So many veterans face a maze of questions and challenges when looking to transition from a military to a civilian career, but finding the right guide can make all the difference in navigating the potential pitfalls. You want a person who has been there before and successfully traveled down that road.

A professional mentor—someone who can share their knowledge, experience and advice—may be your key to success.

“People go further when other people help them,” said Lida Citroën, author of the best-selling book, “Your Next Mission: A Personal Branding Guide for the Military-to-Civilian Transition,” which offers veterans the tools to successfully move to meaningful civilian careers. “We’ve all had people help us—it’s natural.”

What might not be natural for transitioning service members is asking for help.

“The veteran has to get past the thought that asking for help is a sign of weakness,” Citroën said. “It’s not the same as the military. The differences are huge but manageable. All you got to do is ask for a little help. Having a mentor or more than one is like having a professional battle buddy.”
Mentoring is important because of not only the knowledge and skills veterans can learn from mentors but also the professional socialization and personal support to facilitate a successful career that mentoring provides. But how do you know if you have the right mentor?

“Finding the right one can be hard but is important,” Citroën said. “If you’re training for a marathon, you need coaches who know the equipment and who have completed some marathons. Identifying the right mentor works in a similar way. You have to take an honest look at yourself and identify your gaps so you can plug them. Veterans may want to look at other veterans who have had a successful transition, and it’s OK to have more than one professional mentor.”

A healthy mentor-to-mentee relationship involves no monetary investment or ulterior motives. Mentoring in the workplace is a two-way street that benefits both parties. More importantly, for companies, it can help elevate the quality of work, increase productivity, shore up employee retention and create a more positive work environment.

“The value of a mentor who can help cultivate leadership skills one-on-one in real time, reduce the anxiety in taking big steps and focus leaders on achieving their goals is huge,” said National Employment Director Jeff Hall. “Being mentored is one of the most valuable and effective development opportunities for employees. Having the guidance, encouragement and support of a trusted and experienced mentor can provide a mentee with a broad range of personal and professional benefits, which ultimately leads to improved performance in the workplace.”

Citroën also said that since 80% of new jobs come through a personal connection, a strong personal brand, networking and mentoring are critical for today’s job seeker.

“Mentoring is where you can empower yourself,” Citroën said.
“Nobody was talking to veterans about it, but the word is starting to get out.”

One reason the word is getting out is because of Veterati (veterati.com). Built by veterans and a military spouse, Veterati is a first-of-its-kind digital mentorship platform specifically for transitioning service members, veterans and military spouses.

“This platform allows our target audience to network and connect with multiple business professionals who volunteer their time to provide feedback, guidance and advice through live conversations,” said Evan Guzman, Veterati’s development director. “This past year, Veterati helped thousands of service members and military spouses receive career guidance, job preparedness, job leads and land real jobs. Our goal is to make it more effective and easier for those leaving the military and entering the civilian workforce [to find] an opportunity to accelerate their efforts to succeed.”

“We can learn in a number of ways,” Hall said. “I value learning from other people’s experiences, as I find that to be less painful than learning from my mistakes. It is one of the undervalued aspects of having a professional mentor. We encourage each and every veteran to find and work with a good mentor. If nothing else, you can learn from their experience and avoid the mistakes others have made.”