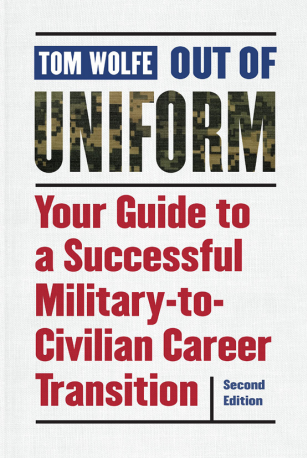
An Interview with author Tom Wolfe ~ *Out of Uniform*: Part 1

By CDR Bob Dolan, SC, USN (Ret.), Transition Committee Chair



How has the transition preparations in the book changed with COVID 19?

The old process used to be if your resume generated interest then you would get a phone interview. After the phone interview, if you were still in the running, you would get an on-site interview. Based upon the on-site interview you may or may not get an offer. Well, because of COVID-19 and travel restrictions many companies are eliminating the phone interview and going straight to a video interview. Now, the beauty of a phone interview is that, for many people, you don't have to worry about what you look like, you don't have to worry about what you're wearing, and you don't have to worry about eye contact and other body language. You had to worry about intonation, enthusiasm, and asking good questions.

Now if you get through the initial screening and your resume generates interest you are most likely going directly to a Zoom or equivalent video interview. You now must prepare for that interview to the same depth that you would for an on-site interview.

How has social media changed the job-hunting process?

Ten years ago an insufficient, inappropriate or a poorly written resume was the kiss of death. Now, an insufficient or inappropriate social media presence is the new kiss of death. When I stress the importance of a powerful and professional social media presence I'm talking primarily about LinkedIn. Without a LinkedIn profile, you are setting yourself up for failure. Why does it matter so much? It matters because a company or organization that wants to hire someone has an inexpensive and relatively easy to use tool at their disposal. They can learn much about an individual before they've ever even spoken to the individual on the phone—it's a great way to source and vet candidates.

My daughter works for Vanguard and I spoke with the vice president of human resources at Vanguard as I was writing the second edition of my book. I asked her how Vanguard views social media. She pretty much reinforced everything I already knew, but then she added something I did not know. Let's say that you have a niece and she's going to apply to Vanguard. She goes online to fill out the application. One of the first things Vanguard is going to do when they receive an application from this viable candidate is to look at her social media profile. They're going to see how long she has been following them. If she just started following them yesterday—or not at all—then Vanguard will reject her because if the person was really interested in Vanguard she would have been following them for months if not years. I have since been in discussions with many other companies and found out that they do the same thing. Here's what to do if you want to work for any company (quoting from Chapter 19 of *Out of Uniform*): "Are you engaged with their brand? Following their social media accounts? Reading, commenting on, and sharing their blog posts? View the careers page of most companies and look at the channel links available." Social media is also a place where you can research companies and you can vet a potential employer and prepare for an interview. If you know you're going to be interviewing with the CFO of XYZ company, you have the ability to learn something about the CFO of XYZ company before the interview. Now that's a double-edged sword. Since getting this information is easy, the expectations that you will have done it skyrockets. Back when it was harder to do, you could probably get away with insufficient research. Now you can't.

Tom Wolfe is an author, columnist, career coach, veteran, and an expert in the field of military-to-civilian career transition. He teaches transition courses, gives seminars on career and job change, writes about the career transition process, and continues to counsel current and former military personnel. For more information, visit www.tomwolfe-careercoach.com and www.out-of-uniform.com

Your book has a very personnel feel to it, with your stories. How do you feel these personal stories help a transitioning military member?

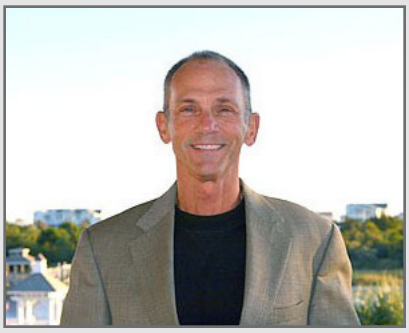
I believe that one of the components of a successful interview is the ability to ask really good questions. Most people focus on the questions you're going to answer, as they should. However, it's not just the matter of the questions you answer, it's also a matter of the questions you ask. I can say to you, "It's very important that you ask really good questions." We can talk about the difference between a good and a bad question. I could tell you that the motive, the timing, and the audience all matter. But what if I told you a story instead? In the book, I tell the story of an individual who was within a seconds of getting an offer, but his failure to ask one more question killed the deal. His final interview was with the CEO of the company. The CEO asked the young man if he had any questions. His reply, "No sir, your people have done a great job of answering all my questions." The CEO was disappointed. A lack of questions can be interpreted as a lack of interest. That's how the CEO took it and squelched the offer. One simple question and the offer would have been his, "Could you please tell me a little bit about your background and what it is like for you to work here?" My point is you will remember the importance of asking really good questions because of the story, more so than if that tip was simply item number 13 on a "how to" checklist.

Why do you feel it is important for a job seeker to know themselves before starting a job search?

That brings up a very interesting dilemma for transitioning military people. By nature and perhaps by training, they don't talk about themselves and have a very difficult time making it about them. In the military, it's more about the team. It's more about the mission and the team working together taking care of the person on your right and person on your left. They have built-in humility. It's very difficult for military people to pat themselves on the back and fly their own flag. That is understandable in the military, but it's different when you are in an interview. In an interview, you are expected to sell your potential, you have to point out, "Here is one indication of my potential. I am good at what I do. Look at my track record. I've done so many different kinds of things and I've done them well." So, there is a track record of success there. What's interesting in what I just said is I used the pronoun "I" so many times as opposed to the pronoun "we". That's hard for military people to do. Several years ago I compiled a list of reasons people get rejected. I don't remember where on this list they fell so let's say number 13 was "Too much I and not enough we" and number 14 was "Too much we and not enough I". I am sharing this with you to show you how tricky this subject is.

Talk about your military background and when you first transitioned.

I went to the Naval Academy straight out of high school, graduated the Naval Academy and went into the fleet. I served in Surface Warfare at sea for three and a half years. Then I had a two-year tour as an admiral's aide to wrap up my time in the Navy. I did not want to go back to sea, so I got out of the Navy in late 1978. I used a placement service to help me discover what my options were. My first civilian job out of the Navy was the worst thing/best thing that ever happened to me—I got fired after six weeks. I had never failed up to that point in my life. I'd always been successful and had this feeling of being bulletproof. Thank goodness I got fired because I was in the wrong job for the wrong reasons. I ended up in the right job the second time. It took me two tries to get it right, but that second job launched me into the military to civilian transition industry, in two or three different capacities. I've been in that industry since 1978.



During his career he assisted thousands of service members in their searches for employment, placing more than 3000 in their new jobs.
Tom was a founding partner of Career Development Corporation, one of the first and most highly respected firms in the military-to-civilian career transition industry.
Tom is or has been a regular contributor to Military.com, Stripes.com, Military Transition News, Civilian Job News, Stars & Stripes, TAOnline.com, Military Wife Network, and Veterans of Modern Warfare.
His book, Out of Uniform: Your Guide to a Successful Military-to-Civilian Career Transition, Second Edition, was published in 2018 by University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, as a follow-up to the first edition which was published in 2012.
Tom lives on the North Carolina coast with his wife, Julie.
He is president of his community Veterans Club, volunteers at veteran-centric events, and serves on the board of directors of Listen Up Brunswick County!
He enjoys running, bicycling, kayaking, Scrabble, poker, craft beers, and walks on the beach.

www.out-of-uniform.com
www.tomwolfe-careercoach.com