Virtual Military Spouse Symposium

Stress Less! Tips to Ease the Stress of the Federal Application
Kathia Kilburn, SECO Career Coach
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Session Transcript

[Eddy]
Well folks, here we are, the last session of the 2018 Virtual Military Spouse Symposium. My name is Eddy Mentzer, and I lead the Department of Defense's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program, your host for this week's symposium. Many of you have been with us through the entire symposium and I love the comments in the chat pod on how we should wrap up the symposium with a seminar on time management so that all of you can take advantage of the resources that have been identified this week. So, we're in our third seminar of the Plan Your Path track. In 27 years of federal employment I have been in 11 different positions, and the one thing I dread is completing my federal application. Our next speaker is Kathia Kilburn, one of our superhero career coaches for the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program. Kathia is going to help all of us by highlighting key points in applying for federal employment and submitting your application. Welcome, Kathia.

[Kathia]
Thank you Eddy. Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us for the Virtual Military Spouse Symposium. In this webinar we will discuss the federal application process and some tips to eliminate stress. Again, my name is Kathia, I have been with the SECO program for the past five years, and I've done a number of federal resume trainings as well as worked one on one with military spouses. In the next 30 minutes we will review some options that can save your time and efforts as you are applying for federal employment. So we are starting off today with a couple of poll questions, and it looks like you all see them. The first question is have you used USAJOBS to apply for positions with the federal government, and the second question is on a scale of one to 10 in your opinion how stressful is the federal application process? So one would be a piece of cake, and 10 would be highly stressful. We will give a few more seconds for everyone to respond. Okay. So it looks like we have most of the responses here. Oh wait, there's some more coming in. I'll give it a couple more seconds. Okay. Well, the majority of our participants today it looks like you have already been using USAJOBS to apply for a federal position. Whether you are already familiar with USAJOBS or new to the website, this presentation will give you a better idea of how to navigate your job search. And as far as the application process, it looks like most of us agree that it is a lot of work but let's focus on how we can make this process easier. At the end of our presentation we will answer questions, and you'll be able to download the presentation slides and a resource handout for your personal use after the webinar.

All right, let's get started. This is what we will cover today. In terms of eliminating some stress we want to make sure you are going for the right kinds of jobs for you. We will talk about not wasting any time on openings that do not fit, working smarter and not harder, spouse preference, and using all available resources for help. My first tip for applying for federal employment is to not waste your time. The federal application process is a lot of work. You want to commit to the opportunities that give you the best
chance. If a job feels over your head, it’s okay to find another one. If you're not comfortable writing based on the position you can move on and research other openings. A lot of reading and writing goes into completing your application, so you want to make sure you are a good fit for a position before investing your time and energy into that application. You never just want to start applying for a job. Before you take that next step, make sure you read the entire announcement and evaluate your qualifications. Then if it’s a good fit, you can take the time to write your federal resume. When you first start looking at an announcement you want to confirm you are eligible for the position. A common mistake is applying for jobs that are for the National Guard or reserves, or current federal employees. On a job announcement look for the box that says this job is open to. If you see the public or U.S. citizens, then you know you are eligible for that position. You can filter your job search for opportunities that are open to the public to be safe. You also want to look at the appointment type. Some opportunities are temporary. Although all job opportunities are good, you do want to make sure you know what you are applying for. So you'll be taking a look at these two items before you start applying for positions, they are circled on the slide to indicate where you can find the information. And I’m going to pull up a job announcement for us to reference. So here I’m on the USAJOBS website, and for location I will search D.C. since that's where we are. Here are the job opportunities showing up in the D.C. area, and right here on the right side you'll see a list of different filters. So all of these are good filters to use to narrow down your job search, but you definitely want to focus on this one right here that says open to the public. Now you will see there are a shorter list of opportunities that are offered to all U.S. citizens.

Once you know you are eligible for a position you can evaluate your qualifications. You do this by reviewing the duties and requirements, the specialized experience, the occupational questionnaire, and the required documents. The duties section will give you a summary of the position and an overview of the responsibilities. You are looking to see if the responsibilities match your role with previous employers. If so, then you know when you are writing your resume you will be able to refer to the same responsibilities when describing your employment history. Next you will see the requirements section. This section is really long. You can first decide if you meet the conditions for employment, like being able to maintain a clearance. The qualifications section may seem like a repeat of the responsibilities, but it also gives you an idea of the expectations to qualify for different grades, which is information you will consider when writing your resume. One of the important things under qualifications is the mention of specialized experience, which we’ll discuss in more detail in just a minute. You will also see information about the education requirements. Some have absolute requirements such as a degree or license, others may list a degree in lieu of experience. Again, at this point you’re just making sure you qualify for the position.

