

# Lessons Learned from Academy Grad's Twin Cities Transition

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## My background

- USAFA '99 grad/pilot (took early retirement) with 3 year project manager staff assignment; obtained Project Manager Professional (PMP) certification; targeted project manager positions within Twin Cities (since my wife grew up nearby); initially knew no one in local area

## Strategy

- People will offer lots of tip (like me right here!) – what works for you may be the opposite for them!
- Go broad and wide – or narrow and targeted
- Broad/wide = not picky on location (Dallas, Houston, & Chicago hires a bunch of grads); use military to civilian headhunter companies like Bradley Morris, Lucas Group, or Cameron Brooks. I recommend Ty Terrazone (USAFA '04) working for Bradley Morris
- Narrow/targeted = my approach since we wanted to live in Twin Cities; national headhunters not much help, so best bet is get yourself to target area ASAP and start meeting people in person
- Think sequentially – get a good resume, apply/network, do interviews; once you are getting interviews, don't keep messing with your resume – it's good enough if people are calling you

## Resume

- If you're not based here yet, borrow a local grad's address for the top – some companies said they trashed all out-of-state apps since they wouldn't pay relocation costs (even if you don't have any)
- I started with a 2-page resume, then skinny'ed it down to 1-page; got more interviews with 1-pager
- I tweaked my resume for each posting, but didn't do massive changes or have multiple versions
- Don't pay for resume services, but do make changes based on mentor input – those in your target industry are especially important to listen to; older mentors may be giving you outdated advice
- All you want your resume to do is make them want to do a phone screen with you

## Applying for Jobs

- Apply for jobs where you know someone who works there, or you will meet a company rep at a job fair within a week; I wasted time applying to jobs where I knew no one – it got me nowhere
- If the app has a place for an internal referral – don't submit it unless you have one; find one!
- Time your submission; bigger companies would reject me within a day or two if I didn't have that internal referral already lined up or I didn't have a friend calling the hiring manager on my behalf
- So applying for jobs and networking needs to happen concurrently
- Apply for jobs before a job fair, so you can talk to company reps about the specific position you want

## Networking

- New to area, don't know many people? That was me. First thing I did – I joined a professional organization, for me the Minnesota chapter of Project Management Institute. PMI-MN held monthly dinners. For 3 months I ate chicken with employed project managers talking about their work as they asked me about my transition.
- PMI MN chapter meetings also gave me access to training events & seminars that I chatted about in interviews – made me forwarding looking as I name-dropped local industry leader names instead of talking about my past military life. This got me my job.
- I was amazed at random people wanting me help me; just ask! Who? Other Academy grads, professional organization contacts, the man your mother-in-law sat next to on a plane (that guy connected me deep into one local company!)

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- Some people I met really got me closer to a specific position, others I met with gave me good overall advice; enjoy meeting new people and don't meet everyone with uber-specific goals – ask them all about themselves + who else you could talk with; have fun!
- As I networked, people would ask if I wanted to chat on the phone or meet in person. That's a no brainer. I met 2 CH Robinson contacts at the same coffee house 2 weeks in a row. That let me bypass HR and right to a 2<sup>nd</sup> round interview. I'd talk on the phone if that's all they offered.
- Minnesota hosts a big annual job fair for veterans @ July; like SACC, but companies are local to Minnesota so much more helpful if the Twin Cities is your target
- I attended a Twin Cities Project Management job fair, too – but most were for short-term contract positions; I thought this might be a way to get my foot in the door, but the problem is a military guy is hard to “put in a box and push across the table”; ie: difficult to convince a client company you can hit the ground running and manage their 6-mo project with no spin-up needed
- Use “Find Alumni” tab of LinkedIn – pick any school, filter by geography, and see where they work!

## Phone Screens

- Have LinkedIn page of caller up in front of you, your resume with notes on how your experience applies to the position, 3-4 good questions to ask, & the position's job description to keep in mind
- That being said – I did the phone screen for the job I did get in a parking lot while my son was at Tae Kwon Do with no notes & not even remembering everything about the position
- Only 1 phone screen didn't get me a face-to-face interview when I put my desired salary (mandatory field on app) too high for the position and I couldn't convince the screener I'd be okay with lots less
- Stand up, walk around as you talk, and smile
- All you want is to be given the chance for a face-to-face interview

