Transition Benefits: Life after Enlisted Review Board

By Patrick Foughty,
Commander, Navy Installations Command Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – When Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate(SW/AW) Anthony Hughes received news in November 2011, that he was on the Enlisted Retention Board (ERB) list he felt like his life was over.

"I remember my CO (commanding officer) sitting me down and saying 'Chief, I've got some bad news,' and I immediately knew what was coming," said Hughes.

His commanding officer informed him of his selection for ERB, which angered him.

"I felt like I had honored my part of the bargain, and the Navy had just backed out on the deal," said Hughes.

Instead of giving up or feeling sorry for himself, Hughes said he quickly accepted the news and started looking toward the future.

"I literally knew exactly what I had to do at that very moment; from that day on my only mission was to get my family back home, so I could get a new job ASAP."

Hughes is one of 2,946 Sailors chosen for separation by the ERB in late 2011, all of whom were from a list of approximately 16,000 records the board reviewed to help reduce manning and meet quotas in various rates across the fleet. With record high retention and low attrition among active duty Sailors, the Navy became overmanned by greater than 103 percent in 31 of 84 ratings, resulting in increased competition and reduced advancement opportunities for strong-performing Sailors to reenlist.

The ERB was introduced to allow the Navy to achieve stability and fit across the force while retaining balance based on seniority, skills and experience.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert explained in his official blog that, "ERB reduces overall manpower by reducing the number of Sailors in overmanned ratings through conversions and separations."

Navy leadership realized; however, that while the ERB was fair and necessary for the needs of the Navy, it also left Sailors with questions and concerns for their future.

"The ERB and follow-on transition process have my full attention," wrote Greenert, "we are putting great efforts to ensure the ERB process is being conducted professionally and fairly. More importantly, we look to ensure that the means for transition is clear, broadly applied, open and readily available."

For Hughes, that message couldn't have been clearer.

"I knew I couldn't mess around," he said. "With a wife and two small kids, I have mouths to feed and bills to pay. There was no way I was going to let this situation mess up my family and our way of life, and as it turned out, neither was the Navy."

Soon after Hughes received the news, a representative from Challenger, Gray and Christmas (CGC), a firm contracted by the Navy to provide extensive transition services for ERB Sailors, reached out and began working with him on his life after active duty.

"One thing that I really needed to work on was my resume, I was taking action on all other areas of my life, from my move to my out processing, but my resume needed work, and the folks at CGC really helped with it."

According to Hughes, comprehensive resume services offered by CGC are impressive.

"I felt like I was talking with someone that had been through the transition process, was in a similar position in the service when they were active duty, so they knew literally all the aspects of creating a resume for me," he said. "In the end my future employer told me my resume was excellent, and a key reason I got the job."

CGC is an employment placement firm that was contracted to "continue to build on the job skills, success and training acquired during Sailors' careers and succeed in the civilian job market," said Rick Trimmer, a contract manager for Commander, Navy Installations Command, who manages CGC's contract. "We (the Navy) have asked them to reach out to each ERB Sailor and offer as much assistance in their employment transition as possible, from resume writing to help finding employers that need Sailors with their specific skill sets."

Hughes explained that CGC worked in a partnership with other firms and assigned him a personal coach to help with his transition.

"The coach I had, Dennis, offered to take my phone calls with questions or concerns at any time, he even gave me his personal cell phone number. I knew he was doing everything he could to help me find a job," he said.

Hughes reiterated that while CGC was a great help, they couldn't do all the work.

"A lot of this is self motivation," he said. "Sure, they'll help you, but you need to take initiative and work with them too. For instance they could only give me a draft for the resume; I had to fill out my information before their editors could make it presentable."

CGC is also contracted to assist with actual job search help by providing employment resources to Sailors and even practice interviews and salary negotiation techniques.

"I was overwhelmed with all they were offering, luckily, with my networking efforts I was fortunate enough to meet my future employer here on NSA Crane, so I didn't really need the full complement of CGC's services," Hughes explained.

In the end, Hughes' setback turned out to be a road to a new a bright future, noted his wife Nikki Hughes.

"The main 'stressor' with getting out of the Navy is clearly the job search," said Nikki Hughes. "But I must say, within the blink of an eye Anthony had a job offer... with the ERB resources (CGC) plus my husband's natural abilities to take charge of the situation, we are ready for the next chapter!"

Hughes has a job offer with a local contracting company in his hometown of Crane, Ind., where he plans to settle his family after he leaves active duty in September 2012.

"I'll tell you this, no one is going to hand you a job, but with a little help from the Navy and CGC, plus my willingness to lean forward and make a plan, I was able to ensure a future and a life after my 14 year plus career in the Navy."

The Navy's contract with CGC is extensive and tasks them to reach out to all ERB Sailors. Sailors are encouraged to contact CGC by calling 1-800-971-4288 or by e-mail at cgcusnavy@challengergray.com if they desire services and have not heard from CGC. Sailors can also contact the Help Center at Commander, Navy Personnel Command by calling 866-827-5672 for more information.