The additional information section usually doesn't have anything to do with your qualifications, but it provides information on the hiring process, including any steps after you are offered employment. Some examples of that are a credit check, required forms, completing a polygraph, your promotion potential, and if there’s a probationary period. This section may not help you with writing your resume, but it can help you decide if you want to apply for the position. We are going to use the hand feature, and you should see that at the top of the screen. By a show of hands, who is familiar with the phrase specialized experience? And I see you all are clicking on your hands at the top. All right, so it looks like a few of us are familiar with this term. I'm sure the regular USAJOBS applicants see this phrase all the time. The exact quote is, to qualify, applicants must possess one year of specialized experience equivalent to the lower grade. This phrase can be intimidating, but all it is asking is that you have at least one year of work experience fulfilling the identified duties. Your experience can be gained from previous employers outside of the federal government. If this is your first federal job, don't be discouraged, you can still qualify. Specialized experience must account for 35 to 40 hours per week for a total of 12 months. How you obtain that year depends on your work history. It may come from one full-time job, two full-time jobs where you worked six months each, a combination of part-time jobs, whatever your experience is just make sure you can account for at least one year with 35 hours per week. This slide has examples of different scenarios where specialized experience can apply. If you happen to have changed jobs within the last year or you have worked a part-time consistently, as you can see, you can easily meet this requirement.
Another major component of the application process is the occupational questionnaire. You want to review the entire announcement to find the occupational questionnaire. I have seen it in different parts of the announcement, so again, make sure you’re reading through all of it. It is important to review before writing to make sure you are able to answer questions about the positions at the highest level. If you are looking at a questionnaire and you aren’t able to answer the questions, that is an indication the position may not be for you because you would not have a high enough score to be competitive against other candidates. Your responses will also need to be justified in your written resume, so you want to feel comfortable and confident when completing the questionnaire to make sure your responses translate into your resume. Last but not least, when evaluating your qualifications check the required documents. Some common documents are supplemental forms, your documents for preference, and a transcript. Any supplemental form can be found on the OPM website. I am pulling up the OPM website to show you where you can find the forms. So here we are on the OPM homepage, and at the top center here you'll see where it says Forms. And towards the left here, they have the different types of forms available. Usually for your application you're looking at standard forms, and these are listed here. But if you need any other type of form, an optional form, the OPM form, they're all available to you on this website. Look at all of the details of the form to make sure you can complete it, and you can come here at any time to find those forms that are requested in your job announcement. Some jobs will require a transcript to verify your education. You can submit unofficial transcripts. Upon hire, you may be asked for an official one, but the unofficial will get you through the application process. If you don't have a transcript and will not be able to obtain one before the closing date, unfortunately this is a job you would not be able to apply for. Incomplete applications will not be considered, and forms can easily be overlooked, so just look for all of your forms, make sure you complete and/or attach them to your application. I see here that Martha asks about the supplemental forms. So the supplemental forms, it's not as common, but on some of the job announcements they will specifically say that they need you to complete a document. The documents are for a lot of different reasons, and you can read up on them on the OPM website, but it’s not something that you have to worry about unless the job announcement specifically asks for that. Regarding the transcript, we do have some information about converting that I will make sure we get before we finish up today. As far as the time frame with the job announcement, you do have to be mindful about the deadline. So if it’s not a transcript that you’re able to get within the deadline or the closing date that’s indicated on the announcement, then you may have to wait to apply. But I will provide some information about converting that transcript.