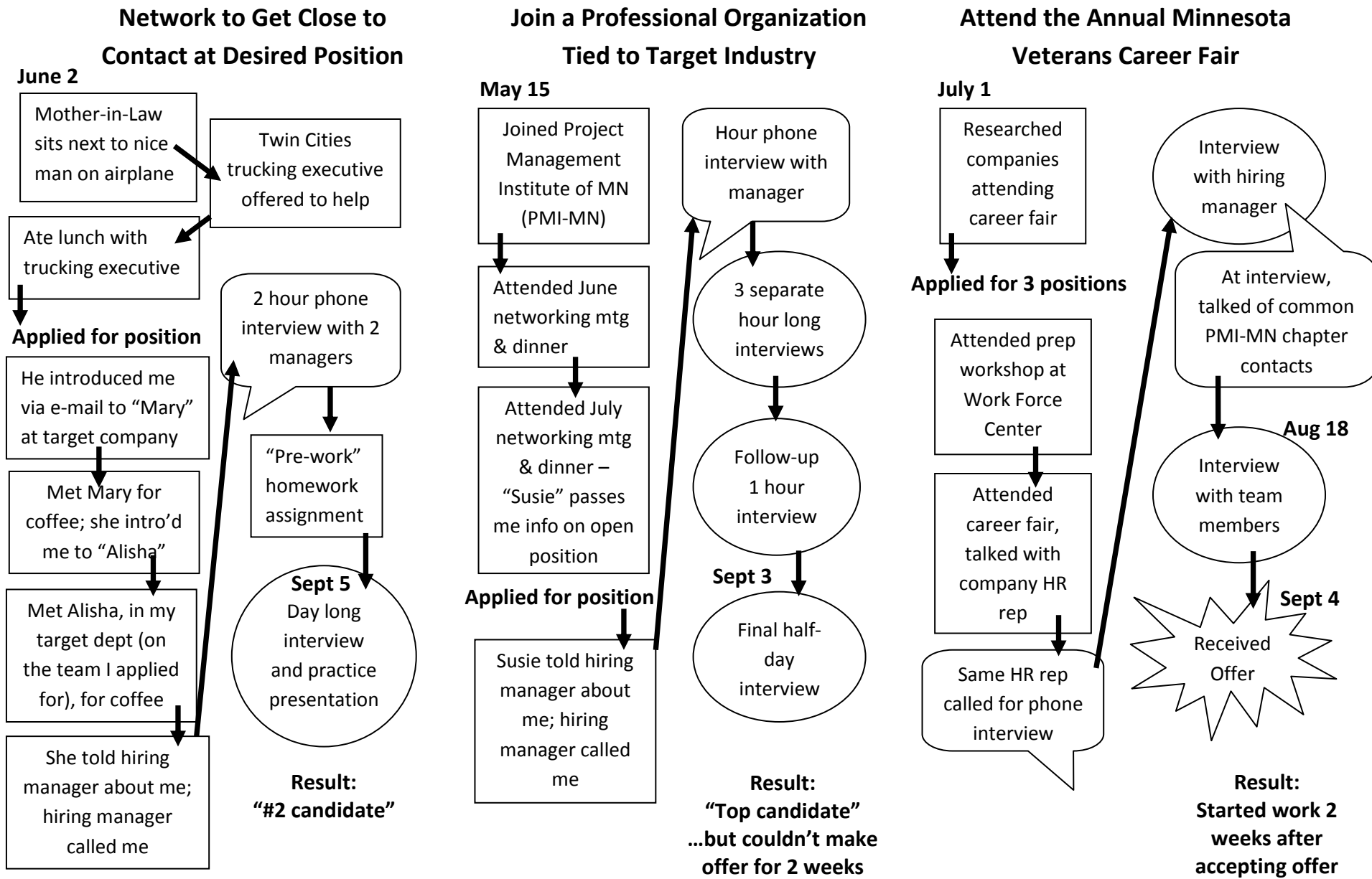
## Interviews

- I applied to 40ish jobs and got interviews for 8 different positions (at 7 companies)
- One key was having insider information on the process; a friend told me after a phone screen the hiring manager wasn't sure of my ability to look long-term, so I spent lots of time talking strategy & long-term projects during my interview – insider reported back they loved it
- Be forward looking; I used LinkedIn to find out that an interviewer (now my boss) knew a local agile project management guru that I had heard talk at a seminar recently. I talked all about that.
- Be ready for VTC and teleconferenced interviews; Not that preparing for it is any different, but for some reason I didn't think of this as a possibility – be sure to talk clearly and address them, too
- One company gave me homework to do and then made me do mock presentations and reports on it during a whole day I spent on-site – be ready for more than an hour sit-down talk!
- Just show up on time, wear nice clothes, smile, don't act weird, & let the rest take care of itself

## Final Thoughts

- Seek out current advice; job hunting has changed in the past 5 years (certainly in the last 20!)
- Yupe, you need a LinkedIn profile; you don't need 500+ contacts, but you need something
- Nothing beats having a friend at your target company advocating on your behalf
- Turn it into a game & have fun – like different video game levels; get to phone screen level & up to interview rounds – know that you'll bounce down, but the goal is to get back up to the final round!
- Be patient. Know when to push and when to wait; while you wait for the next step at company A, start the job search process at company B – always have another option when 1 door shuts
- Find me for help or questions – Dan Dorson on LinkedIn or danieljdorson@gmail.com

# Academy Grad Recently Hired in Twin Cities Methods of Getting to an Offer



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