



2026

CAREER PROGRESSION GUIDE



Blue Water
— ADVISORS —



FIND YOUR NEXT SUCCESS HERE

**YOUR ENDURING PARTNER
YOUR PROVIDER OF KEEN ANALYTICS
YOUR CURRENT-RELEVANT-CREDIBLE RESOURCE**

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CURRENT – RELEVANT – CREDIBLE
NAVIGATING WITH YOU TO YOUR NEXT SUCCESS



WELCOME TO OUR

2026 Career Progression Guide



Two Years Running!

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In this Guide:

Latest insights, content, free resources, and more.

Keep Reading!

Add to your calendar:

1. Quarterly Warriors Taphouse Networking Events
2. Back in 2026; November Virtual Cohort!
3. Launching BWDigital V3 in 2026 Q1!



Taking Charge of Your Career Progression

Members stepping into transition, or as we like to say, career progression often put themselves last. Their love and support of mission in uniform is unflappable and inimitable, often to a fault! Members also often step into a false sense of security where they are overly trusting of the many institutionalized and legacy transition assistance programs that for some time now have been failing to meet the needs of those in transition.

DON'T EXPECT SOMEONE ELSE TO PUT YOU FIRST!

Members often think that they will have more time available to focus on their career progression as they approach their end of active duty service, when in reality, competing interests such as VA Medical, DD214 completion, etc. all result in less time available for members to focus on their career progression. Bottom line....don't delay, start today!

Over the previous 5 years, BWA has been able to secure many analytical insights to help us and our members better understand the mathematical specifics behind members entering into their career progression. Four years ago we theorized that just starting early

into your career progression via some program (TAP, Blue Water, etc.) was the driving key to decreasing your time in pursuit of your next success, and conversely, starting late (i.e. terminal leave) would lengthen your time requirement in pursuit of your next success. What we see today is that starting early is not the only key to success, just as starting late does not doom you to failure. Rather, what members prioritize at that time and the level of effort they put into their career progression, effort is the key. Do your heavy lifting consistently and **engage with a credible team!** Optimally, members should be engaged in a support program 6-8 months prior to terminal, AND be prepared to remain engaged on all things having to do with their career progression from that time on. Consistency is the key! Putting effort into networking, and designing your career progression is required to deliver results.

JOINING A CREDIBLE TEAM IS KEY TO FINDING YOUR NEXT SUCCESS!



Beware the Ocean of Good Will

IT WILL ALL BE ABOUT CURRENCY - RELEVANCY - CREDIBILITY

We have found over the previous 4+ years that there is no shortage of individuals, or organizations in the “Ocean of Good Will” who are willing to share with you “what” they think you need to do as you step into your career progression. If you think about it, anyone can share with you “What” they think you need to do, but only a handful of truly “Credible” resources can share with you “How” best to pursue your career progression, and “Why”. This is at the heart of why Blue Water is different!

We are your current, relevant, and “credible” career progression resource. In addition, our membership stands ready to share their insights with you. This coupled with Blue Water’s analytical insights, personal experience in uniform, transition, and follow on success makes us the premier career progression resource of choice for you!

**BE CRITICAL OF SHARED
INSIGHT!**

Register Today

JOIN YOUR NEXT WINNING TEAM!

Our 2026 Career Progression Cohort schedule is rapidly filling up. If it is your intent to join your next winning team in pursuit of your next success, don't delay, register today!

Engage your command leadership today about securing BWA for your dedicated event!

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Your Mindset & Approach



There Will Be Some Angst

It's important to recognize that many of our members do express that there is some angst as you navigate your career progression. But know why - it won't be because finding your next success is an impossible task, rather it will be because it will take place in a unique environment where others are in control of the flow of events (often new to many of our senior leaders who have been used to being in charge for years). In addition, there is often a new language to master that many are not familiar with. As a member navigating the space, you won't be asking the questions, you'll be answering them (in the interview environment), and others will be evaluating your response, again creating a bit of angst. But know this - your hard and soft skills secured over your years of service are invaluable, sought after, and needed by so many organizations.

As you pursue and engage those potential good fits, it won't be all about you. We express it like this to our members: "It's not about you, it's about them. And the part that is about you, is what you are going to do for them!" Exhibiting a sound understanding of the organization's challenges, concerns, strategy, etc.. will be key and is step one in conveying your value. This followed up with what hard and soft skills you are bringing to the table in order to raise the bar and deliver the needed results will be what sets you apart!

Understand The Analytics

Over the previous 4+ years the Blue Water Advisors team has been able to secure some interesting analytical insights from the engagements of our members. Data and analytical insights are key to new members stepping into their career progression with a healthy mindset. Knowing how long it might take them to find their next success or where other members with similar backgrounds have landed can be more than helpful. Below are just a few of insights we secure to assist new members in understanding their career progression analytically and amending their mindset appropriately.