So working smarter and not harder, there are some options that may give you a greater chance. Multiple vacancies and Pathways are other avenues to consider for an advantage. The multiple vacancies are great opportunities to increase your chances for federal employment. These vacancies mean more candidates, which gives you more room to be selected. The vacancies are indicated under the location section. The example in this slide is an ideal situation where there are multiple vacancies at one location. Some announcements may be for various locations, so the opportunity would be limited. Others will indicate there may be room for additional candidates at a later time, so keep your eyes open for these opportunities. If you are prioritizing job announcements based on the closing date, I would recommend considering these first. Let's use the hand feature again at the top. So who is in school or has graduated within the last two years? Okay, so we have a few students or recent graduates. This part here is specifically for you. Now, for those who are students or within the two years there is an opportunity available via Pathways. This opportunity is for our recent graduates and students, and I like to present this program because many spouses who contact us are also interested or using the My Career Advancement account, so please feel free to share this with other military spouses. But this is a good opportunity to qualify for positions based on your education without being intimidated by any lack of work experience. The recent graduates are eligible for up to two years after their graduation date, and this program applies to certificates in all degree types. So I see Jessica says that it's been five years, but if you’ve done some type of certificate for continued education, that could apply. If you find yourself recently completed any type of education program, again, you can fall into this category. And I’m gonna show you the information for Pathways on the USAJOBS website. We’re gonna go back to the homepage for USAJOBS and we will...
scroll down here, and under Exploring Hiring Paths they have information for military spouses, and here you'll see the students and recent graduates as well. This highlights the Pathways program and it gives you information about the different levels of eligibility. There's internship opportunities for students, for your recent graduates, again, that's if you are a graduate within the most recent two years, and then the Presidential Management Fellows is for those who have an advanced degree, such as your masters or your PhD. Now under additional resources this is a really neat feature, you can click on where it says Federal Occupation by College Major. A lot of times it is hard to understand what it is that you may qualify for as a student. But as you'll see on this page, it gives you an idea of the different types of positions that you can qualify for based on your major. So these are all of the different majors that, say, one who is studying accounting can qualify for. I'm sorry, these are the different openings that someone studying accounting could qualify for. But it's listed in alphabetical order, and on the right hand side you can search through to find your specific major. So for all of your Pathways information, remember to visit here. Hi Gina, so I see you mentioned about your son completing a certificate for heavy equipment operator. And that was last fall, so yes, your son would qualify. I would recommend referring him to that page. And you can go through the list of different majors to see where he fits, but that certificate would qualify as a recent graduate. Jessica, as far as your transcript you can submit it based on your maiden name. In my experience, and with other military spouses, that's something we've all done.

So let's talk about the military spouse perks. For our military spouses, with all of your hard work, support, and transitioning, you deserve some perks as well. The federal government has established spouse preference, which can give you an edge over the competition. It is important to understand how it works and if you qualify. These are the preferences for military spouses, the Priority Placement Program and Military Spouse Preference. Preference is often used interchangeably, but the Priority Placement Program specifically applies to spouses looking for employment in the states, whereas the Military Spouse Preference is for spouses seeking employment at overseas locations. And for those of you who still have questions, we will definitely get to those, if not immediately, during the question and response period. The eligibility requirements are the same for spouses looking for opportunities stateside or overseas. Your eligibility is based on your sponsor's date to relocate as it is listed on their orders, and it starts 30 days prior to that date and lasts for up to two years. This gives you the opportunity to start looking into employment before you actually move. In order to qualify you must've been married to the sponsor before the sponsor received their orders. Job opportunities are based on your location and what is deemed to be within the commuting distance of the sponsor's duty station.

Please note that your preference can be limited to a one-time use per location. If you are offered a permanent position without an end date you will not be able to use preference for that location again, so you want to be careful about the jobs you apply for and make sure it is something you would be okay with doing. After that offer, your preference would end even if you do not accept the job. Now, this does not apply to spouses who accept employment on a schedule or temporary basis. If that is the understanding, for those jobs when the position ends you will be able to apply for other positions under spouse preference. Now, even with spouse preference job offers are based on your ranking in the federal application process. It is still a competitive process, so you do want to be strategic about the time you spend applying for opportunities, as we have discussed throughout today's presentation.

To verify your eligibility for preference you need your sponsor's orders and your marriage license. It is convenient to have digital copies of these documents in case you need to attach it to an application or email it. Make sure you scan these documents and save them as a PDF, this is an easy way to access and use your documents when you need to. Hi Ivy, so as far as the documents, USAJOBS, they will have space for you to attach every document that they need. So you don't have to worry about putting everything in one file, it would probably make sense to have them all separate, your transcripts and then your Military Spouse Preference documents, but you will be able to attach them all separately.
As you are applying for federal employment be sure to use your resources. The office of personnel management over the past couple of years has made a great effort to assist with the federal application process, and here at the SECO program we also have a number of resources to assist. OPM has online events posted on the USAJOBS website. The events are posted at the very bottom of the page, and there is a link to see a full list of the sessions. There have been focus on the federal hiring process, and they regularly schedule events to teach you about the process in writing the federal resume. There are also events about the job search, interviewing, and for special populations. Right now I notice upcoming events for individuals with disabilities, as well as Pathways, but in the past, I have seen events for veterans and military spouses. I can show you that now, and we're gonna go back to USAJOBS. So here we are on USAJOBS and going back to the home page. Scrolling all the way down to the bottom, and here are your events. So right now they're still scheduling for interviewing and finding and applying for jobs in the federal government. If you go to View More Events you'll see the different sessions that they have lined up. And they take a good amount of participants, here they have 1500 attendees, but these are all ongoing, so you are able to sign up for these different sessions throughout the year. But feel free to come back to this page to sign up if any topic happens to stand out to you.

