

REFLECTIONS *ON CAREER TRANSITION*



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AUTHOR’S NOTE

I must have discussed issues surrounding career transition with hundreds of people by now. These individuals were from different walks of life, moving or having moved between different lines of work.

They ranged from a friend who left consultancy work for a social enterprise in Cambodia, another who moved from the arts into the financial sector... to the men and women of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), their prospective employers, and other industry partners, whom I have connected with in the course of my work in the Career Transition Resource Centre (CTRC). As part of the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), CTRC was set up to facilitate personnel with their transition to new occupations after completing a full military career of 20-30 years.

Having reviewed numerous career management publications and online resources, CTRC saw the need for a guide that is directed at those making a career switch and that addresses their relevant considerations. This guide contains short exercises and familiar stories tailored for busy servicemen like you. As compared to the others, this guide is more familiar (containing with content and examples that are closer to home) and more suitable for busy schedules. We hope you will find it useful as you reflect upon your career transition objectives and options.

CTRC would like to thank all the interviewees for sharing their time, personal experiences, and insights so generously. I would also like to thank all those, from both within and outside of MINDEF/SAF, who shared their perspectives on career transition with me.

Lee Ju-Lyn
1 Sept 13

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING MID-CAREER TRANSITION

Although the prospect of getting a new job is always exciting, considerations that go behind such a decision are complicated, especially for mid-careerists.

On one hand, mid-career job-seekers have the advantage of knowledge and skills from past working experiences to perform effectively in their new workplace; on the other hand, experienced workers also tend to look for jobs that suit their established lifestyles (or at least, find one that is worth adjusting to) since other responsibilities and priorities may influence career decisions.

This is different from fresh school leavers, who are more ready to change their lifestyles to accommodate their job demands. And unlike youngsters who have more time to explore and experiment with various career options, mid-careerists are often too caught up with full-time work demands to review their choices until transition draws near. The complexity of career transition can be overwhelming, particular for those who are facing their first career change in a long time.

To better facilitate your career transition planning, the MINDEF/SAF Career Transition Resource Centre (CTRC) designed this guide especially for SAF personnel transiting after completing their full military career. We hope it will help you in planning your career transition from the SAF, and beyond.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

One way to manage career transition is to recognise its challenges and manage the difficulties one by one.

We begin with aspects of career transition that are more familiar, such as understanding yourself better, before advancing to areas like career options and job search issues.

The contents in each section have been organised to guide the self-reflection process:

- ▶ Tips and ideas on specific aspects of career transition
- ▶ Exercises to aid personal reflection
- ▶ Insights and sharing from former SAF servicemen on their transition experience.

By design, this guide should be worked through from the start to the end. You can, of course, begin at any point that suits you. There are no hard-and-fast rules and what you make out of it is entirely up to you – much like your career transition.

Although the prospect of getting a new job is always exciting, considerations that go behind such a decision are complicated, especially for mid-careerists.

EXERCISE 1.1:

Am I well prepared for career transition?

This checklist gauges how well prepared you are for career transition. Tick the column that best reflects your response to the learning objectives.

When you have reached the end of this guide, check back here to see if you have improved.

I know this area well enough to explain my ideas clearly.

I can do more to prepare myself in this area.

Know yourself

Section 2 Do I know my strengths and aspirations?

Section 3 Do I know my life goals and priorities?

Know what is right for you

Section 4 Do I know what industry or job function I want to go into?

Section 5 Do I know if the job is right for me?

Getting there

Section 6 Do I know how to get ready job applications and prepare for interviews?

Section 7 Do I know what it takes to adjust to a job and stay on a job?

STRENGTHS AND ASPIRATIONS

TAKING STOCK

Do you know where your strengths and aspirations lie? Understanding what you are good at and who you want to become can determine the direction you take in deciding the right career. It is a good place to begin your reflection as it is the area closest to your heart, and it will be assuring to remember your strengths as you embark on your career transition journey ahead.

Strengths are desirable qualities honed by individual experiences. They are demonstrated by your behaviour and how you attain your accomplishments. They may also be shaped through circumstances. For example, a person may be flexible and spontaneous by nature, but is trained by work to be a meticulous planner.

With experience and maturity, you may wish for certain strengths that you did not have the opportunity to develop. These may include strengths you wish to embody by a certain age, or traits that you admire in others.

In this way, your strengths and aspirations may either be similar, overlapping, or entirely different. Your core strengths are attributes you are most proud of exhibiting.

As career transition puts you at the crossroads of choosing your next working experience, consider how it may offer you new opportunities to utilise your core strengths and work towards your ideals.

EXERCISE 2.1: Evaluating my strengths and aspirations

- ▶ **“I am....?”**
Under the first column, tick the attributes that have carried you through in your personal and professional life. Can you recall your proudest achievements and how you attained them?
- ▶ **“I want to be....?”**
Under the second column, tick the attributes that make you feel proud and excited about who you are. While your experiences have honed your strengths, where do your aspirations lie?

Qualities	I am/ I am a...	I want to be/ I want to be a...
Adaptable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analytical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attentive to detail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creative/Innovative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decisive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Determined	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diligent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discerning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disciplined	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dynamic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enabling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energetic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enterprising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enthusiastic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focused	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forward-looking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goal-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good communicator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insightful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loyal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meticulous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

REVIEW YOUR RESPONSES:

- ▶ Do you possess strengths that you are particularly proud of? Would you agree that they are your core-strengths? How can you develop them further?
- ▶ Identify the strengths that you are less keen on developing further. Why do you feel this way towards them? Are you prepared to continue applying them in your work?
- ▶ Consider your aspirations, or attributes you desire but have not yet developed as strengths. Why do you think these strengths are desirable? How can you develop these traits?

Further tips:

- ▶ Ask close friends or colleagues what they think about your responses in the exercise above. Their feedback may give you more insight.
- ▶ Reflect on your strengths and how you feel about having acquired them. Would a career change stifle or develop those attributes?

▶ Strengths are desirable qualities honed by individual experiences. They are demonstrated by your behaviour and how you attain your accomplishments. They may also be shaped through circumstances.

PETER WEE

Sharing on 22 Mar 13 at a CT Networking Session.

ON TRANSFERABILITY OF SKILLS

Colonel (Ret) Peter Wee is an experienced HR practitioner, being the former Head of Air Manpower and Joint Manpower Department who transited from the SAF in 2007 to be a HR director in the aviation industry.

In 2010, Peter was assigned the additional role of managing Corporate Services, which includes Information and Communication Technology, Organisational Excellence, and other corporate development areas. He also found the skills he gained in the SAF transferrable to these work areas.

Having met many mid-careerists and job seekers at different levels, he shared that **employers tend to consider job applicants' overall merits and abilities, based on whether they can bring value to the organisation.**

"If you've been working in the SAF in a 'staff' position, you should be able to adapt very quickly to corporate life because the job nature and skillsets required are very similar. Even if you're not in a 'staff' position, you should be familiar with the challenges of executing policies or standard operating procedures," Peter said.

"Generally, the SAF is a rigorous working environment, so use opportunities to give yourself an advantage – gain qualifications and accreditation, and learn as much as possible," he added.

LEARN AND VALUE-ADD CONTINUOUSLY

Learning continues to be important for servicemen who are adjusting after transition. "Skills and knowledge enable one to value-add on the job through improving work processes and the organisation. Therefore, as organisations evolve, **employees must keep on gaining new skills to remain relevant,**" Peter advised. "Remember, the job market can be highly competitive, even for experienced personnel, regardless of public or private sector."

How does one find the motivation for continuous learning despite the demands of work and personal life? It is suggested that one would naturally be motivated to learn and improve continuously, when one's passion is involved. Thus, it is all the more important for transiting servicemen to be discerning about their choice of career.

"Think about career transition as a major milestone in your life. Your next move will be the first step that you will take for the next 20 years of working life ahead of you. Whether you are comfortable with different levels of stability – such as wanting to join an organisation for the long haul, or seeing the next job as a stepping stone to something else – it should be a position that you can and want to contribute in. In other words, it should be about something that you are passionate about," Peter said.

