



Maintaining a Security Clearance is a Valuable Asset for Veterans in Today's Job Market

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In today's competitive job market, any extra credential you can add to your resume puts you one step ahead of the other applicants. If you're just now packing away your uniform and beginning the transition to a civilian job, one of the most valuable assets you can take with you is a security clearance.

A security clearance is not only appealing to future employers, but shows that you've already been through a thorough background check and a disciplined, dependable worker is available for hire. And with the military population as the largest source of individuals holding security clearances, retired servicemembers are in demand for positions that require handling sensitive materials on a daily basis.

It's no question that your security clearance should be viewed as a priceless resource when making the transition to civilian employment. However, keep in mind that you have no right to get or maintain this security clearance – clearances are denied and revoked all the time and not having one can decrease your salary anywhere from \$5000 to \$15,000.

So what steps can you take to ensure you keep your own clearance in tact?

The burden is on you to prove you are a person whose history, both professional and personal, affirm loyalty to the United States. Factors evaluated include strength of character, honesty, reliability, discretion, sound judgment, and freedom from conflicting allegiances.

If you find yourself in a situation where your clearance has been denied or revoked, you do have options available to you. In working with clients on security clearance problems or preparing for their investigation, I ask them to live by three principles: honesty, accuracy, and mitigation.

So why honesty and accuracy? If you are not honest in the security clearance process, you will not receive a clearance. And if you have inaccuracies in your application or interview, you will have to explain why they are good faith errors and not deliberate evasions or lies. These two principles are meant to save you time, effort, and money in the long run.

There are a host of security concerns or disqualifying conditions that cause security clearance decision makers to recommend denial or revocation. Some of the most common conditions relate to alcohol or drug abuse, financial irresponsibility, and criminal conduct. Since 9/11, foreign influence or preference, either yours or your spouse, could also play a factor.

Concerns about the misuse of information technology systems are also starting to become prevalent. There are rules for when and what for a person uses the government computer system. Anything from downloading pornography to viewing a video on YouTube.com on your lunch break could be a cause for revocation of a clearance, not to mention disciplinary action.

The good news is that most people who get a security clearance keep it. But even if you receive word that your clearance has been denied or revoked, you have the right to appeal the decision. A statement detailing the reason for denial or revocation should be supplied to you with the procedures for filing an appeal. If you believe the information gathered about you during the investigation was misleading or inaccurate, appealing the decision gives you the opportunity to correct or clarify the situation.

Here is where the mitigation portion becomes applicable. Your goal in the appeals process is to convince the decision maker that the disqualifying condition has been mitigated or alleviated. Perhaps the financial problems you were denied upon occurred years ago and you've had stable finances since. Or maybe your financial problems happened because of a sudden and very expensive illness. Bankruptcy is not by itself a reason to deny a clearance; it's what you did to become bankrupt and what you've done with your finances since that should matter. You might have had a shoplifting conviction, but it was five years ago. Foreign preference or influence disqualifying conditions can be explained by a detailed analysis of your family history and foreign contacts.

If you think there may be a situation in your past that could cause a problem during the investigation process, a lawyer experienced in security clearance cases can prescreen your application before submission. If you received a letter of intent to deny or revoke a clearance from your agency, you have various routes to appeal. The process differs somewhat from case to case, but no matter what your situation is the deadlines are strict and unforgiving. Representation by a lawyer experienced in security clearance cases can guide you through the process.

If you find yourself having problems with your security clearance, remember the rules I set forth above – honesty, accuracy and mitigation. Following these pointers should keep you with one of the most valuable assets achieved through your military service.

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