By a show of hands, please click on the hand at the top, has anyone here attended an OPM training? Okay. I do see a couple of hands coming in. But we have 65 participants, and as of right now I only see four people who show that they've participated. OPM has been doing this for at least a year now, this is one of the newer features. For those who have participated, if you don't mind sharing your feedback in the general chat for the rest of us. I had the pleasure of attending an OPM training on the federal resume writing process, and it was a really good experience. They allowed you to ask questions just like you are here now, and they also provided contact information if you needed to follow up with someone after the presentation. So I know some of our spouses had questions about their children and their spouses. These OPM trainings are open to everyone. And they're first come first serve, so you just need to sign up on the website, and since they're ongoing if you're not able to make one session you can look for the follow-up session. Ivy said that it was phenomenal. She's done online and in person. Oh that's great, that's really good. They do have sessions for military spouses, I have seen that listed under the events before. I don't see it right now, but that is something to look out for.

Now, as always, you can contact SECO and we are happy to assist. We have resources on our website, and you may contact us for coaching. Who here has used the SECO services or the website? And you can click on the hands again at the top. Oh, well this is good, looks like a lot of people are familiar with our services. So this may be a review for you. We're gonna go to the MySECO website now. You'll find a number of resources on federal employment from MySECO. And you're just gonna go to the header at the top that says Employment Readiness. Once you do that, you can go to our resume toolkit, and we're gonna go to federal employment, it's right here on the right, and this lists some of the resources that we happen to have on the SECO site. So that's the page that we were just on to give you an idea of what it is that you'll be looking for. You also have the option to contact SECO for career coaching. We offer individual sessions, and we have a coaching package specifically for federal employment to assist you with navigating the application process. We are happy to assist you with identifying opportunities and other resources, as well as direction on writing your federal resume. If you are interested in coaching, you may contact SECO to schedule. I encourage spouses to research job announcements beforehand to discuss with your coach. That way your consultation can focus on how you would write the resume for that specific opportunity that you're looking at. And this is something that as a military spouse that you can do with us at any time. This concludes our session for today. Here you will see our contact information. Please feel free to contact us with questions or to schedule an appointment. Please note, any reference website or resource will be on the resource handout, and you will be able to download these slides. At this time we can take questions, and make sure that we responded to everything. Feel free to enter any other questions that you have in the chat box.
Eddy
Well Kathia, thanks so much for that presentation. You know, federal jobs can be a real challenge, and the application process is definitely not easy, and all of the resources you've identified are huge for military spouses. I'll tell ya, my experience and having been doing this for a long time, is to take advantage of every resource that's out there. There are several spouses that asked where they could go for face to face help, and of course the first stop would be your civilian personnel office on your installation, and if you don't know where that is you can utilize the Military OneSource website. If you scroll to the bottom of Military OneSource there's an app called Military Installations. You can type in your installation name, and you can find pretty much any office on that installation through the Military Installations app. So the civilian personnel office provides a great deal of resources at the local level, and then of course our SECO career coaches. It's great to see so many of you have already signed up for career coaching sessions, I'm really excited about what they can provide to you.

Kathia
Yes, I see Paige, you mentioned you signed up with Natalie. Natalie is great, we've trained on federal resumes together, so she's been doing this for a while. And it looks like, Cat, you registered for a coaching package, perfect.

Eddy
So again, Kathia, thanks so much. As we get ready to wrap up what has been three days, 18 hours, of the Virtual Military Spouse Symposium, couple things that I would love to point out. In the chat pod I had provided a little blurb, and I will do that again. We are working to improve everything that we do for military spouses through the SECO program, and one of those processes is to go through the MySECO website. So we have an opportunity for any military spouse to assist us by participating in a usability assessment. So if you've got some time that you would like to dedicate to improving the MySECO website, not just for yourself but for other military spouses, we would love to have you do that, so I just put the link back in there. If you were in our last session I think we had a bad link, but supposedly this link works better, I didn't have time to test it out. But with all that said, putting on something like this takes a huge level of effort, and there's a gigantic team behind the scenes that makes this work. So I gotta tip my hat to my team here in the Department of Defense, Pia Rose and Minina Hawkins, my team members, our colleagues in our public affairs shop, and then of course our vendors that do a great deal of this work. All the IT behind the scenes, our friends at BAM Technologies, and then our career coaches and all the support staff behind them at Zeiders Enterprises. Should mention that both of those companies are military spouse employment partnership companies dedicated, like the other 370 plus companies, to finding opportunities to employ military spouses wherever you live in the world.

