

10 LESSONS AFTER 26 YEARS

1 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

You need to take care of your own health, family, education and career first. Don't put off going to the doctor, attending family events, investing, or planning your education and career since no one else will. I learned much of this the hard way and wish that I would have paid more attention when a mentor shared this lesson with me early in my career. Take the time and ensure these items are aligned before problems become insurmountable.



2 KNOW WHAT'S IMPORTANT

There's always more to accomplish than time allows and attempting to do everything is a recipe for disaster and burnout. Goals and priorities allow you to focus on activities which have the greatest impact. Don't spend precious time and energy on things that don't matter. Identify, focus and accomplish what's most important first. Then go back and address additional tasks and activities that aren't priorities.



3 BE POSITIVE

Optimism is a force multiplier that can enable monumental accomplishment. It draws people towards your purpose while negative attitudes push them away. It can also disarm potential conflicts. Regardless of the situation, put on the face of optimism and move forward.



4 READ

One of the best ways to learn and expand your horizons is through reading. Books, magazines, journals and blogs are great sources of information. Find a few minutes each day or schedule a block of time each week, at minimum, to learn and grow through the ideas of others. If your schedule is so busy that you can't find the time to read, consider listening to a few audio books.



5 LISTEN

Don't confuse hearing, which is passive, with the active function of listening. Listening results in understanding and learning, which is critical to success. Supervisors, subordinates, instructors, peers, friends and families want you to listen – not just hear. Repeating the important points of a message is a great way to demonstrate that you were listening versus simply hearing what they said.



IDEAS TO HELP MAKE YOUR CAREER AND LIFE MORE SUCCESSFUL

6 THINK

No situation is permanent and thinking is the first step to effecting change. Think about where you're at and what you want to accomplish. Military members are expected to follow direction, but they're still allowed to think. You don't have to voice or act upon individual thought, but don't lose the ability to think for yourself.



7 FOLLOW-THROUGH

Persistence and follow-through are critical to success. In turn, adversity is a part of life. Skills and judgement are developed based up experience, which includes challenges and obstacles. Commit to your actions and what you tell others you'll accomplish. Not doing what you say erodes credibility and empowers resistance.



8 FOCUS ON RESULTS

Don't confuse activity with accomplishment since results are what matter. Effort and intent are important but irrelevant when positive results aren't achieved.



9 HAVE A MENTOR

Everyone should have at least one trusted advisor they can speak with, discuss ideas and seek council. The ideal situation is having several mentors, both inside and outside the military. If you're more senior, you should also be a mentor to others who need an honest sounding board and candid insights.



10 START PLANNING NOW

Decisions made while in uniform will have a major impact on your post-military life. Lifestyle, occupation, income and location are a few items to consider. And the sooner you begin thinking about your future, the clearer this becomes. Don't wait until the last minute and limit your options following the military.

