

ASU Tillman Center helps student veterans gain the upper hand in employment

Inaugural Futures Night event offers career resources, features employer vendors

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News

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A military futures expert told a group of student veterans on Wednesday that 77% of all jobs soon will be impacted or altered by AI and that their positions will change every two and a half years due to a variety of factors.

However, there are steps they can take to “job proof” themselves when seeking employment and navigating their careers.

"You are your own brand and if you don't know what your brand stands for when you go in to interview in the marketplace, it's going to be really hard to understand whether or not you're a good fit," said [Mike Schindler](#), a U.S. Navy veteran, an award-winning author and the national podcast host of "[The Military Wire](#)." "Your brand is your last name, and it means you should be able to give employers five reasons why they should hire you. These are the five values that you represent ... that's your brand."

Nationally renowned as a subject-matter expert on leadership development, government relations and veteran transition issues, Schindler was the keynote speaker at the first-ever Futures Night for Military Connected Learners at Arizona State University's Tempe campus.

Hosted by the [Pat Tillman Veterans Center](#), the Feb. 5 event at Tempe's Memorial Union brought together employers, student veterans and speakers to create pathways to professional opportunities.

“Futures Night is putting into action what we believe to be true of our military connected community here at ASU,” said [Shawn Banzhaf](#), executive director of the Pat Tillman Veterans Center. “Our over 10,000 veterans come to ASU looking for their career post military service. We want to ensure they are set up for success and using our connections and partnerships.”

Schindler told an audience of about 50 people that he joined the Navy after watching "Top Gun," a 1986 movie featuring Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis.

“I walked into the recruiter’s office at 17 years old, no lie, and he’s there in his dress whites, neatly pressed. He looks amazing,” Schindler said. “And I look right at him and say, ‘I’m Tom Cruise. I’m gonna date Kelly McGillis and I’m gonna fly your cool jets!’ I did not fly cool jets. I did something completely different in the Navy.”

Schindler said when he left the military, it hit him hard because he was part of a high-octane team and found himself in "corporate America." He said the latter didn’t offer camaraderie, a sense of mission nor a sense of humor for that matter.

“I got into corporate America and went, ‘Nobody is able to joke’ ... like, we (veterans) joke,” he said. “How many of you like to joke? How many of you think you are a nightmare for HR?”

Schindler said he moved to Seattle and worked with startup companies, making and losing lots of money. He transitioned to Hollywood making films, writing books and started a podcast called "The Military Wire." He also started his nonprofit, [Operation Military Family](#), in 2020. The 501(c)(3) veteran service organization provides pathways for veterans to discover and deploy their greatest gifts in family, work and life.

He said that if veterans possess vision, understanding, clarity and adaptability, they can adjust to volatility and external factors in the job market.

“Understand that you’re gonna have to adapt because the marketplace is shifting fast, extremely fast,” said Schindler, whose recent book he co-authored with Chris Sean Nolan — [“The Rise of Humanness”](#) — touches on these very themes. “I think the future is super bright and the possibilities are endless. We’ve always figured it out as human beings — that’s the beauty.”

Other positive messages were conveyed to student veterans by 11 vendors offering employment, career assistance, mentoring and transition programs.

“Veterans always come with a skill set, and it’s always adaptable,” said Evener Scott, director of diversity, equity and inclusion at Honor Health. “We’ve found them to be of good character and are great in the workforce no matter what entry position they come through. We have veterans who work in our human resources department, environmental health and safety, nurses — any position

that's possible."

CVS was another vendor actively recruiting veterans for a variety of positions.

"We want our employers to reflect the communities they serve and we're often looking for leaders and team players," said Sky Lee, a recruiter at CVS. "We at CVS find that the veteran community fits our needs for our company, and coming to events like these is a good pipeline for what we are looking for."

Other vendors, like ASU's [Veterans Imagination Project](#), were willing to offer help to those in transition. The initiative was created in spring 2022 to empower veterans in transition by providing them with future thinking and collaborative imagination skills. Participants learn over the course of eight weeks how to research a desired career and examine the influences and impacts that define that field through foresight activities, scenario planning and speculative storytelling.

Students in the class — veterans and service members from all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces — interview mentors in their chosen field and work together to identify trends and potential opportunities in those industries. Collaborating with other cohort members, instructors and guest speakers, they begin to craft a narrative about their future careers and their places in them.

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[Bob Beard](#), senior program manager for ASU's [Center for Science and the Imagination](#), was there to recruit student veterans to his latest cohort, which starts next week.

"Much of a veteran's experience is about 'what am I gonna do next?'" Beard said. "It used to be that veterans would get out of the military, go to a job and stay there the next 20 years, and get a gold watch and retire. That's not the reality of jobs in the 21st century. We try and break them out of that military mindset and know and trust themselves to be agents of navigating the future."

Another military transition program, [Veterans on the River](#), was also on hand to offer support and an opportunity for adventure. The nonprofit uses white water rafting on the Colorado River as a conduit for educational seminars, and other related activities, to provide space for reflection, a therapeutic environment and lifelong skill development in key focus areas used to transition.

"Instead of helping you get a job, we help you find a career that works with your lifestyle," said Jason Dickinson, founder and director of Veterans on the River and a 25-year Army veteran.

"While we raft down the river, we are teaching them soft skills on emotional intelligence, interview

skills, how to improve their resume and, sometimes, who's who in the zoo. You have to be able to figure out in short order when you're looking for the right career how to make the right network connections."

ASU student veteran David Hamrick, who was one of seven people who participated in last year's pilot program, said it changed his life.

"I gained a lot of clarity by talking to Jason and other veterans on that trip," said Hamrick, who is studying for his master's degree in strength and conditioning in the [College of Health Solutions](#). "Jason pushed me to get my master's degree, and I've been on a good path since."

Bethany Mion, a branch manager with Global Credit Union, said she was there to offer financial education to veterans.

"Global Credit Union started on a military base in Alaska and has been in Arizona for about ten years," said Mion, who is also an ASU alumna. "We want to give back to our communities we call home, and veterans are very important to the credit union as a whole, so it made sense for us to be here tonight."

It also made sense to marine veteran Jose Mora-Lopez, who is studying in the [W. P. Carey School of Business](#). Lopez will graduate at the end of the semester.

"I'm here to socialize and expand my worldview and see what jobs are potentially available to me," Lopez said. "I look at this event as a warm-up."

Thursday's event was more than a warm-up for Jaedyn Kaufman, who is a military-connected student and an Air Force brat.

"I'm about to graduate and I'm looking to start my career, so I'm looking for help with that," said Kaufman, a biological science major in the [School of Life Sciences](#). "Today will give me some connections and expose me to different people I need to talk to."

[Michelle Loposky](#), director of development and strategic partnerships for the Tillman Center, spent several months organizing the event.

"The job market is so much more competitive these days, and we felt like we needed to do something extra," Loposky said. "If we can help student veterans before they graduate or even plant a seed while they're at ASU, the hope is that we can help them find that career they're looking for."

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Keynote speaker Mike Schindler, a U.S. Navy veteran, award-winning author and national podcast host of "The Military Wire," spoke at the first Futures Night for Military-Connected Learners — sponsored by the Pat Tillman Veterans Center — on Wednesday, Feb. 5, at the Memorial Union. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Recent Thunderbird School of Global Management graduate Jovita Dela Cruz (left) speaks with Sky Lee, a recruiter with CVS Health, about career options at the first Futures Night for Military-Connected Learners at the Memorial Union on the ASU Tempe campus. The event was sponsored by ASU's Pat Tillman Veterans Center. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News