PERSONAL BRAND

Setting yourself up where you can contribute with passion will also help you to do well in your job and build up a strong personal brand – whereby the very mention of your name reminds others to think of your trustworthiness to do things well and your excellent performance standard.

"Building a strong personal brand is relevant to every posting that you receive in the SAF," Peter reminded. "It is about how you manage challenges and deal with people, because your performance is also dependent on how good you are at leading others to do their jobs well."

SMELL THE ROSES

Lastly, Peter shared why it is important to reflect on life: "Life is not a bed of roses but life is short. So, **we must appreciate the things we have and move on from our experiences.**

"While we may be at different stages in life, I'm sure you'd agree that building a successful SAF career has demanded much of your time and energy over the past 20 to 30 years. Don't forget that your family, too, has sacrificed much to support you through the most trying periods in life, including your career transition. So, at this 'milestone' of your life, take some time to remember your loved ones and those who deserve your attention."



Think about career transition as a major milestone in your life. Your next move will be the first step that you will take for the next 20 years of working life ahead of you.

PHILIP KANG

Catching up over lunch on 25 Jul 12.

EMBARKING ON A NEW PHASE

Master Warrant Office (Ret) Philip Kang Choon Heng, PB, left the SAF after 36 years of service. He has since assumed a managerial role in the landscape industry with National Parks Board.

Looking back, Philip described his career transition in 2010 as ‘an expected progression’. “We all go through life in phases. In some ways, career transition is like how one moves from starting a family to having children,” he laughed. As with his son, who recently went on to pursue his studies overseas, and his daughter, who recently received her degree and joined the workforce, Philip moved on to further develop his career after leaving the SAF. Explaining his outlook, Philip added: **“When we progress from one stage to another, we strive to make the next stage better than the previous one.”**

LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE OF IT

While some mid-careerists go for career options that will let them keep within their comfort zones, Philip advised: **“We are responsible to ourselves to live up to our fullest potential. In whatever position we are in, it’s about how we steer and define our role and future. Let’s not let our rich working experience go to waste.”**

Bearing these in mind, Philip has continued to contribute unreservedly in his current capacity, as he had done in the SAF. For example, he pro-actively applies his systems-thinking skills to improve work processes. Being trained in people development and manpower planning, Philip is concerned about upgrading and progression opportunities for his team, especially since this would allow them to better meet the expectations of increasingly sophisticated stakeholders.

Recalling how he was encouraged by MINDEF CTRC to apply for the job despite not having the “preferred academic qualifications” specified in the job description, Philip was confident that he brought something more valuable – his 36 years of SAF working experience.

“When you look at yourself in the mirror, don’t you see someone with valuable working experience and genuine achievements? You have accomplished many things in the SAF, don’t doubt yourself now just because you have to do something different,” he cheered.

“MAKE-IT-HAPPEN”

“We’ve been trained by the SAF to adapt, take charge and overcome any challenges that may arise, and accomplish a mission. We are prepared for this. You’d be surprised how well we can adapt to different work

situations and do the job well.” Philip pointed out similarities between how he had to adapt to his new job and how he adjusted across diverse appointment postings in the SAF.

Having the signature SAF “make-it-happen” attitude, he was determined to make his career transition work out well. When he first assumed his job, he quickly identified and focused his efforts on what he needed to perform better at work. For example, knowing how important it was for him to work closely with his team and their diverse business partners, Philip put his sincerity and unreserved effort into building and strengthening relationships with them. He reinforced the sense of belonging among his staff by rekindling their passion through values, identity, and purpose in their daily work. Good rapport with his colleagues also allowed him to grasp what was expected of him faster.

ONE LIFE, ONE CHANCE

Philip urged transiting servicemen, who are typically in their 40s and 50s, to remember that there are still plenty of opportunities in life to contribute meaningfully to society. “We must continue to contribute to the best of our ability. The way to go about it is to get to know yourself, your job, and the people around you,” Philip encouraged. **“We have only one life, and one chance to make something out of it.”**



When you look at yourself in the mirror, don’t you see someone with valuable working experience and genuine achievements?

PRIORITIES AND GOALS

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Priorities in life can help determine how limited personal resources such as energy, money, and time are allocated. Factors such as personality, values, and family commitments influence your priorities, making them unique to you, and changing them over time.

Being clear about the considerations that are most important at this point in your life sets you in the right direction towards your career goals. Only by knowing your priorities can you draw up an action plan.

EXERCISE 3.1: Ranking my priorities

Rate the priorities listed in the diagram below using the scale provided. Some priorities are probably less important than others.

Limit the rating of “very important” to two priorities only, and make sure that at least one priority has been rated “least important”. Be open with yourself – do not base your assessments on what you or others think priorities *ought to be*.

Priorities	Very important	Important	Less important	Least important
Career				
Ethics & Values				
Family				
Finances				
Health				
Personal development				
Social				
Spiritual or psychological growth				
Others:				

Further tips:

- ▶ To test if your responses are valid, examine your attitude and feelings when you spend time on priorities that are “very important” vis-à-vis those that are “less important”.
- ▶ Consider this: “What should I spend my resources on?” Your responses should coincide with the priorities that are “very important”

DEFINING YOUR GOALS

After setting out your priorities, “operationalise” them by writing out tangible and achievable goals for the important areas in your life. Align goals to the priorities you have identified to be “very important” in Exercise 3.1.

Remember, good goals must be worthy of your time and effort, so do make them specific, realistic, and attainable within a fixed amount of time. As life goals and career goals do not coincide for most individuals (as they only coincide for those whose top priority in life is their career), we shall address them in two separate exercises.

EXERCISE 3.2: My life goals

The worked example below illustrates someone whose top priority in life is “Family”.

E.g.	Long term	In 10 years’ time, I want to buy an apartment big enough for my family, including my parents, to live together comfortably.
	Middle term	In 5 years’ time, I want to bring my family, including my parents, on a holiday to visit our ancestral home.
	Short term	By this time next year, I want to be visiting my parents weekly.
Life goal 1	Long term	
	Middle term	
	Short term	
Life goal 2	Long term	
	Middle term	
	Short term	

EXERCISE 3.3: My career goals

Next, consider: “How can I make my career meaningful and relevant to my life goals?” Here is an example of someone working in the logistics industry, whose top priority is “Family”.

E.g.	Long term	In 10 years’ time, I want to be an accredited trainer and a recognised consultant in logistics, as it allows me the flexibility to spend more time with my family.
	Middle term	In 5 years’ time, I want become a certified trainer and practising management consultant in logistics.
	Short term	By this time next year, I want to up-skill and find employment in the logistics industry related to training and consultancy, which allows me to improve work-life balance.
Life goal 1	Long term	
	Middle term	
	Short term	
Life goal 2	Long term	
	Middle term	
	Short term	

Further tips:

Do you involve your family in your career planning decisions? Do discuss your goals and priorities with them so that they can support you in your transition and help you to achieve what is important to you.

TEW SEE MONG

Catching up over breakfast on 2 Aug 12
at Rocky Masters, Depot Road.

EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS UNIQUE

When Colonel (NS) Tew See Mong was invited to share his transition experience in this collection, he was initially hesitant. Although he understood the intention behind documenting the experience and learning points of those who have transited, See Mong was less sure about ‘dispensing generic advice’ when every individual has different needs and goals.

A valuable reminder indeed – **the career choices for one individual might differ from another, for the personality, temperament, outlook, and experience of each transiting personnel is unique.** Everyone undergoes different life stages, and assumes different priorities and responsibilities at different points in time.

“We must ask ourselves, ‘What do I want from life?’ Only when one knows what he wants, will he know what to do,” he expressed.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO YOU

Sometimes See Mong hears questions like these being asked about career transition: ‘How much do you earn now? Are you earning more than before?’

