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Paul Thies: Members of the armed forces are used to contending with stressful situations. However, making the move from deployment to employment as a civilian professional brings with it a different set of challenges. Hello, I'm your host, Paul Thies. In this episode of If/When, we discuss how service members can successfully embark on the next phase of their careers with Issac Barnes, President of Eminent Future, and Cleo Thomas, Vice President and Director of Operation for Jacobs Global Digital Center of Excellence.

Isaac and Cleo are both fantastic examples of service members who are able to parlay their military experiences into rewarding post-military careers. After serving in the US Army for 25 years, achieving the rank of colonel, and serving in the White House under President Obama, Cleo now manages operational priorities to ensure the successful integration of innovations in support of Jacob's Global Mission. A former US Marine, Isaac made history earlier this year as his Black-owned tech company, Eminent Future was awarded a \$13.4 billion defense contract with the Pentagon, White House, and US State Department.

In the discussion that follows, Isaac and Cleo shared how they got started in the military, what they learned along the way, and the advice they would pass along to their comrades in arms who are preparing to take their own next steps. I found that the recommendations they shared are just as applicable for non-military professionals too. I hope you enjoy our conversation.

Isaac and Cleo, thank you both so much for joining me today. I'm really fascinated to talk with you about transitioning from the military into civilian life. I really can't think of two finer gentlemen that I wanted to talk to about this than both of you. You've got amazing backgrounds. You're doing amazing things. I think it's really helpful for gentlemen like yourselves who are in leadership roles where you can mentor to, say, younger folks maybe, or maybe even not-so-younger folks who are transitioning out of military active duty and are looking to move into the civilian life. I just want to start by thanking you both for joining me today.

Cleo Thomas: Hey. Thanks for having us, Paul. I really appreciate it.

Isaac Barnes: Absolutely. Thanks for having us, Paul.

Paul: To start us off, I want to ask you both the same question. Isaac, I'll start with you and then Cleo, I'll ask you the same question. Isaac, can you tell us a little bit about your military career?

Isaac: Sure. I have a very, very interesting journey through the military. I grew up in a family where my dad was an Army veteran. He was adamant about me not going to the military, which is surprising for most veterans. A lot of people see the benefits and they want their kids to follow in their footsteps, et cetera, et cetera. My dad was the exact opposite, but I think he always had this way of telling me what not to do because he knew I was going to do it. [laughs] I think that may have been his way of trying to get me to at least consider it.

My father passed away in 2000. One of the things that I did shortly after that was think about what I wanted to do with my life. I ended up going to have conversations with the Air Force. They wouldn't take me. They were like, "Nah. Your scores aren't high enough. We can't get you in." I went and had conversations with the army. They were literally just pushing money my way, and they couldn't guarantee me the job that I wanted.

As I was walking out of their offices, the Marines stopped me and they basically asked me, "Did you get what you need talking to the Army folks?" My response was, "I actually didn't." They said, "What were you looking for?" I told them, "I wanted to do something in computers and in technology." They basically were like, "We can take care of you." Long story short, I ended up preparing to leave on September 11th, 9/11. My flight got grounded. I ended up sitting in the MEPS station and just terrified watching all of this transpire, one of the biggest, most traumatic events in our country's history.

I ended up leaving there, going back home for about a month. Then, I ended up leaving and joining the Marine Corps, going to boot camp. Did three months in boot camp and then went to the fleet. I was a computer programmer in the Marine Corps. I served basically building software for the Marine Corps which I think most people didn't even know that was possible. That's why I say it was a very interesting experience but I learned a lot. I grew a lot in a very short period of time.

My mom and I look at my oldest brother as a semi-parent but when I got back home they were like, "You changed dramatically." I'm like, "That's what happens when you go up to the military." I think just to summarize it, the experience for me was a very, very transformational experience that has shaped the way that I view the world and also how I approach every aspect of my life.

Paul: Wonderful. Then Cleo can you share with us a little bit about your military journey as well?

Cleo: I agree with Issac. It's hard to talk about when you entered the military without talking about what got you there. I'll start at the very beginning. Similar to Issac, my dad served in the Korean War. He was definitely pictures, photos, he brought a lot of stuff back with him. He didn't push me to join the military and he didn't say, "Hey, don't join the military."

