

ICOSA[®]

EMPOWERING LEADERS THROUGH CONNECTION COLLABORATION & COMMUNICATION

▶ **BUSINESS IN RUSSIA**

A Guide for Planning Ahead

▶ **A FATHER'S JOURNEY**

Walking in Daniel's Shoes

▶ **EDUCATION REFORM**

The Best Bang for Our Buck

★ **FROM THE BATTLEFIELD TO BUSINESS**

Lida Citroën helps veterans transition to the civilian workforce by refining their personal brand - PG 40

AMERICAN ARTIST

GEORGIA O'KEEFE

- PG 90 -

RICHARD "DICK" YOUNG
(left)

Rear Admiral (Ret.) and Chairman of the Colorado Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)

SHANE SCHMUTZ
(middle)

Army veteran, Bronze Star recipient, West Point graduate and founder of Veteran's Passport to Hope

LIDA CITROËN
(right)

Principal LIDA360

BEYOND SCIENCE FICTION

Robots as Solutions

ENERGY STRAIGHT TALK

A Glimpse into the Mind of John Hofmeister

BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

Complex and Challenging Issues in Wet Infrastructure

★ AN INTERVIEW WITH **PATRICK GASTON** ★



From the Battlefield to Business

Transitioning Our Veterans Into the Workforce

BY KELLY DE LA TORRE

“Everyone has a personal brand, but most people do not control or manage it.”

— LIDA CITROËN



Just like generations of veterans before them, today's soldiers are preparing to transition from the battlefield back to civilian life. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), there are 2.3 million veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and tens of thousands of additional troops returning home as the United States begins to withdraw from Afghanistan. For these soldiers, the homecoming doesn't consist of parades and celebrations like the iconic images that symbolize the end of World War II. War is brutal and isolating. And for veterans, there can be confusion in trying to define the civilian from the soldier. Luckily, there are experts who understand the life they have led on the battlefield and how this can impact the transition into civilian life.

I had the pleasure of talking with one of the foremost international experts in personal branding about this topic. Lida Citroën, of LIDA360, has a demonstrated passion for helping veterans refine their personal brand and prepare for the next stage in their lives. In a show of gratitude for their service, she does all of this work pro bono.

ICOSA: Veterans are focused and highly trained; yet they are finding these skills don't translate well on their résumé for reentry into the civilian workforce. In your work as a personal branding expert, you've found the résumé is not the key. Rather, veterans should focus on their personal brand. What is personal brand?

CITROËN: I define personal brand as your reputation—the behaviors and beliefs you have expressed that create a perception of value (or not) in the minds of your target audience. That said, everyone has a personal brand, but most people do not control or manage it. It is important to understand and maintain the way you are perceived and how others assign you value and relevance.

Personal brand already exists in the minds of colleagues, friends, clients and people with whom you served in the military. Your behavior and actions over time earned you this reputation—good or bad. For some

people, their reputation is not how they want to be seen, and they might find themselves limited in personal and professional growth and opportunities they are afforded.

For those of us who went the civilian path, we learned through career experience or in business school that professionals thrive in the world of differentiation, value propositions and competitive advantage. We've learned the importance of capturing the attention of target audiences with compelling and relevant messaging that promotes a specific value proposition. At all levels of the civilian work environment—from blue-collar labor to executive work—individuals can embrace the power of personal branding to intentionally build a reputation for themselves that attracts opportunities to them.

ICOSA: How does military training alter or impact personal branding?

CITROËN: Since personal brand is rooted in values, beliefs and ideals, most people who served in the military were drawn to service because of a sense of commitment, patriotism and loyalty to country or other similar beliefs. Yes, there are some who serve for other reasons, but being able to articulate the value proposition tied to service is important.

Training in any strong culture, such as the U.S. Armed Forces, brings opportunity to examine one's personal brand. Much of the work I do with transitioning veterans is spent uncovering those personal assets, strengths and beliefs that make them unique and differentiated. Just saying you are loyal, team-oriented and able to work well under pressure is not enough of a differentiator. Shane Schmutz, Army veteran, Bronze Star recipient, West Point graduate and founder of Veteran's Passport to Hope (VP2H) says, "As a veteran who made the transition myself, I know how important it is to be able to market yourself in order to compete effectively in a civilian workplace."

Today's recruiters are looking for applicants to bring a clear sense of value and purpose to the job and to stand apart from others. Because military training emphasizes team over individual, this can be challenging for veterans.

ICOSA: Who should the veteran in transition consider a target audience for a job transition?

CITROËN: Because personal branding is a journey about how to move from here to there, transitioning veterans must identify a target audience that understands and embraces military skills and values. This audience holds the opportunity we desire. A new job? A promotion? Additional resources? Our goal is to understand this audience and what they need and want in order to effectively position ourselves and our personal offer.

For veterans, there can be confusion in trying to define the civilian from the soldier.



» Lida Citroën with Wall Street veterans

Here are some things to consider:

- What industries, companies and fields would you enjoy working in? Do you like structure and formality? Do you work better outdoors? Do you work better in mission-driven industries?
- Which types of people do you do your best work with? Are you social, outgoing and friendly? Do you like to keep your work and personal lives separate?
- What do you know about your target companies and the people who work at those companies? Do they attend industry meetings? Are they located in a certain area of the country? Are they active online (social networking)?
- Learn everything you can about the individuals you are targeting at these companies—what do they need for you to deliver (job requirements) and what do they need to feel (personal needs).

Your target audience is going to consider how well you can do the job, as well as how you will get along with others and fit into their culture. Understanding your audience by knowing who

needs to find you relevant and compelling in order to hire you, promote you or refer you is critical. You simply cannot focus your efforts on everyone. You must find a specific industry, audience segment and personality and then target that group in order to get noteworthy results.