“But if we stop and think about it, does that really matter? A man who earns three thousand dollars but spends only one thousand dollars can be considered a rich man. A man who earns thirty thousand dollars a month but spends forty thousand dollars can be considered a poor man,” See Mong explained.

See Mong knows the importance of financial wellbeing thoroughly, having set up Seed Global Investment in 2009, with more than 20 years of experience and interest in financial investments. **Financial achievement, however, is not the sole definition of success as there are other important factors in life.**

“To me, ‘success’ is more about having quality relationships with my family and friends, than having a lot of money,” See Mong shared.

His vision pushes him to invest extra effort and discipline in achieving the “lauded freedom and flexibility” of being an entrepreneur, but he ensures that he makes time for his family instead of devoting himself entirely to work. “When people ask me what’s my favourite car,” quipped the car enthusiast, “I’ll sincerely reply that my favourite car is the one with my family in it.”

He also exercises regularly and is mindful that, “without good health, one will not enjoy spending even if he has a lot of money.”

SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

See Mong also highlighted a priority that is often overlooked or neglected: spiritual and psychological wellbeing.

“Someone once said, **‘if you don’t have the time to meditate or reflect, then effectively, you are saying you don’t have time for success’**,” said See Mong, who went on to explain that by preparing our minds to be clear and receptive, we can readily recognise and seize opportunities when life presents them to us. Despite his many commitments, he makes time everyday to reflect upon what he has to be grateful for. This helps him to remember his priorities.

Mindfulness is especially important in running a business, where there is high autonomy. “We choose how we want to spend our limited time, who to do business with, and so on. **There is always choice in the decisions we make,**” See Mong said.

Despite all the planning, research, and analysis, every decision will ultimately require one to take a leap of faith. Only in knowing our goal, can we be assured that we make that leap in the right direction.



We must ask ourselves,
‘What do I want from life?’
▶ Only when one knows what
he wants, will he know
what to do.

WILLIAM SIM

Catching up at the CT Networking Event on 19 Jul 12.

PLANNING AHEAD

At a time when others were only just starting to make out the meaning of career transition for themselves, Major (Ret) William Sim was already dropping hints to his young children that he would be leaving the SAF.

“I anticipated that the transition period would put extra demands on my time and energy. For example, I might have to work harder to adjust to new job challenges or ‘catch up’ on industry knowledge. **Knowing that I would need my family’s support when that happens, I’d prepared them for my transition,**” William recounted.

“It’s a matter of identifying potential obstacles and mitigating their impact on my career plan, so that I could better focus on finding a suitable job and doing it well.”

William was so conscientious in preparing for his career transition that he even reduced his financial commitments prior to his transition period so that there would be less pressure to take on a job merely for wanting its remuneration.

“Those embarking on ‘second’ careers should really look at life’s priorities in totality. Everyone has different priorities. For me, family is very important,” William said. Commitment to his family

guided William in his plans: he had considered taking a six-month break from work after leaving the service just to spend time with his loved ones. He had also turned down a tempting job offer in Hong Kong with lucrative prospects, since he did not want to relocate his family or be apart from them.

“At the same time, I was also looking for a job in which I could be suitably challenged and that would allow me to contribute meaningfully to society.”

NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED

With his search criteria clear, William came across a job opportunity that matched his skills and past experience very well. The responsibilities were also interesting and meaningful to him. He was, however, held back from immediately applying for the post in the Health Sciences and Medical sector by one part of the requirement: “Medical background preferred”. How did a job description that had otherwise suited him so well almost get passed up over three words?

“It is hard to remain confident when you are being tested. It may seem easier to walk away from opportunities than face possible rejection,” he shared. Fortunately, he was persuaded by his friends to give it a try and got the position.

“Indeed, what was the worst that could happen other than not being shortlisted for an interview? On hindsight, I should have been surer in my expertise and how they could benefit the organisation. Someone with a medical background might not have had what I had to offer,” he reflected.

“I joined the organisation without the ‘science’, but I have the ‘arts,’” William said, referring to the soft skills such as planning, and people management and development, that he had picked up in MINDEF/SAF. “So, I’d like to encourage transiting servicemen: **don’t hold back because you didn’t ask or give it a try. Believe in yourself, and believe in what you can do,**” he added.

Now that the job search is over, does William feel that the ‘preparation’ work with his family members has paid off?

“Definitely! I can now work over weekends without having to make major adjustments to my family commitment,” he joked.

Yet, one cannot help but wonder if William worked overtime not simply to “adjust to new job challenges” or “catch up on industry knowledge” as he had anticipated, because there was something about his work that brought a sparkle to his eyes as he professed “I enjoy the work very much”.



Those embarking on ‘second’ careers should **really look at life’s priorities in totality. Everyone has different priorities.**

THE RIGHT SHORTLIST

EXPLORING YOUR OPTIONS

Faced with career transition from the SAF, where your career appointments had been planned and managed by your personnel management centre, what will you do with the newfound empowerment to pursue any sector or profession? Will you continue to do something related to your experience, or will you go for something entirely different?

Some people approach transition by shortlisting their immediate options, but this process could be disadvantaged by limited market awareness. Another way is to brainstorm and map out career options in line with one's goals and priorities. Be open to suggestions, and try to find out more before eliminating your options.