I think the crossroad came for me when I was in high school. Our counselor were giving out scholarships to a lot of the different people in the high school. Some of us had higher GPAs than others but we still weren't offered a scholarship and I didn't understand. I walked into her office one day and I said, "Hey my GPA is in the high threes, just trying to figure out why I don't get a scholarship." She was like, "Well, there's plenty of opportunities for you in the local plants.

They got steel plants, they got railroad factories, they got all kind of stuff for you to do from a technical standpoint. Don't you think you'll be better served going into one of the labor fields?" I was like, "No, I don't think I would be better served going into one of those." My dad worked at a railroad plant and he did that his whole life. It was definitely hard work and my assumption is that he wanted something better for me.

Bottom line, I didn't want my mom to pay for college. A group of us started looking for scholarships and I found this Army ROTC scholarship. I was like, "Hey, it's free. They give you a \$100 a month book money." I was like, "There's no better deal than this." I applied, I got accepted. Went and did my initial physical and it turned out great. They told me, "You got a full scholarship, you can go anywhere you want to go." I picked a school called Tuskegee University. Really the reason I picked Tuskegee because I didn't want to live too far from my mom and dad. It was a couple hours away from my house in Alabama and the journey started at Tuskegee University.

I did five years. I graduated as electrical engineer. I thought based on the fact that I was an electrical engineer, the perfect career choice for me would be engineer until I found out that engineers in the army are not real engineers, they just blow up stuff. I jumped out of that one and went into the Signal Corps. I started in the Signal Corps. My first duty station was Fort Bragg. My plan was to do my four years and get out but to be honest with you, I had a great time. The reason I think I had a great time was because of the mentorship. People would come up to me, 18, 19 years old, and say, "Hey sir, how did you get to where you are?"

It wasn't a lot of minorities at Fort Bragg when I was there. We were just the sounding board for people to walk up and just talk to us. I did my time at Bragg. I went to school at Fort Dodge, ended up doing the normal things that officers do, commanding companies, battalions. I commanded a brigade in the Pacific. I was in charge of about 4,000 people in the entire Pacific. I was in charge of the army comps for Guam, Alaska, Hawaii, and all of the stuff that supports the US Army Pacific Command. After that, I went to the White House and I served for two years as the White House Communication Agency Director or Commander under President Obama.

That was a great experience for me. That was definitely outside the norm for a signal officer, an army officer. I was glad I was selected for that job but it was extremely stressful and political. They didn't tell me that when I got hired but it's definitely you're going to the White House but you think you can still do army stuff. It wasn't quite like that. After I left the White House, left right after President Obama left, and then I went to JFHQ-DODIN, which is Joint Forces Headquarters-Department of Defense Information Network.

I was in charge of the entire Department of Defense Information Information Network, [unintelligible 00:09:46] people, thousands of people connecting to the network working closely with NSA and cyber commands. I learned a lot about cyber. I learned a lot about offensive cyber, defensive cyber, everything that goes into protecting our nations. from a homeland defense to other things. I retired in 2018 as a colonel, and I started my journey from there. That's just a little bit how I got there and where I am now. I love defensive cyber operations, and that's what I do in Jacobs.

Paul: Awesome. One thing that I picked up on, both you and Isaac have served under the Obama administration, and Isaac, I think you also served under the Trump administration as well. You both have that White House experience as well, which is really fascinating. Now, Isaac, you were telling me right before we got on that you got

out, I think about 2005, I think it was, and you began your professional career, or I should say your civilian professional career.

Isaac: Excuse me. Yes.

Paul: What are some leadership insights you gained during the course of your tenure in the military that you think are particularly relevant for someone embarking on a corporate career or a civilian career?

Isaac: That's a fantastic question. I think the best way that I can shape it is to take you back to boot camp, because I think that's where the leadership lessons truly began, especially for Marines. One of the early experiences I had and the slap-in-the-face moments I had learning leadership the hard way was during one of our PT sessions during boot camp. It was a mile-and-a-half run. This was one of the first times I had ever run over a mile. I'm running, and I'm running, and I'm running, and all of a sudden, I got about three-quarters of the way through the first mile, and I felt like I got hit by a semi-truck.

