

Nicole's story on entering the civilian job market for the first time

When I left the forces, I was full of energy about what my next steps in my career could be. I had almost 10 years of naval experience under my belt, having worked hard to the rank of Petty Officer and getting consistently good feedback from my superiors. I knew which direction I wanted to go in, and was excited to just get out there and make it happen!

The first job rejection hit me really hard. I had put a lot of effort into my cover letter (the first one I had ever written) and the automated decline email was so impersonal. Couldn't they see that I was the perfect fit for the job? I felt dejected, I suddenly felt like everything I had achieved in my naval career wasn't worth much to anybody at all. I wanted to give up on the spot and see if the navy would just take me back. Most of my civilian mates just laughed and said something to the effect of "welcome to the rat race" – a world I was completely unfamiliar with. However, a close friend of mine went through some job websites with me and showed me the things I should be looking out for, like salary bands and working hours, travel expectations and required qualifications. She looked at my CV and told me that I was completely underselling myself and that I needed to use bolder language – for example, helping to organise the inter-base sports tournament meant that I had in event co-ordination and budgeting.

I also learned that sometimes, there is just stuff outside my control – for example, there may be internal candidates, restructures etc or dozens of applications for one job, affecting how closely my CV gets looked at. I also learned that a job application is a two-way street – if I email a company with some questions and they don't get ever get back to me, it that necessarily the kind of place I want to work?

One night, I applied for 6 jobs in a row, not allowing myself to get too attached to any of the roles. And guess what, I eventually got offered interviews for 2 of them! There was no point getting hung up on the 4 that I got declined for, I had to focus on those that wanted to give me a shot. I wasn't going get caught off guard or let people that had been in the civilian workplace for years have much of an advantage over me. I read all the reference material the HR people sent me, and practiced the STAR interview model that a lot of places use now. It was really tricky to brainstorm some answers to potential questions and wondered if I sounded silly – it's always hard to blow your own trumpet! I also used my partner as a sounding board to practice, practice, practice! Anyway, something must have worked because 7 months later I am sitting here working for an awesome NGO doing rewarding mahi in social services, with a really flexible work environment to fit around my childcare.

I guess what I am trying to say is don't let a job rejection rattle you too much, sometimes it's like buying a house – it might not have been meant to be, and down the line you'll be grateful you never got it because something so much better might just come along!