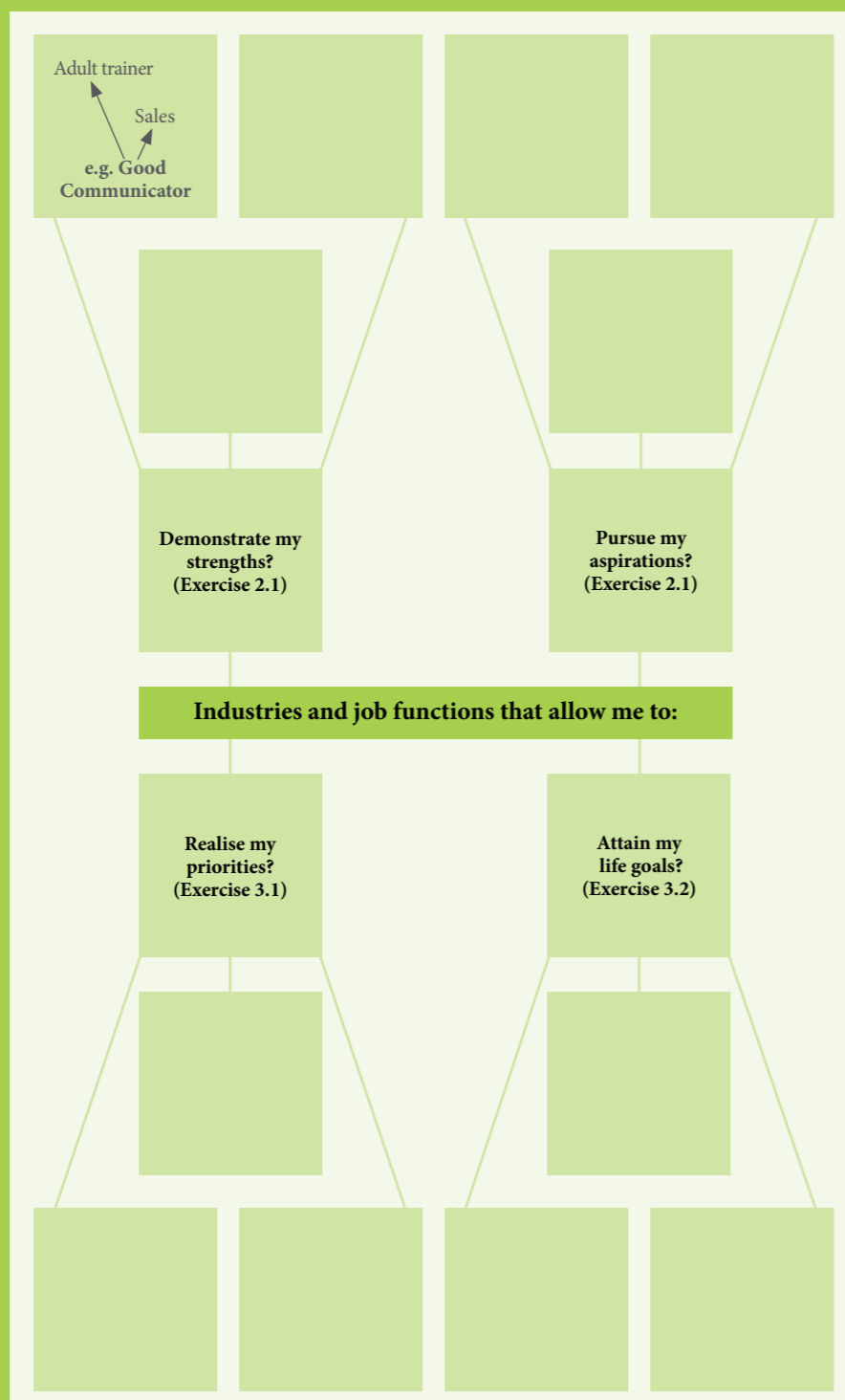
STEP I: BRAINSTORM

EXERCISE 4.1: Generating job ideas

Consider the industries and jobs that can support your strengths, aspirations, priorities, and goals. With the prompting questions provided, brainstorm answers using the mind map. Pencil in whatever comes to your mind so as not to limit your potential.

Further tips:

- Think about what your friends do for a living, and if you might do the same.
- Surf the web for suitable industries and work opportunities; look to online job portals for ideas.



STEP II: RESEARCH

To find out more about the industries or job functions that you have written down, do:

- Stay abreast of industry developments through the Internet and mass media.
- Visit trade shows and events, or browse the selection of trade publications available in public libraries or websites.
- Join industry-related associations.
- Get insights and recommendations from friends and industry associates.

Through your research, you may come across industries or job functions that you may not have considered before. Your confidence will build up as your awareness improves.

STEP III: SHORTLIST

With the information gathered through your research, you might reconsider whether your preferred industries or job functions would still enable you to: (a) demonstrate your strengths, (b) pursue your aspirations, (c) align your lifestyle to your priorities, and/or (d) attain your life goals.

Review and fine-tune your responses to Exercise 4.1, if necessary.

EXERCISE 4.2: Shortlisting my options

List the industries/job functions consolidated through Steps I and II in the table below. On a scale of 1-7 (1 being 'very unlikely' and 7 being 'very likely'), rate your responses to (a), (b), (c), and (d).

Narrow your options by looking at the industries or job functions with the highest scores. To direct your efforts, keep your shortlist to not more than three top industries. Focus your job search on opportunities within these industries.

Do my researched options allow me to:

Industries/Job function	a) Demonstrate my strengths? (Exercise 2.1)	b) Pursue my aspirations? (Exercise 2.1)	c) Realise my priorities? (Exercise 3.1)	d) Attain my life goals? (Exercise 3.2)	Total
e.g. Logistics	6	3	4	5	18

Further tips:

- Are there any industries that score high on (b), (c), (d) but not (a)? If so, find out about training courses and other development opportunities to strengthen your competency.

TAN KOK HENG

Sharing at the Career Seminar and Networking Session on 23 Jul 12.

THE POWER OF NETWORKING

“If you are hoping to have more career options, **tap into your network of personal contacts**,” advised Colonel (Ret) Tan Kok Heng, who left the SAF in 2005. “Everyone is doing it. There’s no need to feel embarrassed. At the end of the day, the decision to hire you is based on your ability, so you need not be overly concerned about ‘owing’ anyone anything,” he shared.

Kok Heng is now a HR practitioner specialising in talent management, recruitment and placement – it is a role he had always wanted to be in. Although he thoroughly enjoyed his first job after transitioning from the SAF, Kok Heng wondered what other options might have been available if he had been more open about his transition. “My friends chided me for not letting them know I was transiting from the SAF, for they would have wanted to introduce me to their organisations. I should not have kept mum about my transition plans if I had wanted more options to consider.”

With the benefit of experience, Kok Heng no longer shies away from tapping into his networks. When he was ready for a job change, he had indicated his intentions to his

contacts; through them, he found a suitable opportunity and managed to secure his next appointment.

“The other advantage of being recommended by your contacts is that they can act as referees and testify for your abilities,” Kok Heng said. This had motivated him to perform his best at work as a responsibility to his referee.

UPHOLDING THE SAF “BRAND”

He advised transiting personnel to do their research before taking on a job, especially if they were referred, and to stay at the job for at least one to two years. Kok Heng reminded transiting servicemen not to view their second careers as ‘semi-retirement’ jobs, he said, “You may have to work harder, possibly with less manpower and monetary resources.

“**Don’t take on a job with the intention of ‘trying out’ and then doing it half-heartedly.** For that will be bad not only for your personal branding, but that of all former SAF servicemen as well,” cautioned Kok Heng. “**We all play a part upholding employers’ trust in transiting servicemen to be reliable and capable of doing a job well.** This is so that employers would continue to turn

to SAF transiting servicemen as a resource for quality candidates.”

From his HR perspective, Kok Heng senses that employers do appreciate SAF-trained personnel, who are valued for their strategic planning skills and resourcefulness. Former servicemen also stand out with their people and leadership skills, having spent a good part of their SAF careers managing regulars, NSmen, or NSF’s from different walks of life. “The important thing is to use your skills and engage the people around. **Every one of us is a leader in our own right**,” Kok Heng added.

For Kok Heng, the time he invested interviewing all 60 members of his department within the first month of his new appointment was highly appreciated by his staff. He shared, “I gained their trust and helped to dispel the misconception that SAF personnel are authoritative individuals. We are less rule-bound than others think, as we are flexible and adaptable to the situation.”

“In looking for your next job, **be mindful not to over-pitch yourself, but also don’t sell yourself short. You can succeed by following your passion in the area that you are best in.**”



We all play a part upholding employers’ trust in transiting servicemen to be reliable and capable of doing a job well.

DING CHIN KEE

Catch-up session on 18 Jun 13 at Carpe Diem Kidz, Royal Road.

PLAN EARLY

Colonel (NS) Ding Chin Kee, better known as ‘Ding’, began planning his career transition when his wife, Lynn, started their first childcare centre about eight years ago. Lynn herself was transiting from her auditing job to self-employment.

“A decision like this goes beyond one’s personal career goals. It is a family decision,” Ding said. The stability of Ding’s Navy career gave Lynn the confidence to venture out. “We shared the idea that, if the business takes off, I can join the venture when I complete my military career.” With Ding’s support, the franchise business flourished under Lynn’s management.

Through MINDEF’s Career Transition provision, Lifelong Employability & Advancement Programme (LEAP), Ding completed a Master of Education course in Early Childhood Education and Teaching. Although the qualification was not a prerequisite for childcare centre operators like him, it equipped him with the fundamental technical knowledge and insights to run the franchise well.

When Ding transited from the SAF in 2012, the couple decided to open their third childcare centre. One year after that, Ding and Lynn were planning their fourth centre. On his own, Ding also started another venture offering consultancy services in the defence sector.

“As the saying goes, ‘if you fail to plan, you plan to fail’. I’m glad I started my planning early so that I had more than one transition option to turn to,” Ding said.

MAKING MINDSET ADJUSTMENTS

“Yet, one can never plan or prepare himself enough as he can never fully foresee what is required of him. For a start, there will always be teething problems that crop up. I thought I was well set for transition, but the learning curve was still steep when I was on the job,” he added.

“Therefore, it is important to be mentally prepared, and to make mindset adjustments. While leadership, operational skills, and ‘the way SAF personnel see things’ are valuable qualities in any work context, we must adapt.

“It was tempting to simply apply solutions from past experiences, but things didn’t work that way. In working with new challenges and colleagues, I had to let go of my presumptions and make a mindset change – to recognise that I’m in a new environment. Once I accepted that, I stopped questioning the need to do things differently.