My lungs just felt like they were going to collapse, and I look around, and one of the drill instructors, he's looking at me, he's like, "Don't think about quitting." I was like, "But I want to quit." He's like, "No. You don't quit until you're throwing up." In that moment, I'm looking, I'm like, "Quitting until I throw up. I'm going to quit way before I throw up." Then he said to me, he was like, "Look, how many of these guys around you have stopped so far because they can't go anymore, and they're throwing up?" I was like, "Probably about four or five I've seen so far." He's like, "Yes, exactly." He's like, "Has that happened to you yet?"

I said, "No." He's like, "Well, that means you can keep going. If your body's not giving you clear signals like that, then that means you could keep going." In that moment, I felt the switch in my mind. My whole perception of what I was doing changed. I was like, "Okay, it's really my mind playing these tricks on me, my body is actually fine." In that moment, I felt my entire being just relaxing and calm down." I tell that story because that stayed with me throughout the rest of my military career, and it still stays with me until this day. There's always these moments in life where we feel like we can't keep going, or we feel like we've had enough, but ultimately, there's always another gear that you can kick into, and it typically starts off with the mindset.

Looking at life and seeing life through the lens of, is it really that bad? You brought up my tenure at the White House and working in both administrations, and that was one of the things that kept me going. As Cleo mentioned, the environment is super political, it's super hurry up and wait similar to the military mindset, because a lot of changing of opinions and perspective, depending on who's in charge at the moment. Ultimately, the thing that kept me going through all of that, and allowed me to lead the people that I was in charge of was just remembering those core lessons that I learned in the military of camaraderie and mission first.

I can keep going down and all of these different little things that we had, the duties that we had while we were in the Marine Corps, that all shaped who I became and who I am today as a leader in how I look at approaching life in general. Those moments, starting in boot camp all the way through the military, taught me how to treat people, taught me how to handle projects, how to handle pressure, how to think

mission first and thinking about the future, and not just focusing on the pain that I'm suffering and going through today.

I was actually there a part of the transition. I know Cleo you left shortly, but I actually stayed and we did a marathon over a two-month period of trying to get everything transitioned over. It was one of the hardest and toughest experiences I had in my professional career since I left the Marine Corps, but that experience in the Marine Corps prepared me for it because ultimately, I don't have somebody kicking dirt in my face. [laughs] I'm not running six miles in the hot sun. I'm literally just sitting at a desk working on a computer, and having conversations with people. I think one of the biggest leadership things that I walked away with was just in general perspective. Being able to look at the broader picture and see where I fit in that picture and know that, ultimately, everything's going to be okay.

Paul: It's fascinating that you bring a bootcamp, because I imagine that part of the philosophy behind that is you've really got to break people down. You've got to break down their pride. I think most of all, that's that they know best and break them down so that you can build them up better and that they are to their capability. First and foremost, they have to empty their hands of whatever it is they're holding onto that keeps them from excelling or keeps them from learning about themselves things that they wouldn't otherwise know.

Cleo: Yes. Paul, can I jump in right quick on that comment?

Paul: Yes.

Cleo: I mean, because you brought up a perfect point about breaking people down. I think one thing we learned because I didn't go through the bootcamp process. We went through this thing called the officer-candidate school, some people call it, they may be familiar with it, or ROTC camp, if you're an ROTC. One thing it taught me was-- It taught me that I didn't have those limits, those self-imposed limits that I put on myself.

At one point I was like, "Oh, you can't run but a mile or you can't run but X." I mean, going through these type of camps in the military and the bootcamp teaches you, you can go past X, it just opens more doors for you. Some people call it breaking you down. Some people calling it expectation management. You expect people to fall out at two miles, but when they don't, then they just keep running. They just keep doing things and they keep excelling.

That level of stress that the military puts on you, it's truly doing that. It's teaching your body that it has another gear, that it has another limit that you can go past this limit, self-imposed limit that you put on yourself.

Paul: Now, Cleo, you had mentioned, particularly, well, in your career but even early on you had mentioned you'd used the word mentorship. Here we are, we have people who are transitioning out from the military and they're starting to enter the civilian job market. What are some of the best ways that you found that established career professionals like yourself and Isaac and others who have successfully transitioned from the military to civilian life? How can you mentor or what tips would you say to mentor military personnel just entering the job market?