AS OF 1 JANUARY, 2025

Average Pursuit Days | 129

Where do Members go?

- Defense | 32.6%
- Gov Contracting | 33.3%
- Corporate | 24.6%
- Other / Civil Service | 9.5%

% Negotiating Base Pay: 94%

- % Successful: ~56%



"It's not about you, it's about them. And the part that is about you, is what you are going to do for them!"

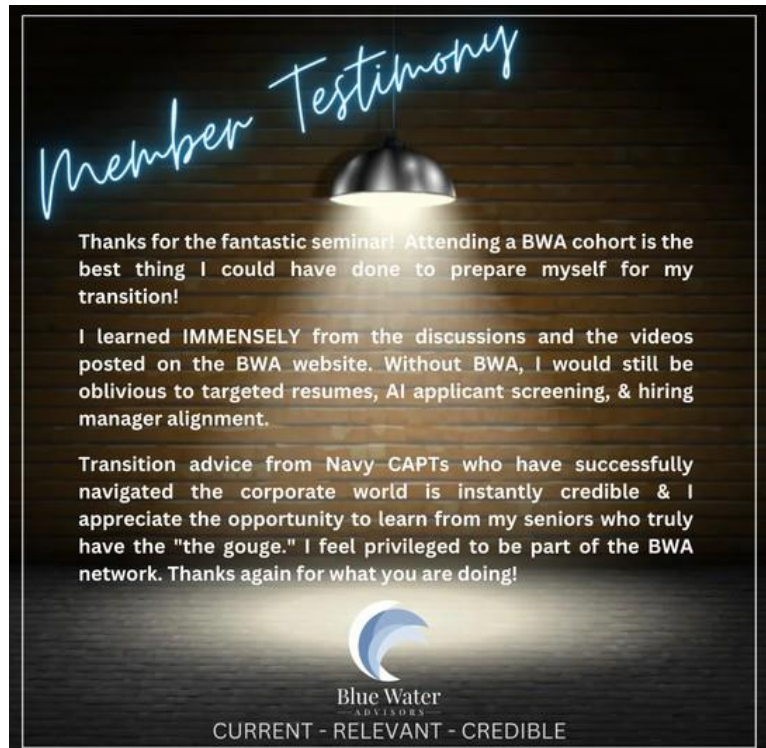
Designing Your Career Progression



Know Your Big Rocks!

When engaging our members on the importance of spending time developing their career progression strategy, we are often met with members perception that there is little to no value in this effort. What we typically note is that most members don't place a lot of value here as they have historically been the recipient of support in the way of detailers, placement officers, community managers, monitors, etc. Bottom line, they don't value the effort as much of it has been provided for them throughout their time in uniform. What they fail to realize is that 100% of all of that effort previously provided to them is now ultimately their sole responsibility. Gone are the days where next steps are provided to them.

Step one in designing your career progression is knowing what is important to you in this next phase



of your life. Identifying your "Big Rocks" will become the yardstick that you utilize to assess every pursued opportunity and whether or not it is a potential good fit.

**MEMBERS LANDING IN A POOR FIT
WILL NOT STAY! IN 2021-2023 ~3%
OF MEMBERS STAYED <6 MONTHS
IN ROLE. IN 2024 THIS HAS
GROWN TO ~5.5%.**

DON'T SKIP ON DESIGNING YOUR CAREER PROGRESSION!

This is incredibly important as we know members who land at a poor fit are much more likely to not stay, and leaving will in turn thrust you right back into your career progression again. As you pursue your next success, time will be money, and stepping into the at will work environment is best done with a purposeful design!

Your Market Analysis



Know How To Assess A Good Fit!

We espouse to our members that this is probably the single biggest miss in the traditional, legacy and institutionalized transition process. Most of us here at BWA simply don't recall TAP, or any of the other various offerings discussing how to assess a good fit! Amazing, as we see this as incredibly important especially if you are looking for longevity in your next success.

Doing your market analysis will be critical to you finding a good fit. We share with our members to be engaged and proactive about securing their next success. Stepping into the at will work environment and waiting for someone or some company to take an interest in you is passive by nature. We highly recommend qualitatively and quantitatively assessing those companies or industries that are of interest to you to ensure you are indeed pursuing a good fit!

Qualitative Assessment: Put simply we want to know what those individuals who are closest to you

think about the opportunities that you are pursuing! We know you are excited about it but when assessing "Fit", we find your inner circle often knows you better than you are often willing to admit to yourself. Valuable insight!

DON'T GIVE AWAY YOUR DECISION MAKING AUTHORITY!

"DON'T LET SOMEONE ELSE DECIDE YOUR BEST FIT FOR YOU!"