“Another aspect about mindset change is changing others’ mindset about you. When I first joined, my colleagues were worried that I might run the centres like a regiment,” he laughed.

DRAWING ON PURPOSE AND PASSION

It does seem that Ding has made a big transition across two very different work cultures – from the SAF’s male-dominated, systematic, and engineering-based environment, to the childcare’s service-oriented set-up where the “customers” are too young to even fully understand what they are told. “Children don’t take to commands or orders. They run around. They cry,” he mused.

But his motivation for joining the education sector is similar to why he joined the Navy back then. “For me, the Navy is about protecting the family and future generations. I’m still contributing to the same cause by grooming our future generations, teaching them to protect themselves,” Ding explained.

“With passion, adjustments are easy to accommodate,” he shared. “Being in my 40s, it is time to do something I really want, instead of just working hard for financial rewards. The amount of effort I put into the centres might be more financially rewarding if it was invested in other things. But it is my belief in the importance of providing good education to young lives that drives me to go the extra mile.

“Transition is a good time for SAF servicemen to think about what to make of their lives and to ask themselves, ‘What do I see myself doing for the rest of my life?’”



Transition is a good time for SAF servicemen to think about what to make of their lives and to ask themselves, ‘What do I see myself doing for the rest of my life?’

THE RIGHT JOB

BALANCING WORK WITH PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

Achieving work-life harmony, or the ability to balance work requirements with other personal demands, has become increasingly relevant to today's workforce as its expectations of work become more sophisticated. With rising living standards, workers are looking to their work for more than remuneration, but things like job satisfaction as well. On the other hand, given the 24/7 nature of global business competition and enabling information

technology, employers and customers are expecting workers to be spending more time and energy at work.

Career transition presents the opportunity to review your priorities and to go for jobs that gear towards better work-life harmony – that is for you to better align your work to support your goals and priorities in life (Exercises 3.1 and 3.2). To assess the suitability of a job offer or self-employment opportunity and how it may affect other areas of your life, check your responses using the following exercise.

EXERCISE 5.1: Matching my job to my goals

Consider these questions as you decide on your next job and tick your responses in the corresponding columns on the right. In the first column, indicate your top priorities, as identified from Exercise 3.1, to remind yourself to pay extra attention to these aspects of work. You may photocopy the exercise so that you can use it to assess the suitability of multiple positions.

My top priorities (Exercise 3.1)	How will my next job affect other areas of my life...?	Yes	No or not sure
Career			
	Will the position allow me to demonstrate my strengths and perform well (Exercise 2.1)?		
	Does the position bring me closer towards my career goals (Exercise 3.3)?		
	Will I be able to progress from the position?		
Ethics and values			
	Does the work allow me to engage in activities that are ethical?		
	Does the work allow me to uphold my personal values?		
	Do I agree with the organisation's values and business ethics?		
Family			
	Will the work or organisation's HR policies allow me to spend enough time with my family? (E.g. with its business travelling or work hours requirements.)		
	Will the work allow me to develop knowledge or skills that can bring me closer to my loved ones? (E.g. help my family members or are related to their interests.)		
	Will I be working in activities that do not cause anxiety for my family? (E.g. not working in potentially hazardous environment.)		

My top priorities (Exercise 3.1)	How will my next job affect other areas of my life...?	Yes	No or not sure
Finances			
	Based on salary surveys, is the position likely to offer me remuneration that matches my financial requirements? (Do consider total annual package and not just the monthly gross salary.)		
	Will the work enable me to achieve my financial goals in the longer term? Is there room for salary or income growth?		
	Can I afford the additional expenses on food, season parking in the CBD etc., which may come with the job?		
Health			
	Does the work allow me to avoid unhealthy activities, such as binge drinking for business entertainment?		
	Does the work allow me enough time to exercise?		
	Does the organisation have policies and benefits that encourage a healthy lifestyle?		
Personal development			
	Will the position allow me to develop my aspirations (Exercise 2.1)?		
	Will I have enough time to pursue learning activities outside of work?		
	Does the organisation have policies and benefits to encourage continual education?		
Social			
	Does the work encourage me to build meaningful relationships and meet new people?		
	Does the work allow me to work with dynamic and cohesive teams and superiors?		
	Does the work allow me enough time to keep in touch with my friends?		
Spiritual or psychological growth			
	Does the work allow me to help others or engage in activities that are meaningful to me?		
	Does the work encourage me to develop wisdom and self-awareness?		
	Does the work allow me enough time to meditate, self-reflect, or pursue religious activities?		
Other priorities:			

A job that is good for you would be one that elicits many “yes” responses, especially if they pertain to the priorities that are most important to you.

TAN SOON LEE

Sharing via an email on 10 Oct 12.

When Colonel (NS) Tan Soon Lee agreed to share his 2012 career transition experience, he even offered to write his own entry. In his own words, this is what Soon Lee shared:

EXPERIENCING “CAREER TRANSITION”

“I was 40 when I was offered a Chief Operating Officer position in a private security company. The role was suitable and the package was very attractive. I had, however, not discussed career transition with my family and we were not prepared for a change. Moreover, I felt responsible to the SAF for my on-going projects and duties. Forgoing the good opportunity, I decided to mentally prepare myself for career transition from that point on.

“In my 28 years with the SAF, there have been a few ‘career transitions’ although, technically speaking, I was in the same organisation. The first transition was from an Artillery unit to the General Staff in MINDEF. My job scope changed from training NSF soldiers to being in charge of capital acquisitions and project management. From there, I moved on to command a signal battalion although I was a gunner by training. The third transition was to spearhead development in a

precision strike domain as part of the 3rd Generation SAF. I then became a Defence Attaché, based in Beijing. Hence, I wouldn’t say that career transition is new, having held all these positions in my SAF career.

THE CHALLENGES IN CAREER TRANSITION

“Like me, **most SAF personnel would have dealt with job transitions in the course of their career. Having to pick up new skills or learning to excel at new job positions are not unfamiliar experiences.** I think the challenge lies in marketing our relevant skills to our potential employers.

“**The issue is this: ‘What do I want to do after the SAF?’** This question is not easy as it relates to our life purpose and career ambitions. Other considerations, like being employed or being an entrepreneur, working for public or private sectors, local or overseas, etc., will also have to be addressed.

“At the end of the day, it’s about personal choice. Some would like to have a more relaxed pace for their second career, while others would want challenging new roles.

“**After knowing what you want, the next hurdle is in finding the right opportunity.** Opportunities don’t always present themselves readily. Suitable job vacancies are hard to find, especially senior management positions, which are not typically openly advertised. Personally, **I’ve found networking to be an important and useful skill.** Previously, I’d connected some of my transiting colleagues with acquaintances in the commercial sector, and through helping them, I got to understand the issues of transition better. When it came to my turn, I was fortunate that my old boys’ network provided me with several suitable openings.

“**While a good transition opportunity does not guarantee a good second career, it provides the chance for good personal development.** To all who are transiting or considering a transition, I’d like to say: work hard, think smart, and plenty of good luck!”



While a good transition opportunity does not guarantee a good second career, it provides the chance for good personal development.

LEE CHONG KIAT

Catch-up session on 22 Nov 12 at Rocky Masters, Depot Road.

ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

For Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret) Lee Chong Kiat, career transition took place in 2001 to a business park in Indonesia. Although he had started out as a business development manager, the opportunity to assume the post of general manager came within the first year of his employment.

What did help, according to Chong Kiat, was the large number of factories in the business park with managers who were Singaporean men – in other words, either NSmen or former NSmen – as this meant that Chong Kiat was able to easily establish a strong rapport. “We knew each other’s system, and could trust each other. This is very important in business,” he added.

At the height of his business park career, Chong Kiat was responsible for some 80,000 workers, 2,000 of whom were managerial staff. He thoroughly immersed himself in the work, learning the ropes of running factories and managing people. His experience eventually led him to set up Dayoo Singapore, a manufacturing, engineering, and component supplies company.