Cleo: Yes. I'll tell you if you're starting a new company, a lot of companies now have these network of veterans, they call them different names, VetNet or whatever, but I think it's best to start there. If you're brand new and you're coming into an organization, you want to talk to someone who's been a part of your journey, who's experienced the military, who understands how to translate some of these things into corporate America talk.

I'll use an example of that. At Jacobs, we have this thing called the e3, which everybody just somewhat sometimes panics over. To me, I translate it into, "Here's my support form, here's my NCOER evaluation form, here is my OER." Then so a lot of things in corporate America are just named differently, but there's still military tools. One soldier walked up to me one time and said, "Hey, sir, I'm really nervous about transitioning out of the military because it's a whole new environment for me."

I asked him, I was like, "How many times have you PCSed?" Then he said, "I PCS probably 12, 13 times." I was like, "Each time you go to a brand-new unit, and what happens? It's new people there, it's new task, they don't know much about you, but you have to perform, and you always come out on top." I was like, "What makes corporate America different than PCS into a new environment? It's still the same environment. It's just new task and new traits and skills that you have to learn and you have to build on."

It's just you getting to know people, still keep that same mentality that you had in the military, still volunteer for things, still help support people, help build teams, mentor people, guide people down a certain path, show your leadership ability. Those same things are what corporate America is looking for and what they need in order for the company to be successful. That's what I tell people all the time, and use the networks that's established. LinkedIn. As a career professional, you see me on LinkedIn, you looked at my bio, I got a military resume. Just go ahead and DM me and say, "Hey, Cleo. Hey, sir. I've been looking at Jacobs, what do you think or I'm having some challenges associated with transitioning, Who can I talk to? Then the last thing I'll say, Paul, is like, when I was getting out, I was on edge because I was two months away from my last paycheck. Didn't have a job, had a lot of interviews. I called mentors that I had in the Army that were still active duty and said, "Hey sir, I'm stressing over here. I got two months left," and they're like, "Calm down. Relax, enjoy yourself." Then they put me in contact with other mentors that are in corporate America that have job opportunities.

I went from putting resumes all on Monster, Indeed, LinkedIn, to talking to four people and ended up with like seven or eight job offers. Network is extremely important and don't start after you get out to try to network. You need to start networking now as a military member. If you know you're going to get out in five years, it's not too soon to start building your LinkedIn and your networking and go to these conferences and collecting cards and staying in touch with people. I think that was my most important lesson when I transitioned and for me to help people, it's the same thing that someone did for me. My door is always open to try to help someone transition into corporate America.

Paul: Then Isaac, picking up on that a little bit, what resources would you point out to military personnel to avail themselves of as they make the transition to a professional civilian career?

Isaac: I think Cleo touched on some of the key resources that are available to veterans. They give us the PTAP training when you come out, you get the transition training where they walk you through some of the basics of what you can expect through your transition and trying to prepare you for civilian life as best as they can. I think taking advantage of that is definitely crucial but the people that I've seen that have been able to successfully transition, they had a plan for themselves. I had a senior Marine that was mentoring me before I got out and one of the things he told me, he said, I got out 16 years ago. The thing that I realized is I had a family of marines when I got in and when I get out, I still have a family of veterans that I can lean on.

I think most of us don't really think of it that way. We don't see ourselves as a family, as a unit just because we don't have any ceremonies or rituals for veterans other than Veterans Day but I think that's one of the biggest things I will say is when you're going out into the world, you need to start thinking about one, where you want to be and who you want to be and how you want to be of service. Using the internet as much as possible, but also connecting with other people in your network and outside of your network and stepping out of your comfort zone, and realizing that we all know what you are going through so you don't have to feel that pressure or feel awkward about asking for help or asking for advice.

Tools I would say also is just look at the Veteran Affairs Administration. I know there's a lot of flack that they get about the services that they provide or not providing, but ultimately they do have some really solid resources and they have access to information that you may not be aware of. Then the other tool that was mentioned earlier by Cleo is LinkedIn. I think LinkedIn is one of the most invaluable resources for people that are transitioning because you literally can search for veterans that are in your field and identify them and do not be afraid. People get stuck on, what do I say? How do I ask? I know that person's busy, et cetera, et cetera.

