned and add value to your retirement planning. It is paramount for retiree success.



Important questions to start asking yourself:

- 1) How should I manage my financial portfolio so I am prepared for retirement?
- 2) How do I manage the free time I have now while working? What do I do when on leave, pass, etc.?
- 3) What are my hobbies, interests?
- 4) Who do I want to become after retirement? WHY?
- 5) What do I want to do after I retire? (Gap Year*, Gradually Retire, Volunteer, Nothing) WHY?
- 6) Where do I want to do it? WHY?
- 7) What do I need to do to make it happen?
- 8) If I have dependents, how old will they be when I retire? How do I get family buy-in on my plan?
- 9) If I don't have a spouse or significant other, who can I go to for brainstorming sessions?
- 10) Do I want to start / expand my family?
- 11) What do I want to put in my legacy letter that allows me to discover, communicate, and preserve my values, stories, and wisdom in order to help others on their journey?
- 12) Who will be my retirement mentor and coach?
- 13) Who will be in my retirement social circle?
- 14) Do you have a family member enrolled in EFMP or be responsible for taking care of a loved one with special needs, a senior parent, etc.?
- 15) If you and spouse are dual military, are you retiring together? If not, what is the plan?

*Gap Year Isn't Just for College Students



GAP Year?

After decades of stress and personal sacrifice, a gap year may be what you need to decompress while working through your transition and transformation. Use this time to help you decide if you: are not certain you want to remain in your current industry, are interested in exploring other career interests, want to stop working altogether, or need time to adjust to your new routine.

Merrill Lynch/Age Wave's¹ retirement survey revealed 52% of retirees take a break from working after retiring to "relax, recharge and retool" before re-engaging in their retiree pursuits.

¹Leisure in Retirement: Beyond the Bucket List.(2016). A Merrill Lynch Retirement Study conducted in partnership with Age Wave.ml.com

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- YEAR COUNTDOWN TO RETIREMENT

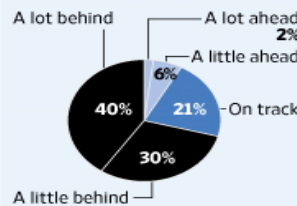
Year 15 – Review and Assess your current situations and what it may look like in the next 5 years

FINANCES

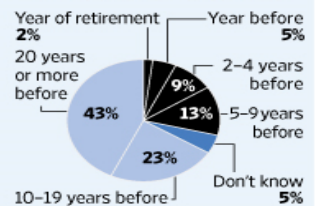
- Review income, debt, budget, spending habits, etc.
- Assess savings
- What are your financial goals?
- How old is your vehicle? / What is the condition?
- Are you considering renting or buying after retirement? If buying, calculate approximate property taxes and home maintenance costs. If a current owner, can you pay off home or explore refinancing?
- What is your credit score?
- Based on Army Retirement Calculator, what is your retirement income for the year you plan to retire?
- If divorced, is a percentage of your retirement part of your divorce agreement?

On Your Mark...

When asked where they stand with planning/saving for retirement, surveyed workers said:



When asked when they began to plan financially for retirement, surveyed retirees said:



Note: Percentages don't total 100% due to rounding
Source: Employee Benefit Research Institute

FAMILY

- What will your children's academic status be for (high school & college)? Will they be living at home?
- Is your spouse in school/working or dual military?
- Has your spouse/significant other postponed pursuing their dreams/goals so you can serve?
- Relationship assessment (How is your marriage, communication, etc.?).
- Are you transferring GI Bill to dependents? Will service obligation be met at retirement for transfer?

YOU—Are you willing to have an open-mind to listen and explore options?

- Where are you academically? What are your higher learning goals?
- Are you sharing your retirement plans/goals with your supervisor, mentor, coach, etc.?
- Speaking/Communication Skills - Join a Toastmaster's group (excellent for transitioning your thoughts, words, and movements from the military community to civilian population). There is always room to improve your speaking skills and increase your communication effectiveness.
This is important!! If the last time you "interviewed" was for your SSG promotion or NCO competition, speaking about yourself will definitely need rehearsal time.
- Begin exploring interests/hobbies you enjoy that positively impact and add value to others.
- Explore gradual retirement options (this option is discussed in depth during coaching and workshops).
- Seek out a volunteer position – board member of a nonprofit, volunteer coordinator, event organizer fundraising committee member, advisor, student mentor, etc.



- YEAR COUNTDOWN TO RETIREMENT

Year 16 – Researching, Brainstorming, and Planning for Retirement Roadmap

You **CAN** Plan Your Own Retirement, but make sure you know your **WHY**
'He who has a why can endure any how' - Frederick Nietzsche, German philosopher

- Retirement locations - near a military installation, close to family members/friends, away from family members/friends, abroad, etc.? Why?
- Which states are considered military friendly? Why?
- Identify businesses/organizations/industries and positions, gradual retirement options, retirement activities
- Research specific businesses/organizations/industries, positions, gradual retirement options, retirement activities
- Explore Military Courses/Training/ Certifications outside MOS to increase knowledge and skillset
- Join a Mastermind Group, FB Groups, Organizations, Social Meetup Groups, Toastmasters, etc.
- Explore books, Podcasts, TedTalks, Webinars, Workshops, Conferences (outside of your interests)
- Reflect. Ask yourself what did you do, specifically, to add value to others and improve/grow the organizations during your assignments? You still have time to make a difference!
- Create a Vision Board – it is a powerful tool to help you see what you are envisioning for retirement and create for your life and develop a plan



Know your 'WHY'

Your WHY allows courage and determination to surface and overpower your fear.