TAKING RISKS

“Don’t be mistaken; I don’t see myself as a risk taker,” Chong Kiat said seriously. “**I assess opportunities**

very carefully, and only decide to invest when the risk is minimal. This also affects my business decisions; for example, I subcontract some parts of the operation to lower business overheads, which are, in other words, business risk. I also started my business in an area that I know very well and am interested in. **With today’s information technology, nothing is too difficult to understand, as long as you have the interest.**”

Dayoo scaled up, growing from a small office supplying electronic parts, to a small manufacturing factory, before becoming an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) for some major Japanese electronic brands. At the time CTRC met up with him, Chong Kiat and his partner were running four factories in China, and his company had become one of the most financially successful in the province of Jiang Xi.

PARALLELS BETWEEN BUSINESS AND MILITARY

“**If you plan every business deal like it’s a military operation, you will almost never fail.** For me, clinching the deal is like a target that has to be attained by a certain time,” he emphasised.

The former commando also drew other parallels between his business and military experience. “Like the

SAF, my business requires me to be on ‘24/7’ standby. Whenever I’m briefed by my accountants on business performance, I can’t help but recall how I used to be updated by the S1s during an exercise,” he laughed.

“I sometimes feel like a Unit CO, except that instead of my rifle or other military equipment, I am armed with my banking tokens and the mobile phones that connect me to my various factories,” Chong Kiat said.

ADVICE FOR NEW START-UPS

For those thinking about starting up, Chong Kiat reiterated the importance of building relationships: “**Doing business is really about building and managing relationships.** For example, understanding human relationships has allowed me to do business with the Japanese without even speaking the language.”

He also urged new entrepreneurs to strengthen personal connections, employ the right people, go into a field that one knows best, make decisions fast, and be hardworking and honest. “If you are dishonest,” he cautioned, “it will be difficult to make money in the long run. But do look out for others who might be dishonest.”



If you plan every business deal like it’s a military operation, you will almost never fail.

RESUMÉS AND INTERVIEWS

SHOWCASING YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Despite being exposed to a wide range of job experiences in the SAF, many transiting servicemen are unfamiliar with the typical hiring process in the external job market, as their military career development and job appointments were centrally managed by their personnel management centres.

This section provides advice on putting together a good application and preparing for a job interview. Aspiring entrepreneurs may also consider using these pointers to create a portfolio and presentation that would impress prospective clients.

THE HIRING PROCESS

The typical process you can expect to go through when looking for a job is as follows:

You identify a suitable job vacancy through word-of-mouth, advertisements, job portals, job placement agencies, and other sources.

You apply for the position through the organisation's web portal or email. You may have to complete a standard online form and/or submit supporting documents as attachments.

The organisations' HR staff shortlists candidates from the applications for interview.

This list is proposed to the hiring manager, who is typically the supervisor for the position you are applying for.

The hiring manager and HR interview those shortlisted and decide which candidates are most suitable for the job.

An offer is made by the organisation. If you are offered a job, it is at this juncture that you may negotiate your salary and benefits.

PUTTING THE JOB APPLICATION TOGETHER

A complete job application may consist of a cover letter, resumé or curriculum vitae (CV), academic certifications, and testimonials. While the cover letter is important in making a first impression, your applications are most likely assessed based on your resumé, which summarises how your experience and skills make you the ideal candidate. Every element on your resumé, including its format and presentation, should be customised to position you for the job.

EXERCISE 6.1: Checklist for an effective resumé

Be concise ✓

Space is premium on the resumé. Keep sentences concise. Avoid listing experience that is unimportant to the job you are applying for.

Translate experience into transferrable qualities ✓

Explain how you have used your specialised skills and knowledge to achieve successful outcomes that your prospective employers can appreciate. For instance, describe 'How I did my previous job well', instead of 'What have I done in my previous job'. Also, use layman terms to replace technical jargon. Here are some examples:

What have I done

Supported 2 SIR for Exercise Puma

How I did my job well

Managed a team of 30 members to coordinate the logistical requirements of 10,000 servicemen for an overseas operation.

What have I done

Organised Command and Staff Course (CSC) at GKS CSC, SAFTI MI for career officers (MAJ and LTC) and the National Service Command and Staff Course (NSCSC) for selected reserve officers.

How I did my job well

Coordinated a 10-month long training programme "Command and Staff Course" for the military institute. Ensured smooth day-to-day running of the programme for the 500 middle-to-senior management level officers who attended.

Customise your resumé for each job application ✓

Every job and employer is different. Study each job description and its requirement, and then customise your resumé to enhance the relevance of your experiences skills to the job.

Further tips:

- ▶ Use your resumé to demonstrate the strengths that you have discovered from Section 2. For example, if you are good at working with people, you may want to say, "Led a team of 10 executives to..."
- ▶ Get resumé templates from Internet or from CTRC and modify them to suit your needs.

PREPARING FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

Interviews can be unnerving but the consolation is that the experience can be improved with practice and preparation.

EXERCISE 6.2: Checklist for a successful interview

Relax, it's not personal ✓

The interviewers aim to find out more about you and how you can fit into the organisation. Sometimes, the questions asked can come across as interrogative, making you feel defensive. Remind yourself that the questions are not personal. Help your interviewers by providing information about your working style, and how you could contribute to the job and organisation. Take your time; think through your answer before you reply.

Anticipate questions ✓

Prepare yourself for likely questions, and practise your responses in front of a mirror. Here are some common interview questions:

- ▶ Tell us about yourself.
- ▶ Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Tell us about your relevant experiences.
- ▶ Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- ▶ What do you understand about this industry/organisation?
- ▶ What do you know about this position you are applying for?
- ▶ Why did you apply for this position?
- ▶ What is important to you in a job?
- ▶ Tell us about your working style.

Imagine being in the job that you are now applying for. What would you ask someone who is applying to become your replacement?

If you find yourself stumped for answers, look through your responses for the exercises in the previous sections – you could draw some inspiration from there. For example, to answer "Tell us about yourself" you could choose to reply with an overview of your strengths, working style, priorities in life, or work experience.

Ask questions ✓

While the hiring organisation finds out about you at the interview, it is also an occasion to learn about the job and organisation, the industry, and your prospective colleagues. Prepare two or three questions that will demonstrate your interest and allow you to verify if the job requirements are aligned with your personal values, goals, and priorities. Be mindful not to come across as interrogatory, or ignorant about publicly available information. Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ What is a typical work day like for the ideal incumbent?
- ▶ What are the qualities of an employee who does well in the position?
- ▶ If I get the job, whom will I be reporting to? May I know what is his/her working style and expectations?

The outcome is always positive ✓

What is the worst that can happen at an interview? Perhaps your interviewer may turn out to be an NSF whom you had previously offended? Or perhaps you may make an embarrassing remark by accident?

Ultimately, the worst that could happen is to be found unsuitable for a position. And even if that were the case, the experience would have improved your interview skills for your next application. Take the rejection in your stride and choose to think of the outcome positively:

- ▶ There might have been another candidate who was a better fit.
- ▶ The interviewers know something you do not; perhaps your personality might not complement the team or group dynamics.
- ▶ Your experience and expectations might not have been suitable for the position after all.
- ▶ You are now better prepared for your next job interview.

Trust that whatever outcome will be for the better. Just do your best and relax.

TANUSHA TAN

Interview conducted over email on 15 Jul 12.

TAKING A STEP BACK TO RECHARGE

After spending more than 35 years in the Army, with her last appointment as an Administrative Supervisor in the SAF Personnel Hub (East), Second Warrant Officer (Ret) Tanusha Tan Wan Ru wanted to take a break from work and spend some quality time with her family before embarking on her next career.

“There were occasions throughout my SAF career when I spent very little time with my family due to appointments that required me to put in long hours everyday. So, to make up for lost time, I went on a two-week holiday with my husband. We also spent time together going shopping and watching movies during my break. I was thoroughly relaxed!” Tanusha wrote.