They may be busy, but if they're busy, just ask them, Is there someone else that you think I could talk to that could help you? Or when you get some time, can you answer these questions and just make it easier for them?

Paul: No, I think that's great. Then Cleo, he mentioned LinkedIn and finding people in your field, that kind of thing. I realize there are no one size fits all answers to this question, but are there specific career choices or professional disciplines that you think are particularly well-suited for military personnel?

Cleo: Yes, I think one of the main things they teach you in the military when it comes to career disciplines and goals is the leadership piece is critical. I don't know if I can pick one particular MOS. Of course, I'm going to lean towards the technical side only because that was my bread and butter and it was linked directly to in my opinion, my degree of electrical engineering still dealing with circuits and signal, and communications. Now, I would only say just get into an MOS that allows you to have different experiences that you can go multiple places and then you can build your resume and your skill set. I used to tell my soldiers all the time, if the Army is having training, take advantage of it because that certificate, that degree, or whatever, they can't take it away from you when you leave. That's going to be a great resume builder when you get out.

Whether you're an infantry guy, field artillery, or medical, whatever you are just trying to take advantage of the services that they offer. Don't shy away from taking that extra class or getting that extra certificate or volunteering to be part of something that's going to increase or improve your learning. I jump outside the MOS and make it more personal.

I loved Isaac's comment about develop a plan.

That's one thing we don't do a lot. We don't develop a 5-year, 10-year, 20-year plan. Where do you want to be? I used to ask my soldiers, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" They used to look at me like, "I'm growing up now." No, "When do you want to be when you grow up? When this military life is over for you and you transition somewhere else. What do you want to be when you grow up? How do you want to be remembered?"

I think that really makes people think about things they need to accomplish now, things they need to accomplish in the future to get to that end goal. I think that's something that I would lean on. The military has a lot to offer. My story is unique. I came in wanting to stay four years and stayed 25, but the military teaches you so much about stress management. At the White House. Perfect story is President Obama got on stage one time and he said, "Oh yes, even the president's printer runs out of ink." I'm in my office because I have to watch the speech and I'm laughing. Then on inside I was like, "Oh crap, that's my fault.[laughs] That's on me."

The audience laughed. They had a great laugh on it. I looked at my phone immediately my phone started ringing because you take these moments for granted, but to be honest, every lesson you learn in the military, it's going to roll back into corporate America somewhere down the road. Definitely fill up your kit bag, fill up your toolbox with good lessons, and then just use them to grow as a leader no matter what environment you land in.

[crosstalk]

Paul: Now Isaac, we talked about some of the career elements and networking and trying to find a job, but maybe a little larger scope than that. What do you see are some of the biggest challenges that military personnel face when transitioning to civilian life? Maybe this is a mindset shift or whatnot, but what do you see are some of those kinds of challenges that people should be aware of and how do they overcome them?

Isaac: I'm glad you brought this up too because this is something that I talk about with people that are both veterans and people that are still active. I think one of the biggest gaps that I see is culture. In the military, you get used to a certain level of expectations. Where the people around you, they're going to show up to an extent. I think in the corporate space, getting used to being able to understanding how to push people, but doing it in a way where it's not as aggressive as how we do in the military.

You can have a certain level of tone, you can have a certain level of expectations that you can place on people and you know they're going to deliver in the military side, but a lot of that pressure, you have to learn how to ninja your way through it as

a civilian. I think that's one of the biggest things that I see people transitioning out of the military struggle with.

Then also I think one of the other big things is just having confidence. Knowing that you have been prepared for some of the most difficult circumstances a human could ever face in life. That will show up in moments of crisis, moments of chaos, moments of importance in your civilian career, and being able to walk in that and trust in that and walk moving in that energy when you get into the civilian space. Doing it in a way with emotional intelligence.

I think emotional intelligence is one of the biggest things I think that as veterans we need to fully embrace and that will ease the transition. Learning how to deal with different types of people is something that you've mastered when you're in the military because you don't have an option not to. You're surrounded by people from every background, every race, every ethnicity, every gender et cetera, et cetera. When you get into the civilian space, just walking in that confidence and knowing that you've been prepared for things that most people would never be able to experience.