Quantitative Assessment: Here you want to ensure you have done a thorough deep dive into the company or industry of interest. Knowing as much about what it is that you are pursuing is key to ensuring that you are prepared to deliver results as well as arrive at a good fit. The size of the market, major competitors, company communications to employees and investors on future engagements and strategy are all invaluable insight to secure "in advance" of pursuing!



Targeting Your Resume



The Importance of Targeting Your Resume

Stereotypically, as most members approach BWA, they immediately want to pursue two lines of effort:

1. Purchase business attire. 2. Write a resume. Blue Water embraces that these two lines of effort are not even in our top 5 of things to get going on as you step into your career progression. Until you know what is expected of you (dress included) in the environment you are pursuing and have a specific position description to target your resume towards, we think engaging in efforts here is not completely productivity.

YOUR RESUME IS NOT GOING TO GET YOU A JOB!

While we acknowledge that your resume is not what is going to secure you your next success, it is nonetheless a critical attribute. In essence, it is your ticket to the dance. It is you capturing the specifics behind your fit for the role and responsibility - in a targeted manner. Show the hiring manager you are the answer to what they are looking for!

Once you are recognized as a potential good fit, and land in the “Keep” pile, your targeted document will have lived its most important function - getting you to an environment where the HM will want to have a meaningful conversation with you about your hard and soft skills and your ability to deliver results to your potential new team.

BE CRITICAL OF RESUME ADVICE:

1. **IS THE PERSON PROVIDING IT CREDIBLE**
2. **IS THE PERSON CURRENT AND RELEVANT**
3. **IS THE PERSON ABLE TO PROVIDE “HOW”**
4. **IS THE PERSON ABLE TO PROVIDE “WHY”**

As a group, we are typically not well versed in dealing with resumes. Most of our members have never written a resume, or at best have done so many, many years ago. We fail to realize that our resume will be a living, breathing document and that we will likely have a unique product for each individual pursuit. There is no one size fits all in this arena! To effectively target your resume, you must have a position description, or a firm understanding of the role and responsibility and what the company values in support of the role.

Effective Use of Social Media

-Building Your Brand-

Linked



Remember - You are the Product!

While in uniform many of our members steered clear of social media for obvious reasons. While we don't espouse that not having a social media profile / brand will be the cause of you failing to secure your next success, we do believe that it puts you at some level of disadvantage. Exactly how much of a disadvantage is difficult to assess, but it should be noted that nearly 100% of our membership have at least a LI profile and have experienced positive results with it.

As you navigate your way into this new at will work environment, you should be aware that those seeking talent (you) are in many instances using these tools to locate you. Not being "findable" via these tools does put you at some level of disadvantage.

Aside from having a brand that represents you well and that is "discoverable" on sites such as LI, you also should plan on using these tools in a targeted

manner to assist you in identifying key networking points of contact. Social media is a positive, and many of our members have some ground to make up in mastering the effective use of these tools. No time like the present to embrace the future! Come on in, the water is fine!



REMEMBER, THESE ARE THE TOOLS THAT THE HIRING MANAGER, TALENT ACQUISITION MANAGER, ETC. ARE USING TO FIND YOU!

Prepping for Your Interview



Being Ready For Your Interview Starts Now!

Many of our members see the start of their pending interview coincident with the actual start of that event, when in actuality the interview begins at first contact with anyone in the company you are pursuing.

It should come as no surprise that as you venture into your market analysis phase of your career progression you will be engaging potential co-workers. During this time, you will begin to identify potential industries and companies that you are interested in and will set out to learn more via informational engagements. Just as you are seeking to gain information about a company, its culture, environment, etc., those individuals you are engaging are also afforded the opportunity to secure insight about you.

The biggest take away here is to avoid engaging in informational discussions where you are not completely prepared for the discussion. As the person seeking the discussion / connection, take it upon yourself to be the flexible one and the one

who will schedule the meeting. This is a professional courtesy. Your previous role, responsibility, seniority, have no place in this new venture. Members trying to leverage their past authority in this new pursuit are often frustrated with the lack of results in securing employment. Be humble and appreciative that individuals are taking time to meet with you!

Remember to follow networking / informational protocol. Keep engagements short (30 min.), have prepared questions (~3), be prepared to clearly, concisely and coherently convey why you are interested in this company (~2.5 - 3min.). Reach out to Blue Water for additional insights on how to navigate networking discussions and prepare for your interview.

FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

1. **Have at least 8-10 preplanned responses**
2. **Practice them!**
3. **Make your answers 2.5-3 min. in length**
4. **Have a couple of questions for the interviewer**
5. **Make sure you can answer why you're interested**

Prepping for Compensation Negotiation



Don't Be Caught Off Guard

Your First Discussion On Compensation Often Comes At First Contact!