Tanusha thought that her calm and relaxed composure after the holiday might have helped her shine during her interviews. Between spending quality time with her family, Tanusha attended job interviews with employers she was connected with through CTRC.

KNOWING WHAT SHE WANTS

Having a good idea of what she was looking for in a job was also important. Feeling that her knowledge of government administrative policies and processes was her asset, Tanusha chose to make her career transition within the public sector, so that she could continue to apply her experience and skills in this area. She also believed the public sector could provide her job stability, work-life balance, and sufficient challenge – qualities she valued in her career.

Her clear goals eased her anxieties arising from the uncertainty of choice, and allowed her to focus on refining her resumé and preparing herself for her dream job.

CONNECTING WITH HER INTERVIEWERS

During her job interview, **Tanusha assessed the interviewers’ keenness in employing her, and seized opportunities to demonstrate her enthusiasm for service excellence.**

She highlighted her skills through recounting her duties in the SAF, such as leading NSmen through their

In-Camp Trainings, and organising various events such as Change-of-Command parades, National Day Parades, VIP visits, and Workplan Seminars. Exemplifying her words, Tanusha also talked about the pride and excitement she felt when she was the Army’s overall champion for HR Audit.

Her confidence was backed up by being well prepared for the interviews – she brought along the certificates from the HR courses that she had attended over the years – evidence of her active learning while in service. **“I appreciate the many good training courses and continuing education programmes that I was able to attend in the SAF. I would also like to thank the SAF for all the nurturing opportunities and guidance given to me.** I learnt through mistakes and have become more confident as a leader, and am able to work more independently,” Tanusha added. She was confident that her active learning attitude would help in her career transition.

Tanusha also encouraged all transiting personnel with her experience: **“Most important of all, we must have passion in whatever we do, and be positive always.”**



Most important of all, we must have passion in whatever we do, and be positive always.

JAYARAM SREENIVASAN

Catch-up session at a café in Yishun on 16 Jul 12, one day after his official transition date.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret) Jayaram Sreenivasan spent 23 years in the service, with more than 10 years of experience in resource planning. He considered himself fortunate for transiting into a job in corporate and resource planning, a role he enjoyed thoroughly.

Initially, Jayaram was not expecting to land a job that would fit so well with his interests and experience, as resource planning is a specialised domain with a limited job market size. So when CTRC informed him of a strategic planning position in the healthcare sector, he was immediately drawn to it. On hindsight, he was glad he had not settled for other jobs that were not as relevant to his interests: **“After a certain point in life, with all the basic needs settled, our career goals tend to veer towards job satisfaction.”**

Jayaram admitted that preparing that resumé was challenging as it was his first in over 20 years. Having referred to some samples provided by CTRC, he managed to do well and the hiring organisation contacted him for an interview soon after he applied.

At the interview, Jayaram discussed the job role and expectations with his prospective employer, explaining his experience and knowledge in strategic and resource planning. He also asked

appropriate questions to show his interest and aptitude.

GROUNDLED CONFIDENCE

Jayaram did not allow the lack of healthcare industry knowledge to deter him too much, explaining that, **“I know that I needed to learn, and I had the confidence that I can learn.”** He based his confidence on past experiences of taking on new roles in the RSAF and how things would turn out well when he prepared and applied himself to take on challenging work. **On each assignment, his goal would not be “to just finish the work” but “to do the work well”** by evaluating and rationalising what is best for the organisation.

These attitudes are relevant to career transition, as Jayaram explained, **“Everything we do becomes building blocks for our character development, including the positive habits we pick up from work, and the way we meet new challenges, and it is this character that we bring with us from the SAF into our next career.”**

Related to his personal development, Jayaram was also grateful to have had good bosses who gave him the space and autonomy to execute his responsibilities. He reflected that his military career allowed him opportunities to learn from many senior officers and commanders from MINDEF and the SAF. He was also appreciative of his staff and their support.

WITH MIXED FEELINGS...

Jayaram was excited about his new job and the fresh learning opportunities that came with it. He would be heading a new set-up, and given the chance to shape the team and establish directions for the future development of the organisation.

At the same time, Jayaram will also miss the SAF, including its familiar environment and the people, especially his team from Air Plans Department. And judging by the crowd who wished him well at his farewell, Jayaram would also be missed by his SAF colleagues.

“I am sad to leave the SAF, and if you probe this further, I may break down,” Jayaram said with a smile. “Let’s put it this way: when I first joined the RSAF, I was just like an F-5. Along the way, I’ve developed and matured with the organisation that I was part of, and it had become an integral part of me. Now that I’ve learnt new skills and acquired new strengths – I’ve gained ‘more weapons’ and can ‘navigate’ better, so to speak – I leave the Airforce as an F-15. So, for the development and opportunities that the RSAF and SAF had given me, I will always be indebted and grateful.”



Everything we do becomes building blocks for our character development, including the positive habits we pick up from work, and the way we meet new challenges, and it is this character that we bring with us from the SAF into our next career.

STAYING AHEAD

A NEW BEGINNING

After a successful job interview, a job offer might be made. Some negotiation on your employment terms may take place before you officially accept the offer. You may then feel a sense of relief and anticipation of your new work life ahead.

At this point, however, you may not have completed your career transition – not until you have settled into your new appointment and are well adjusted enough to productively contribute in your newly-established comfort zone.

Effort and determination must be put in to ensure that you adapt well to your new career. In getting used to new routines, you may have to overcome steep learning curves in gaining business knowledge, grasping culture differences, and managing complex group dynamics in your new work environment.

EXERCISE 7.1:
Coping with multifaceted change

What can you do to adjust better and faster? One way to prepare yourself for change is to take charge and know what you will need to learn.

Find out about your job and new workplace by being observant or asking your colleagues. Remember that first impressions matter; so be friendly and sincere. Spread your questions amongst different colleagues and engage in small talk. Apply yourself fully to adapting to the new environment and it will go a long way in paving a smoother career transition ahead.

Listed in the table are some common work adjustments following career transition. Use it to reflect on how you can adjust to your new work environment.

Work Aspects	Leading questions	I got this covered	I need more info on this
Orientating yourself on the first days of work	What is the appropriate attire for my first day at work? Will there be formal meetings to attend? What is the best way to get to work? What time should I start and end work? Who will I be meeting today? What am I expected to prepare?		
Work Attire	What is the dress code for different occasions? (Tip: Better to over-dress than under-dress.)		
Transport	Will work require me to move around? What is the traffic condition like?		
Food and drinks	Where can I eat my lunch and with whom? Should I be buying tea for my new team? Where is the pantry?		

Work Aspects	Leading questions	I got this covered	I need more info on this
Business knowledge	What specialist knowledge is required for the job? What can I do to learn them faster?		
Administrative support	Whom or where should I turn to for help on HR or administrative matters? (e.g. claim submissions, office supplies, and technical issues.)		
Performance management	What are the performance assessment/management policies? What is the assessment cycle?		
Value systems	What does my organisation value in its employees? What do my team members value in its co-worker?		
Work culture	What are some aspects of work culture that I need to know about? (e.g. How flexible are people with their work hours? How do managers and their staff interact?)		
Communication styles and norms	How do people prefer to communicate, e.g. through emails, instant messages, or face-to-face conversations? Should proposals be submitted in written form, or discussed over coffee?		
Bosses and their bosses	What are my bosses' management styles? What are their concerns and priorities?		
Co-workers	What are the relationships like between my co-workers? How do I fit in?		
Subordinates	What do my subordinates expect of me as their manager? What motivates them?		
Clients	What is my value proposition to clients? What are their main concerns?		

STAYING ON TRACK

Make it a habit to go through Sections 2 and 3, and to review your strengths, aspirations and life and career goals from time to time. Use Sections 4 and 5 to evaluate the relevance of your work, especially now that you are in it, and understand the demands of the job.

