

Project Management can help Veterans Overcome Challenges of Transition to Civilian Life

Interview with Matt Quick¹

Head of Military and Veterans Program
Project Management Institute



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Matt Quick joined Project Management Institute (PMI) in January 2022 and has been leading its Military and Veterans Program since 2023. He focuses on empowering the military community to explore project management as a viable career path.

With 25 years of service in the United States military, including three years at the Pentagon and over 15 years managing diverse projects, Matt brings a wealth of experience to his role. He is passionate about aiding transitioning service members in their career journeys, offering coaching and resources to ensure they are job ready.

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Serving as an active presence on [LinkedIn](#), Matt shares valuable insights from his conversations with veterans, practical tips, and lessons learned.

Matt currently resides in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and enjoys spending time with his wife, two boys, and his best friend, Marley.

Interview

Q1: First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You are the Head of Military and Veterans Program at Project Management Institute (PMI). Can you explain your responsibilities and objectives?

Matt Quick (Quick): Thank you; it's my honor to be included. As PMI's Head of the Military and Veterans Program, I develop and manage initiatives to support veterans and actively serving military personnel and their families in understanding project management as a possible career path. A large part of the program is educating them on how the skills honed during military service translate into project management. My passion for this developed after I made the transition from military service to a civilian career – project management is a skill and profession I was completely unaware of while serving.

Q2: Why did PMI create this position?

Quick: The U.S. currently has 2 million actively serving military personnel, and according to the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force, the [Project Management Professional \(PMP\)[®]](#) certification is the most requested certification amongst them. While it may “take an army” to keep up with this type of demand, we're building a small but mighty team to add value to the military and veteran community by partnering with organizations to offer project management-focused resources and a supportive community.

With 200,000 military personnel leaving service each year, we can step in and support these individuals in identifying their skills and how they translate into project management as a prospective career path. On the flip side, transitioning military personnel entering the profession helps fill the project management talent gap. According to [PMI's research](#), 2.3 million people are needed to enter project management employment every year through 2030 to keep up with demand.

The U.S. military develops its personnel into amazing project professionals—many of them not even realizing it. That's where PMI and our community come in to support by offering training and certifications for transitioning military personnel, veterans, and their spouses – often at no cost through military-funded programs.

Q3: Some PMI chapters have established programs to support veterans, such as the Dallas, Texas chapter. Do you promote or support such chapter initiatives? If so, in what ways? How can PMI chapter leaders learn more about your programs or services?

Quick: Yes, we enthusiastically support these initiatives. In fact, it's because of the PMI Chapter Military Outreach Programs, like in the PMI Dallas Chapter, that we're able to be so successful with our military and veteran outreach. In North America, we have approximately 150 PMI chapters, and so far, about 1/3 of them have military-focused initiatives. That speaks volumes about the importance of this type of outreach and support for the military and veteran community.

PMI and our chapters actively promote and support each other's initiatives by speaking at professional development events, working together at PMI Global Summit events, and as I travel around the country to visit military bases, I invite the local PMI Chapter Military Outreach Program team to accompany me. We're working together to connect people and awareness.

Additionally, the PMI Military Chapter Guest Pass program is available to our military community. This program allows PMI members to receive a year of free local chapter membership. Chapter leaders can request these codes at any time, and their use is unlimited.

Q4: Has your focus been mostly on American veterans, or is this an international point of focus for PMI? How do veteran's needs vary worldwide, and is PMI supporting veterans in more countries? If so, which ones?

Quick: We began developing the PMI Military and Veterans Program in the United States and are now expanding to Canada. As we build processes and governance, we're actively talking with chapter leaders around the world to learn more about their military and veteran needs. My hope is to continue expanding similar opportunities as needs arise.

Q5: Project and program management have long been critical roles and skills in defense departments and in defense and military programs. Does this history of PM in the military influence your activities? If so, in what ways

Quick: Absolutely! I'm a military history enthusiast, particularly the World War II era. During that time, the U.S. Department of Defense and its suppliers developed frameworks and software for large-scale projects, eventually creating their own project management methodology and propelling project management as a formal discipline.

