

Nancy Laine helps veterans link in to the civilian world



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NANCY LAINE

HILL STREET STUDIOS



By **Crystal Owens** – Reporter, Tampa Bay Business Journal

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Nancy Laine has been told by war-torn commandoes that they’d rather be in combat than go through the transition process into civilian life.

By the end of her optional LinkedIn training course on MacDill Air Force Base, their attitudes have changed.

“I’m not afraid anymore, thank you, one commando told me at the end of the class,” Laine said.

Laine, the co-founder of the St. Petersburg nonprofit Project Transition USA, has traveled to the base once a month for the last six-and-a-half years to teach service men and women gearing up to transition out of the military how to navigate the business social media platform.

She's one of few instructors in the nation that's allowed onto a military installation to teach such a class — the Pentagon and Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland don't even offer the option to transitioning military.

“This has been the most fulfilling thing in my life and I really mean that,” Laine said.



Nancy Laine is the co-founder of Project Transition USA.

Networking navigation

Laine didn't start her career looking to cater to a niche market. Her first experience with LinkedIn was years ago when she was able to land a job through the social networking platform. The more Laine delved into the platform, the more she learned to navigate her way through it by networking. Eventually, she became a pro and friends began asking for her help with their profiles. These experiences led to Laine receiving more requests for help, especially from individuals looking to start their own small businesses.

“I had no idea I would be doing this but life leads you in directions that you can't possibly anticipate sometimes,” she said.

It wasn't until Laine finished a speaking engagement with the South Tampa Chamber of Commerce about LinkedIn that she realized there was a much larger demand for her services. She was approached following the event by a high-ranking military retiree, who asked her, 'Where were you a year ago?'

"It was a colonel and he thought he had a job lined up with the Department of Defense and it fell through a week before he was expected to start," Laine said. "And, finally someone said, 'it would have been good if we had been able to find him on LinkedIn' ... he thought his experience would speak for itself and it didn't."

Laine doesn't create LinkedIn profiles for her class attendees, but shows them examples and teaches them about the various way to search for jobs through keywords and promote themselves for better employment.

The success of Laine's classes on base led to the start of her nonprofit, Project Transition USA, which specializes in helping transition military veterans and their families learn to utilize the networking and job search technology of LinkedIn. The nonprofit uses 100 percent of its proceeds toward training veterans to transition into civilian life.

Each month, Laine's classes are packed with 30 to 40 individuals – mostly made up of senior leaders gearing up for retirement.

"Senior leaders seem to have the worst time. ... MacDill Air Force Base has some of the very people at the top who get sent there as their last duty station before retirement, so that's why there's so many top leaders in the class. They're running CENTCOM and SOCOM and now they're getting out," she said.

In some instances, students in her class are contacted before the end of the session from recruiters looking to hire for various positions that fit the military members' experiences.

The main thing is people do want to hire them and they're probably looking for them right now," Laine said.



Military members at MacDill Air Force Base are trained by Laine on how to properly network themselves through LinkedIn as they prepare to enter the civilian workforce.

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Finding mentors

Many military members transitioning out of service also struggle with their next career path, so Laine also teaches them how to connect with other like-minded veterans' groups on LinkedIn that allows for mentorship. The nonprofit also started a scholarship that goes to a transitioning military member in need during their hunt for employment outside the base's walls.

"All they know is other military folks. It's hard enough to get a good job when you know people. But when you don't know people? Forget it," she said.

Since stress is a huge part of transitioning to civilian life, Laine is gearing up to become a certified practitioner with Heart Math, a technology program that's said to help reduce stress and anxiety by increasing inner balance and self-security.

Her ultimate goal is to have a LinkedIn training course on every military base in the country and keep those retiring from MacDill Air Force Base in the Tampa Bay area.

"I think it should be taught on every base. It's still not taught on every base and LinkedIn has been around since 2003," she said.