“As employers strive to hire more and more veterans, it becomes so important that veterans can articulate their value proposition. We can’t just rely on résumé to get the attention of hiring managers,” echoes Richard (Dick) Young, Rear Admiral (Ret.) and Chairman of the Colorado Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR).

ICOSA: Many veterans are highly trained in a specific skill. How can they explain these skills in a way that is easy to understand?

CITROËN: I hear this question a lot from veterans making the transition. While it is impressive to put “sniper” on a résumé, my concern is the impression and understanding that is created for the hiring manager reviewing the résumé. What if the only experience she’s had with snipers is in the movies? That could work against you.

Focus on highlighting the value from the skills you have learned, instead of a list of strengths and skills. Instead of, “expert in team building,” share the ways you have built collaborative efforts that met a specific objective and the end result’s impact. This is more descriptive and relevant, and gives the employer a concrete picture of your role and the outcome.

Similarly, if you are pursuing a leadership position and are uncomfortable offering yourself up as a leader, consider letting testimonials, endorsements and recommendations promote you more effectively. This is a great way to let the credibility of others highlight your strengths.

Above all else, make sure your résumé promotes who you are as a person—your personality, charm, passion and uniqueness. The Summary or Overview at the top can explain your difference in a couple of sentences. For instance, I worked with a Navy SEAL who was “passionate about getting IT systems right.” He

**WORKFORCE
TRANSITION RESOURCES**

Personal Branding:
www.lida360.com

Veterans Green Jobs:
www.veteransgreenjobs.org

ESGR:
www.esgr.mil
www.esgrcolorado.net



» Branding workshop with Citroën

wrote, "I believe that the role of an IT director is a customer service position, ensuring the customer experience reinforces the company's brand." That made him stand out!

ICOSA: What are the common stereotypes of the military culture? Can some of these stereotypes be overcome using personal branding?

CITROËN: On the employer side, there is still a great deal of confusion and mystery about military service, particularly those who have experienced active combat. Thanks in part to media hype, fears of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and other issues have created misperceptions about the veteran in the civilian workforce.

At the same time, the beliefs that military veterans are trained in loyalty, collaboration, integrity, discretion, trust building and hard work are not to be overlooked! Do all that you can to demonstrate examples of how those traits and skills came to life during your service time and how you expect to use them to be more effective and valuable to the company with whom you are seeking to work.

Many of the veterans I work with are transitioning to professional careers in professional services such as law or finance. Those industries value qualities such as integrity, discretion,

loyalty and positive personal interaction. Other clients of mine are continuing the training they received in the military and pursuing careers in technology, aerospace, engineering and design. In those fields, employers see the value of a veteran's training—the aptitude to work under tight deadlines and the ability to manage complex and expensive systems and technologies—as assets.

► Recruiters are looking for applicants to bring a clear sense of value and purpose to the job and to stand apart from others.

ICOSA: How can veterans use their experiences to positively influence their personal brand?

CITROËN: The veterans I have met and worked with—well over 100 now—have never shied away from something that was challenging, unique or difficult. There is a resiliency, pride and commitment to mission that a veteran brings to a situation that uniquely qualifies them to understand and leverage the personal branding process.

I often say that, building your personal brand is simple, but it's not easy." Veterans understand this. The concept of self-promotion is foreign to them, as they have been trained to maximize mission over

self. But this is not how the civilian workforce operates. Those of us non-military professionals see the benefits of self-marketing and competitive advantage to gain access and opportunity in our careers.

As the veteran makes the transition and begins to build their personal brand, it is critical to take prideful ownership of the successes and achievements gained during

service. Then, the job is to make it understandable and relatable to a non-military hiring manager.

There are some significant cultural differences between military and civilian life that impact the personal brand. For example, in the military soldiers are required to be fit for combat and there are strict standards for grooming. In the civilian world, their fitness is a choice and grooming guidelines are on a case-by-case basis. Military personnel also have restrictions on freedom of speech—they can't participate in political activities while in uniform and expression of varying viewpoints can appear to conflict with good order and discipline.

ICOSA: For a veteran returning home from war, what do you recommend as first steps to set them on the right path in building their personal brand?

CITROËN: The personal branding process starts with you and your goals. It begins by understanding what you are passionate about, what you value and how you live an authentic life. In other words, what would you fight for? What led you to a military career? What passions did you bring forward in your service that are relevant as you transition to a civilian career? And what makes you stand out in the minds of your colleagues?

Next, you need to understand your audience's needs. In personal branding we strive to make ourselves relevant and compelling to a specific target audience. As I write about in my book, *Reputation 360: Creating power through personal branding*, (Palisades Publishing, 2011), not everyone will get your jokes or feel comfortable around you. Targeting those employers, clients and customers who will find you relevant is critical and cuts down on your marketing efforts. It is easier to promote yourself to people who already get you.

From there, you can build a strategy and a game plan to market and promote yourself with intention, focus and authenticity. You will begin to take note of your image and body language. You will have a strategy for networking and using social media to build your profile in a way that gets the attention of employers. And you will use tools available to you—gained through service or afterward—to become in control of your perceived value to the marketplace; thus affording you opportunity to grow personally and professionally.

► To learn more about how to begin your personal branding journey, visit www.lida360.com. To learn more about the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, visit www.esgr.mil or in Colorado, visit www.esgrcolorado.net. To learn more about the work of Veteran's Passport To Hope, visit <http://www.veteranspassport2hope.org/>. And to learn more about the Military and Veterans Employment Expo, visit www.mvee.org/default.html. ▲