Your WHY removes the barriers and keeps you in motion.

Your WHY is your thirst quencher.

Your WHY pushes you through challenges and teaches you the lessons from your setbacks.

Your WHY is your compass, map, coordinates, and pace count that will navigate you towards your desired life.

Attain your goals, achieve success. Know your 'WHY'

Tanya Smith



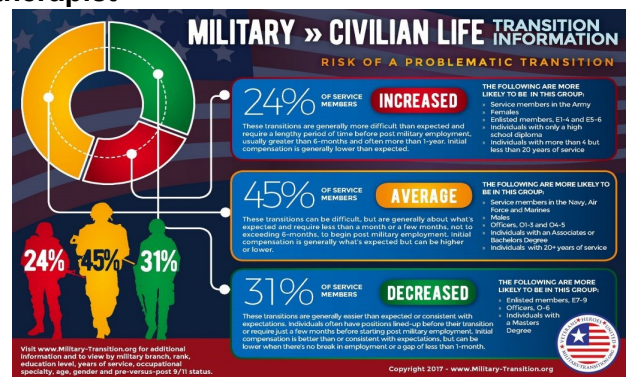
- YEAR COUNTDOWN TO RETIREMENT

Non Financial Preparing Is Just As Important As Reviewing Your Financial Portfolio



Year 17 - Prepare and Plan

- What does retirement look like for you? What is your vision?
- Where will you live? Are you familiar with the federal/state/county tax laws?
- What retirement plan are you interested in pursuing—Gap Year, Working, Volunteering, etc.?
- What academic degrees, certifications, licensures, or experience/requirements do you need?
- Request copies of medical records
- What comments on your performance evaluations and awards evokes a positive emotion?
- Attend Job Fairs and Professional/Personal Development Meetup/Eventbrite events
- **Assess your Accrued Leave** (consider managing leave so you can have at least 60 days for transition leave) - especially important if retiring at 20 when plan was for after 20+ years
- Conduct a skills assessment
- What internships, fellowship, apprenticeships opportunities are available in your area of interest?
- Research, learn, and become familiar about living life as a retiree in your age range
- Reflect. Ask yourself what did you do, specifically, to add value to others and improve/grow your unit? It's still not too late to help develop others and grow your organization
- Create a professional email address for personal networking use
- Create a networking card— name and contact info
- **Schedule a consult with retirement/life coach or therapist**
- Begin observing and listen to elevator pitches
- Examine your social media accounts
- What is clearance status? Is it time for update?
- What additional duties do you or have you held?



Source: Military-transition.org

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- YEAR COUNTDOWN TO RETIREMENT



Year 18 – Assess, Determine, Plan

- Gather and Review medical records
- Evaluate and assess your preparedness to retire. This is important to do now, regardless of the year you plan to retire
- Attend SFL-TAP classes your 18th year of service, even if you have not yet decided to retire
- Connect with VA presenters
- Lock in a mentor and/or a coach
- Enroll in certification courses/Master's program/ Take licensing exams
- Create LinkedIn account / Have a professional photo taken
- Revise Networking Card as needed (add tag line/interests)
- Assess your civilian wardrobe. Is it in alignment with your retirement plan?
- Increase network contacts (attend Meetups, networking, professional, and social events)
- Attend job fairs and workshops (for military and non-military) connect with recruiters
- Attend transition, retirement, financial workshops (non-military)
- Evaluate criteria for DoD SkillBridge, Fellowships, Internships, Apprenticeships, etc.
- Create resume rough draft
- Determine retirement date
- Research, learn and become familiar about living life as a **retiree for your age range**
- Search veteran friendly organizations - IVMF, Hire Heroes, Wounded Warrior, Four Block, DAV, VFW, Bunker Labs, VETLANTA, USO Pathfinder Program, Team Rubicon, The Mission Continues, Team RWB, or other Military Partnership Programs
- **Medical, Dental, and Insurance Plans**
 - ** Learn and understand medical and dental plans (deductibles, co-pay, etc.)
 - ** Explore life insurance options and rates. Learn and Understand the different types

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- YEAR COUNTDOWN TO RETIREMENT

Year 19 – Transitioning and Transforming

- Prepare your exit strategy. Backward plan from retirement date:
 - What are your transition leave dates?
 - What are your PTDY dates? If moving, when?
 - What are your dates for clearing?
 - What are your dates for your fellowship, internship, class, etc.?
 - What is your retirement ceremony date? **This is an important Capstone event. Take some time to plan and celebrate your career milestone!**

- Familiarize yourself with the Phases of Retirement and the Emotional Stages of Retirement
- Prepare replacement. Create a continuity book. You **WILL** have medical appointments, TAP, etc.
- Continue to attend SLF-TAP classes, information is often added and updated
- Continue to improve elevator pitch
- Update Networking Card
- Finalize Resume
- Upgrade LinkedIn Account
- Keep an open mind and remain committed to Lifelong Learning
- Develop/Revise your Personal/Professional Growth Plan (this is included and covered in personal coaching and workshop series session)



Create a calendar. Define your days. Plan and Schedule meaningful things to do daily!