We are going to conduct one last little event at four o'clock, if you're on Facebook and you have time to join us for a little Facebook Live session. I'm going to be joined by Mrs. A.T. Johnston. Mrs. Johnston is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, essentially my boss, and we'll look forward to hearing some stories from Mrs. Johnston and how she has navigated her career. It's been amazing to see where she's been, so I hope you can join us on Facebook Live on the SECO page at four o'clock. But I wanna thank all of our spouses that have joined us as well. This has been pretty amazing throughout, a great deal of information. Still got some questions comin' in there. Annette, you said where on the MySECO will all the session downloads be available? Takes us a few days to get those up, we have to make them compliant for publication and meet some standards, but we will have them highlighted on the slider. I can't give you a definite URL until we are ready to put them up, but if you check back, we'll also follow up with everybody that's registered and provided emails to let them know that the sessions and all of the downloadable information are posted as well. But I would say if you check back in 10 days you'll definitely be able to see that, Annette. Looking at a couple other questions on here. Are you willing to help retired military spouses, a question from Blanche. Blanche, by law we are able to help spouses 180 days post-separation. Unfortunately that's the current guidelines that we have, although I will say that there is some work being done right now to extend that to one year post-separation, so we're hoping to see that
come down in the near future. But there are other resources and other organizations that we work with that can provide similar support. We work with the Department of Labor and the American Job Centers, where they have American Job Centers across the U.S., a great opportunity to reach out, and they cater not specifically to, but they work a great deal with veterans and veteran families. They also have Hiring Our Heroes, who is very focused in on supporting veteran and veteran families in the employment space, so there are resources out there. What I would say is that if you were to call in and speak to one of our career advisers that they would be able to point you towards those resources that would be able to help you out. Just lookin', what can we be, to get that rule changed to help veterans for life. Carolyn, I totally understand where you're comin' from, I'm gonna be a veteran spouse here in the next couple years myself, but right now that's rooted in public law. I think that there is some interest in other agencies that may work a lot more with veteran and veteran families of trying to provide similar services, but unfortunately that's really where the law is right now. I always tell military spouses that you're citizens, and you have the ability to impact legislation by contacting your legislators and letting them know, you know, what you need, and so that's where that opportunity lies, it really comes back to what we've talked about several times through the week, is that grassroots effort, letting your elected representatives know that these challenges exist for veteran families as well as active and National Guard reserve families, and letting them know. So take advantage of being a citizen and contact the local legislator to help in this effort. Another great reference there from Kedra, as far as your local One-Stop Unemployment Commission, there are a lot of resources out there and there's a lot of resources that do help veterans and their families, so take advantage of those. We talked all the time about our toolbox. You shouldn't have a toolbox that is one size, you should have an expandable toolbox so that you can always add these tools in and adding new things as we go. Minina just posted our Survey Monkey so that you can provide feedback on this symposium. Once again, that is so important for us to get feedback, for two reasons. First, so that we can make improvements and make this a better event, as well as other events that we do through virtual means, but also so that we can justify what we're doing. We do have to let our leadership know how important this is to military spouses, so if we can let them know of the quality and the import it's gonna be very important for us moving forward to be able to offer you more and more.

You've seen a lot of presenters this week, as well as my team. LinkedIn, great opportunity to connect with us. I'm more than happy to connect with you as a fellow military spouse, but also look at the Military Spouse Employment Partnership LinkedIn group. Dan Savage in the LinkedIn session talked a great deal about that and what opportunities that provides for military spouses. Keep your eyes open. Over the next few weeks we'll be making a very big announcement regarding LinkedIn and the Department of Defense's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program, some new things that we have coming that are gonna be a huge benefit to military spouses, so keep your eyes on that. Minina's putting the link to the LinkedIn group for Military Spouse Employment Partnership. Eddy, for the site test link it's asking for an email to send. What are we supposed to put in there if we haven't done the test yet? Tell you what Jessica, here's what I'm gonna do. I am going to put my email address in here so that you can contact me afterwards and we'll make sure that we get you set up to help us out. That goes for anybody else that may want to do that usability assessment. Or if you wanna provide direct feedback on this week's symposium, you all will have my email address and I look forward to hearing from you. And there it is. Okay, again, I hope everybody can join us at four o'clock, we're gonna take a quick break here and we'll see you over on the Facebook SECO page. Thanks everybody, have a great.