

Follow Your Dream While You Follow the Military

Wordcount: 599

by Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer

A few weeks ago, Air Force spouse Stephanie Nichols wrote in response to the initial “Follow Your Dream While You Follow the Military” article.

“I just read your article and felt a glimmer of hope. My husband joined the military last year and we are stationed in Germany. Before we left I was finishing my AA degree and starting an AS in Legal Studies. I had a fulltime job as a photo lab manager. I figured when I moved here, I wouldn’t worry about a job and instead attend school full time to become a Paralegal. Then when we return to the US I could start my career. Well, it hasn’t worked out that way and I’m very frustrated! College here is too expensive...I tried to volunteer at the Legal office on base but was turned down...To sum this all up, I’m a college educated homemaker. I have so much to offer and I sit in our apartment day in and day out while my husband serves the country. I need to feel useful again and do something I love!”

Have you ever felt like that? You know what you want to do but it’s just not possible where you happened to be stationed?

I know I’ve been there. I couldn’t find the course or job I wanted at our first assignment either. I stayed at home and was miserable and made my husband miserable. Knowing what I know now I would approach things very differently. I’m hoping what I’ve learned can help Stephanie and others in similar situations.

My response to Stephanie included a long list of ideas and resources along with a promise to research her particular situation further by interviewing experts. With Stephanie’s permission, I’m using her example in the next few columns. Whether your dream includes pursuing a particular degree or career field like Stephanie, or is focused more on a business you want to develop, or a lifestyle you want to create, or some other goal you have in mind, these ideas might help. You just might be able to adapt them to your own situation.

Rather than immediately looking towards ways for Stephanie to pursue the paralegal course, my first question was “What is it about that law career that interests you?”

I know from talking to many others as well as from my own experience that what sometimes happens is that we go after careers or interests that are either money-driven or based on someone else’s idea for us. It’s hard to passionately pursue something that isn’t truly your own dream.

I’m not saying that that is Stephanie’s story. I just want her to be sure — BEFORE we dive into brainstorming and research on how she can achieve that paralegal goal — that that is truly a dream of hers and not a “should” or someone else’s expectation for her.

Many of us spend our lives trying to live up to everyone else’s expectations for us — all the “shoulds” in our lives. When your parents, peers, spouses, coworkers and society all have ideas of what you “should” do, it is sometimes hard to sift through that to get down to what you truly want. But it’s an important process to go through.

To help you in the process of figuring out what you really want, I’ll share a number of resources. This isn’t a “one-exercise” process, but there are good resources available to help.

Next column you’ll find out what career counseling experts recommend in the way of interest inventories and other resources to help you figure out the best fit for you.

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Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer lead workshops and are the authors of *Help! I’m a Military Spouse — I Want a Life Too!*
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