Members often remark that as they pursued their next success, discussions on and around compensation came much sooner than they were expecting. It kind of makes sense however if you think about it. Why would an organization engage in large effort if they had questions or concerns in meeting your compensation expectation?

Queries often sound something like, "So, in general what are you looking for with regard to compensation?" It is this early conversation that can tie members hands if they don't understand how to effectively navigate this question, or worse, respond to it in a committed response thus removing their ability to negotiate in the future.

Knowing what aspect of your total compensation you are actually discussing in these early engagements, and having a sound strategy to respond to this question will be key to securing your compensation goals!

KNOW YOUR VALUE

Members who anticipate this early engagement on compensation often do better in the long run in negotiating their total compensation. They understand that having a strategy in approaching this is important, and knowing that strategy earlier rather than later is key to their success.

**IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR
VALUE, DON'T EXPECT
SOMEONE ELSE TO FIGURE IT
OUT!**

In researching your value, members often place an arbitrary number on their value which by default becomes their target. In actuality, members are not looking for this value, rather they are seeking to understand what the company they are pursuing is capable of compensating them for fulfilling the specific role and responsibility they are looking at. That is the number they need. Once they have that insight, then they have a decision to make, i.e. that number either meets or fails to meet their compensation goal.

Maintaining a Keen Eye

-Be An Astute Judge-



PROFESSIONAL SKEPTICISM AND CRITICAL THINKING

Have A Critical Eye!

As members step into their career progression they are often inundated with information on how to find their next success. This information is not only sought out, it also readily flows in from various sources. Bottom line, everyone will want to help. We stress to our members that despite everyone (friends, family, coworkers) wanting to help, NOT everyone should be helping, and the first and most important gatekeeper is you!

Each and every one of our members has been successful in uniform. A large part of the success has been your demonstrated ability to assess information and the quality of that information being conveyed to you. That skill has served you well in service, and will continue to serve you well in your career progression. Despite not having a depth of experience in the “at will work environment” you will still be able to assess the quality of the information, and most importantly the credibility of the messenger delivering the information. This is key, and we highly recommend

maintaining your critical eye!



A critical eye is the beginning of positive change.

Be wary of resumes being provided for you to emulate or engagements with industry leaders where an outcome sounds too good to be true. There are few easy roads to travel in your career progression. Gains are hard fought for; opportunities to engage where the outcome is poor and time is wasted are abundant. Have a plan, engage in it consistently, and be sure to align with a credible team!

It's Not Over -Just Because You Land-



Your First Year Onboard!

Onboarding, Ramping, Delivering Results, Annual Review

Most members are surprised when we discuss the need for continued engagement with us and their new network after securing their new success. We explain it like this. Landing is a critical first step towards delivering results in the chosen environment that they have pursued. That said, while you have arrived, there is easily an entire year of “firsts” that await each and every members who lands.

Onboarding. It is likely that as a Blue Water member you never will have experienced an onboarding process within a company like the one you will be stepping into. Don't underestimate the importance of a seemingly elementary process. This is far more than just being integrated into the HR data base and getting your new computer. Methodically joining a new team, taking the initiative to meet those on the team and other teams that you will support or who will support you is key to earning trust with those around you. Make the initiative and be a bit humble in your approach.

Ramping: If onboarding is arriving and meeting the team, then ramping is taking those first early steps towards understanding the needed due outs for not only you but your team as well. Gaining a quick insight as to what these items are, how they are derived, and the process by which they are constructed is key to your current and future success. Remember, the clock will be ticking. Most onboarding and ramp timelines depending upon the company can be anywhere from 4-7 months.. Beyond that, it will be time to compete and deliver needed results.

Delivering Results: Your success here is likely tied directly to how successfully you onboarded, earned the trust of the teams around you, and how effective you have been at ramping. If you are struggling here, you might review how well you stepped into your new role, and how well you understand what is expected of you and your team.

Your Annual Review: Many miss the mark here in a couple of regards. First off, know that it will or should happen. Second, know that you should prep for it! Being able to review the results you delivered, your goals for the coming year, etc. will be key to a successful meeting.



Meet the Team

As 2025 has quickly come to an end, so to has 2026 commenced with a flash! We are excited to continue to work hard at exceeding the needs of all of our members as we grow and scale our organic network, supporting content, and growing partnerships. 2026 will also see the launch of Blue Water Digital V3 which will provide current members visibility to the entire network of Blue Water’s growing membership. This interactive tool will provide easier organic connections to like minded professionals seeking their next success. The BWA team will revisit the virtual cohort (November 2026) where we will offer our flagship career progression cohort to those individuals unable to attend an in person cohort. Stay tuned for more changes! From the entire Blue Water Team. We appreciate you and look forward to a most productive 2026!

Mike Wallace

CEO

Blue Water Advisors

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