Then second I would say is financial management. I've seen that as one of the biggest hurdles for people in the military because you have this guaranteed check coming 9 times out of 10. Then when you get out, knowing how to actually allocate your resources properly so that you can sustain it over time. I think that's one of the other big issues that I've seen across the board. Just embracing learning and not expecting to know everything and realizing that you know nothing and being okay with that in all those areas.

Those are some of the key things that I would say I've seen as some of the biggest challenges. The health side, mental health side, the emotional health side, and then the financial health side.

Cleo: I would definitely agree with Isaac on that one because soon as you come out of military and go into corporate, they ask you questions about like 401K and dividends and stock options and up and down. Those are things that we'd never experienced in the military. This whole financial thing, you definitely need to lean on people who've been through that before. Even during the offer letter process, have someone translate all that stuff, that fine print that's in your offer letter.

A lot of times they make an assumption that, oh, you guys already have medical or you guys already have this so we can give you a lower salary. A lot of times that's not true. You really need someone to help network and mentor you through those situations.

Paul: Walk you through those details. My last question for both of you is the final word, a summing things up. Cleo I'll start with you and then Isaac will ask you the same question. Cleo, what are some lessons learned while serving that you'd point out that can help personnel make the transition?

Cleo: I think the number one lesson learned for me is networking. A lot of times when I was in those environments, I did not want to go and sit in a room with ex-general, ex-colonel, ex whoever who was coming to talk to us about leadership and

life lessons. If I could do all that again, I would definitely build that network of not only teammates, but friends and civilian professionals that can help lead and guide me through multiple scenarios that you face in corporate America.

A lot of times we just stumble our way through the process when you could have leaned on someone to help navigate you through the pothole and around them. I think that's one. Then the second one I'd say is you're great, look at what you accomplished in the military. Look at what you've done in the military. No matter if you retired or not. Look at all of the hurdles that you had to go through to get to where you transitioned out. Take that same amount of greatness and confidence and transition that into corporate America.

When you look at some of the stressful situations that we've been in, a lot of people in corporate America have not been through those type of hurdles. You can end up being a coach to someone that's outranked you just because of your experiences. You can be a mentor to someone that's below or above you based on your experiences in the military. Just don't take for granted the things that you learned are small. They're huge. Then another thing I'd say is once you transition and retire out, one of the a GO told me he retired like two or three years ago, we get about two or three months of transition leave on the back end.

A lot of us want to rush right into a job. We want to figure out-- We don't want to take any break at all, but taking a month off to do what Isaac talked about, develop that plan, and really your plan should have already been built, but now you're just fine-tuning it to figure out exactly what you want to do. One of my mentors made me develop a plan and it was like interview twice with a large business, interview twice with a medium-sized business, interview twice with a small business because I couldn't make a decision if I wanted to go small business, medium or large in corporate America.

That was part of my plan that he forced me to develop during that month I was off. I learned how to make beer. I learned how to like, bought a mountain bike, how to do few things, I just had hobbies and those hobbies helped relax me and transition me mentally through some mental things that I was going through over to corporate America. It just calmed me so I was ready for that transition.

I would say those, and I'm not going to take a lot of time, but I think those are just three things that I would do. You have done it and you have done it very well for X amount of years. Don't lose that confidence going into corporate America thinking, I hadn't done corporate America before, so now I'm starting at zero. No, you're not. You're not starting at zero. You got a tool bag of knowledge that you're taking to corporate America.

Paul: That's great. That's great advice. Then Issac, the same question for you. What are some lessons learned while serving that you'd point out that can help personnel make that transition?

Issac: I'm just going to confirm some of the stuff that Cleo said. I think he hit the nail on the head in many different statements, but I think number one for me is mentorship. As I look back upon my entire career, I see the importance that mentorship played throughout all of it. Every major decision, I didn't make in a silo, I

didn't make by myself. I actually went to people that had experienced what I was planning to experience or currently experiencing, and I asked their perspective.

I've done this very strategically throughout my career. I'll just give some examples. I made the decision to go into the military by reaching out to all the veterans that I could reach out to in my neighborhood. I sat down and had conversations with them. Those conversations led to me having it guaranteed in my contract that I would do no other job while I served, other than a computer programmer, unless I chose to do something else while I was in the Marine Corps.