During World War II, the military developed systematic approaches to managing large-scale projects or operations, including resource allocation, timelines and risk management, and team coordination.

The military has a long history of acknowledging project management as a discipline, like the Polaris Project, but for those outside specific project or program roles, project management isn't known and could be so beneficial across roles. When more of our military learn and implement project practices, it will not only enhance current military project outcomes, but also help them develop skills and experience for when they're exploring a post-military career path.

Looking back on my service of 25 years in the U.S. military, I realize that my entire career was based on projects and programs—and I didn't even realize or understand it. My goal at PMI is to be the person that I needed during my military career, helping others understand project management as a valuable skill and potential career path.

Q6: What are the main challenges veterans and military personnel face when transitioning to civilian careers? How can PMI or project management help the most?

Quick: Three of the main challenges veterans face when transitioning from the military are:

1. **Employment transition:** Skills acquired in the military may not directly translate to civilian jobs, making it hard to find suitable employment.
2. **Cultural adjustment:** The military culture is structured and disciplined, while civilian life often requires self-direction, which can be a difficult shift.
3. **Loss of purpose:** The military provides a strong sense of purpose, which some veterans struggle to replace in civilian life.

PMI offers community and certifications to help military and veterans "find their way" after service. It shows veterans how their skills translate into project management and opens a possible career path while helping them stand out amongst their peers. Local chapters offer networking, support, mentorship, PMP application workshops, leads on job opportunities, and more.

With all branches of the military funding PMI training and certifications through their Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) Programs, the sooner service members get trained and certified, the earlier they can start gaining translatable experience, ultimately leading to post-military employment.

Q7: Did you face these challenges?

Quick: I didn't, but after personally talking with hundreds of transitioning service members each year for the past five years, I can attest that these challenges are real. Recent research highlights the struggles veterans face and only amplifies the importance of working with this community to get them job ready.

A [survey](#) of 1,000 U.S. military veterans found that finding post-military employment was the most significant challenge faced when transitioning to civilian life, with 33% of

respondents saying it was their biggest hurdle. While the military teaches many transferable skills, 20% of veterans never created a resume, compounding their transition challenges. It took an average of four months to find a civilian job.

Another [study](#) found that nearly one-third of veterans experienced underemployment, which is when people hold jobs that don't match their skills, education, or experience. I believe this is where learning skills earlier in military careers empowers them to explore better-matched career opportunities and, eventually, jobs.

This [study](#) found veterans often report that their first civilian jobs lack career development or advancement opportunities, and they end up leaving in their first or second year on the job. This would be vastly different from their military careers, as service members are continually developed and trained – not just in their specific jobs but also in general military leadership and other functions.

Q8: What are your three recommendations for a successful transition to project management?

Quick:

1. Get certified earlier in your military career.
 - a. Take the free [PMI KICKOFF™](#) course to gain a foundational understanding of project management and then earn your [Certified Associate in Project Management \(CAPM\)®](#) certification.
2. Use that training to develop industry project management experience and turn that experience into your [Project Management Professional \(PMP\)®](#) certification.
 - a. Experience is what post-military employers seek the most, so start building experience in the military.
3. Get involved in your local [PMI chapter](#) and give back through volunteering and mentoring opportunities.

This has been proved to be a great recipe for post-military success.

Q9: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Quick: First and foremost, project management is a skill—a skill most military personnel develop in their careers. This skill can lead to a lucrative post-military career. But even if it doesn't, learning and developing project management skills add value to every profession and our personal lives. In fact, LinkedIn named project management as an in-demand skill for 2024.

That's why I plan to earn my Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)® certification in the next six months. You should, too, especially since the military funds it through its COOL Programs! You can learn more about the PMI Military and Veterans Program [here](#).

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

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Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange SA](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with significant manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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