Ask yourself: Am I satisfied with my work or organisation? Do I aspire for more challenges, or perhaps, a promotion? Am I on track despite a job rotation or organisational restructuring? Is my work aligned

to my expectations for personal development? Will my work still be as relevant to my life goals in the next two years? Am I ready to initiate another career transition?

EXERCISE 7.2:
Planning to plan

Plan to evaluate your career. Decide when and how regularly you wish to review your career goals. Like organisational work-planning or post-implementation reviews, align your evaluation cycle to an occasion so that it would be easy to remember.

How frequently shall I review my work relevance?	6 monthly	
	Yearly	
	Once in 2 years	
Date/occasion of my last review	Calendar/ Fiscal year	
	My birthday	
	SAF ORD/First day on new job	
	Others:	

Further tip
Commit to your plan, mark down the dates on your electronic calendar!

BERNARD YEO

Insights shared at a CT Networking Session on 22 Nov 12.

ADJUSTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel (NS) Bernard Yeo left the SAF in 2007. He still remembers his transition period vividly – how he had stepped out of his office after Chinese New Year's day and started his new career in the Central Business District a few days later, and how he and his new colleagues had lunch at a Malay restaurant on that day.

Over the next two weeks, Bernard spent his lunchtime exploring the 'CBD landscape'. It was so different from that in the SAF: instead of the physical exercise routines, running tracks, and familiar greenery, Bernard found himself jousting with executives in the concrete jungle of Singapore's financial sector.

"It is part of our SAF training to 'recce' our new environment," Bernard said and went on to explain how this had helped him adjust to the new workplace. "In ways like this, **the SAF has prepared us with the ability to enter unknown terrains and 'make something out of it' when we move into new careers,**" he said, confident of his adaptability.

HAVING CONFIDENCE

Prior to his transition, Bernard had refused several job offers while he was still in service. "I was looking forward to my subsequent appointments in the SAF and the contributions that I can make in them," he explained. Nevertheless, the job offers made Bernard aware that he would have a

promising future outside the SAF. "It's just a question of when that career would eventually unfold," he added.

This confidence carried him through his job interview, "I went to the interview with a light heart since I did not feel the pressure to get the job. This helped me connect better with my interviewers and make a good impression."

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Bernard pointed out that **transiting SAF personnel have many transferable skills**. "Most of us have practical crisis management skills that are important to business continuity planning, or 'BCP'." He cited how opportunities in BCP were growing as businesses become more vulnerable to volatilities in global economics, politics, as well as the effects of natural disasters.

"All transiting servicemen are leaders in the SAF, be they senior commanders or middle-management supervisors, who would also possess some HR skills and experience," Bernard said.

"It is rather unfortunate that we are sometimes questioned on whether our skills are appropriate to outside the SAF context. Perhaps this could be attributed to doubts borne by some NSmen, based on their NS experience decades ago," he suggested. "For instance, some people may think that since there are assigned 'runners' or clerks to handle administrative work in the SAF, which is not the common

practice in the commercial sector, they wonder if we can adapt. Hopefully, we can all do our part to correct these misconceptions after our transition, especially those of our new colleagues."

PREPARING FOR TRANSITION

It did not take long for Bernard to find his habits adjusted to suit his new work environment. When scanning the newspapers, he would now watch out for business news and the "Money" section that was related to his new work, instead of defence-related news and foreign affairs updates that he used to turn to first. He encouraged all transiting servicemen to do the same: to **keep abreast of business information that would help in their new career**.

"**Gather as much information as you can to help you make the decision.** Find out if your career choice would require you to have certain certifications, and attend these courses early to better prepare yourself," he advised. "Attend networking sessions and events related to your career interests."

"If you liken career transitions to a financial investment, you may start with assessing your personal risk profile. Servicemen are typically transiting at a point in life whereby they have to manage multiple roles as parent, child, and spouse – **what are the other commitments that you must fulfil? They will help determine your career choice.**"



If you liken career transitions to a financial investment, you may start with assessing your personal risk profile... what are the other commitments that you must fulfil? They will help determine your career choice.

IRENE WEE

Catching up over lunch on
22 Nov 12 at Tiong Bahru.

MANAGING SURPRISES

“But I’m still adjusting!” Lieutenant-Colonel (NS) Irene Wee quipped at the request to share some advice on how she coped with career transition after leaving the SAF in Oct 10. Having held various HR positions in the SAF, Irene had moved on to HR appointments in the private sector. Clearly, Irene recognised that career transition involved an ongoing adjustment process, much like one’s journey of continuous personal development.

“Adjusting to a new organisation is quite similar to adjusting to the various appointments that we were rotated to during our SAF career. One of the most challenging aspects of changing jobs is adjusting to the culture of the new workplace. **While you can try to research into organisational culture ahead of time, there is nothing like experiencing it first hand and responding to it on the spot,**” Irene said.

BRIDGING DIFFERENCES

But what type of differences in work culture can one expect?

“Well, for a start, when I was out of the SAF, what hit me was the ready access to the Internet and camera phones.” laughed Irene. “On a more serious note, this also means quicker access to information and faster responses to work. I love the dynamism as it gets my adrenaline going and it increases my productivity.

“**The culture gaps are really dependent on each individual.** For example, your comfort level with the new workplace being more or less structured, largely depends on how flexible you are to begin with,” Irene said.

“The key to bridging that cultural difference is to start with oneself. **Stay open, continue to learn, adapt, and be agile!** Having a good sense of self-awareness and a realistic appreciation of the situation around you will also go a long way to tackle some of the

challenges of career transition.

In addition, I believe humility and authenticity are endearing values, especially when one moves up the corporate ladder.

“There are different leadership and management styles out there, and one will eventually find a place that clicks, even if it takes a few more tries.”

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Besides broadening one’s corporate network, Irene also recommended staying in touch with SAF friends and colleagues to facilitate adjustment to life after transition. “**Be it through the SAF Veterans’ League or social media platforms like Facebook, let’s stay in touch with each other. It is comforting to know that friends are just a call away when you need help and support.** Besides, it is amazing how often SAF comrades can bump into each other as we go about our everyday lives, so keeping in touch is really a breeze.”



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DEFINING SUCCESS

YOUR VERSION OF SUCCESS

In today's competitive society, we are pressured by ourselves, peers, dependents, and even the popular media to be successful. But what is success, really?

Is it the attainment of financial wealth, material gain, social status, business titles, or other people's admiration?

While persuasive, these popular standards of success are limited, and can be limiting. Instead of spending your time and effort chasing a notion of success that is defined by others, ask yourself what you really want to achieve in your lifetime and what will really matter to you in the end.

Define success on your own terms: success can be the achievement of something you desire, plan, or attempt to achieve.

Your version of success is unique and admirable, as is everybody else's in their own right. It can be about having good health, sharing

loving relationships with your family members, having a set of firm principles and values, bringing your parents back to their hometown for the visit that was their life-long dream... depending on what is important to you.

Career transition offers you new opportunities to position yourself and your career to best allow you to attain your goals and realise your priorities. Make use of it to live your life to the fullest.

So long as you do your best, be assured that you are already moving as fast as possible, towards the most important version of success – yours.

EXERCISE 8.1: Defining success

On the facing page, complete the sentence, "To me, success is..." with your own definition of success. Cut out or photostat the page and put it in convenient place to remind yourself of what you are working towards.

So long as you do your best, be assured that you are already moving as fast as possible, towards the most important version of success – yours.

TO ME, SUCCESS IS...

This special edition of the *Career Transition* magazine is a guide aimed at facilitating personal reflections about mid-career transition.

It features easy-to-use planning models, checklists, interactive exercises, as well as candid and insightful sharing from the following personnel who have transited from the Singapore Armed Forces:

Bernard Yeo
Ding Chin Kee
Irene Wee
Jayaram Sreenivasan
Lee Chong Kiat
Peter Wee
Phillip Kang
Tan Kok Heng
Tan Soon Lee
Tanusha Tan
Tew See Mong
William Sim



MINDEF Career Transition
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