Once I got to the point where I was ready to leave, I did the same thing. I went and spoke to every single Marine that I could find or veteran that I could find and asked their perspective on how to approach the next level. I came back with a checklist of things, and I looked at the commonalities. These are the things that they said, "Don't do," and these are the things that they said, "Do." I made a short list, and I executed on those. Then getting into the corporate world, it was the same thing throughout that process. There were many times where I was challenged to learn something new or do something new or lead something that I had no experience in.

The way that I approached it was I found people, every single time. All the way up until today, I've done that in my career. When I wanted to learn sales in business, I did the exact same thing. I reached out to as many owners of companies that had a background of success. I asked them their perspective on sales, and I sat down with them. That motto of mentorship, it applies in every area and every aspect of your life. It's one of the most valuable tools in your toolbox that you have available to you, no matter where you are in your career or transition.

Then, I would say, number two is, the other big piece to that, is knowing how to identify what you want to do and where you want to go. Just because you had experience in one area when you were in the military, doesn't mean you have to stay in that area. I get reached out to all the time by people that are looking to transition from I had an administrative role when I was in the military, now I want to be in tech, I was in healthcare, and now I want to be in tech. You know what I mean?

There's always a door open for you, you just have to navigate how to translate that experience into where you're going. One of the perks we have as being veterans is all of us are taught leadership at some level. That leadership ability and that ability to have accountability for your actions and for your work, that shows up in the actual workplace and in the civilian sector. You can always translate those skills, it just may take some outside help or outside eyes on it to help you translate it in that way.

Those are the two main things that I would say military personnel can do and people that are transitioning out can look into, and just seriously consider and think about those two areas because that's going to make all the difference for you.

Cleo: Translating those skills definitely lead to your resume. They don't know you, that resume is definitely critical. When Isaac was talking about translating those skills in measurable requirements, that's exactly what people need to do, because I've seen some military resumes that look just like their description, telling me, "I was a soldier and I did X." No, what was the results of that? That's extremely important putting it down on paper your accomplishments.

Paul: So people can see the impact that you're able to have.

Cleo: Exactly.

Paul: This has been super fascinating. I'm listening to both of you, and I did not serve in the military. It's like there's just so many gems here that I wish, when I was a young person, a much younger person, that I had heard this stuff, and that I had known this stuff when I was just getting in college and getting out. I think a lot of what you both shared resonates even beyond the military.

Obviously, it's very, very helpful for people who are in the military, but I think anybody could really benefit from what you both shared this is excellent advice. Issac and Cleo, I want to thank you both so much for your time today. It's been a real pleasure talking with you and getting to know you. Also would be remiss if I didn't thank you both for your service to our country. We owe you an enormous debt, you and all veterans. Thank you so much, for your time today.

Cleo: All right, Isaac, I'll hit you on LinkedIn.

Isaac: It's already starting. Listen, and I just want to give one last gem, if that's possible. I think this, you just said something that sparked something in me. One of the things that I learned as a programmer, but also as a marine is the concept of reverse engineering. Reverse engineering just means looking at something in its finished state and then working your way backwards.

I've done some dealings with several companies that have models called working backwards. Where you start with the end result and you work your way back. When you're transitioning out, it helps if you know where you want to be because you can look at the existing job descriptions that are out there and then reverse engineer and work your way back. What degrees did they say I need to have? What skills did they say I need to have? Some of the people that are on LinkedIn that have these jobs, what certifications did they get?

You could start looking at this stuff and making a checklist out of those items and then just knocking them out one by one and positioning yourself for success. I just wanted to add that as one key nugget because I feel like that's something that I've done and that I've used that I don't talk about enough. I think it'll be super helpful for people no matter where you're coming from in your career.

Paul: Oh. That's excellent advice. Yes. Thank you so much for sharing that. Again, thank you both so much. I have really enjoyed talking with both of you today, so thank you.

Isaac: Thanks, Paul.

[crosstalk]

Cleo: All right. Take care. Thanks, Paul.

Isaac: Have a great one.

[music]

[00:42:03] [END OF AUDIO]