Do not use your certainty about retiring from military life as an excuse to not plan for what you will certainly be... a retiree, living a civilian life.



Tanya Smith (Full Bio)



Tanya M. Smith is a global Leadership & Productivity Strategist and the Founder & CEO of Life In Quarters™, LLC. Ms. Smith retired from the US Army in November 2016 after 24 years of total service. She began her military career as an Army Reserves Radiologic Technician. Wanting to experience the Army on a full-time basis, she resigned from her position as Acting Director for New Jersey's largest residential program for male juvenile offenders.

She became a Cryptologic Linguist and graduated with Honors, from the Spanish Basic Course at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in Monterey, California. Throughout her career, she remained mission-focused and results-driven. Her passion for striving to develop effective leaders was instrumental in contributing to the overall success of Soldiers with whom she served. Her extraordinary actions were vital to building teams who achieved and exceeded organizational goals.

Ms. Smith successfully served in both traditional and nontraditional Army leadership positions. Her positions included: Team Leader, Platoon Sergeant, US Army Recruiting Command Language Advocate, Rear Detachment First Sergeant, and Advanced Individual Training Platoon Sergeant. She additionally served in senior leadership positions for Army programs: Retention, Equal Opportunity, Resiliency, and Sexual Harassment/Assault. Her station assignments included Fort Drum, New York, Fort Meade, Maryland, Fort Hood, Texas, and the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), Monterey, California. Ms. Smith deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq in support of peacekeeping and combat operations.

The last assignment she completed in uniform was at Fort Meade, Maryland. As the Command Language Program Manager, she oversaw the Army's largest unit for linguists. She and her team managed training for over 350 linguists in 14 different language disciplines. Her team was recognized by the Department of Defense and received the Command Language Program Award for 2015 over all the US military language programs.

Ms. Smith's civilian education includes: Associate Degrees in Spanish, Intelligence Studies, and Applied Science, a Bachelor of Liberal Arts, and a Master in Organizational Leadership. She also completed University of Pennsylvania's Master Resiliency Trainer Certificate program and earned certificates from Cornell University in High Performance Leadership and Executive Leadership. She is now pursuing her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership.

Her combined civilian experience and years of service to the nation have provided her invaluable opportunities to see and understand the world from unique perspectives. These experiences have contributed to her ability develop effective leaders and empower them to grow organizations. As a life-long learner with a passion for adding value to organizations and individuals, she became a certified Speaker, Coach and Trainer with the John Maxwell Team. She accepted an opportunity to participate in Costa Rica's Country Transformation Project in March 2018 and assisted with training 15,000 facilitators in a Round Table process based on life-changing principles.

Tanya has been sought after to conduct Professional Leadership Development training for universities, nonprofit organizations, and the US military. She is also a member of the National Capital Region's Total Force Development Council and offers personal and professional leadership development training within the Military District of Washington Community, including The Pentagon.

Miss Smith received the 2019 Empowered Woman of the Year Award, the 2018 Top Performance Coach, and is recognized as an Influencer by the International Association of Women. She is also a coauthor in *Camouflaged Sisters: Leadership Through the Eyes of Senior Military Women Leaders* (Amazon Best Seller) which examines the grit, perseverance, and determination it takes to rise through military ranks as a woman in uniform (signed copies are available for purchase at lifeinquarters.com/products).

Some of her military career highlights include:

- Saving the Army more than \$40 million and 4,800 months of language training; being recognized as the first to achieve and exceed USAREC's Linguist Recruiting Mission after a 9-year mission; bridging the gap between recruiters and 14 academic institutions; fostering a high performing workplace environment for recruiters and enabling them to enlist over 400 linguists; and motivating 150 recruiters to enroll in undergraduate studies
- Having the only platoon to ever achieve a 100% graduation rate for students enrolled in the Basic Chinese Course and surpassing the 75% graduation goal rate; exceeding the 30% goal of achieving higher than the minimum language score by accomplishing a 95% rate, professionally developing over 350 students enrolled at DLIFC for language acquisition; having the highest number of students graduating from DLIFLC with an Associate Degree in Basic Chinese
- Leading a team to assist 59% of the linguists to achieve foreign language proficiency scores above the Army's standard; overseeing the expansion of language training opportunities for Soldiers to attend institutions of higher learning stateside and abroad
- Knowlton Award recipient for significantly contributing to the promotion of Army Military Intelligence and demonstrating superb professional and leadership competence

