

Good afternoon,

I am so excited to be here today to be a part of the First Annual Military Spouse Career Expo.

The life of a military spouse is unique, exciting, challenging and yet rewarding.

Being a military spouse we get to reap so many benefits not often shared with our civilian spouse counter-parts.

Whether we choose to:

- **Stay at home** – to care for our children or family members with special needs,
- **Work from home** – as a telecommuting employee or self-employed business owner, or,
- **Become career spouses**, - working outside the home in a traditional work environment

As a military spouse, we still get to reap the benefits of personal character and leadership development, adventure, relationships, and most importantly, the opportunity to serve (*our soldiers, one another, and our country*).

But even with all the wonderful benefits, the life of a military spouse is not without challenges, particularly when it comes to establishing, building, launching, starting, or restarting your own career.

For the next few moments I'll be sharing with you information about the entrepreneurial / portable careers training initiative called: "**Virtual Business Ownership**" as well as some of my own personal career experiences, challenges, and victories.

Virtual Business Ownership

Victoria M. Parham, Keynote Speaker

President of VSSCyberOffice.com

A little about Me:

- I am a retired Army spouse since Oct 2004
- DoD Contractor for the Virtual Business Owners Training Program, a Department of Defense Portable Careers Training Initiative, where I serve as Director of Training and Lead Instructor, since 2002
- Founder and president of VSSCyberOffice.com, a virtual business startup consultancy and training firm
- Virtual Business Owner since 1997
- US Army veteran since 1989
- Mom of one (a teenage daughter)
- Transitioned 9 times out of my 15 years of being a military spouse. My most memorable transition was from Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland to Fort Richardson, Alaska.

During this trip, it was a personal test of my knowledge, skills, and technology capability as well as an opportunity to prove not only to myself but to others whom I would later “Pitch” the virtual working concept: “*Working virtually, works.*”

During a 22 day, 5 hour and 30 minute trip, I ran my virtual company from the backseat of our family SUV using a laptop, cell phone, pager, mobile printer, email, and web-cam.

Tasks performed from the road included:

- teleconferences with clients and virtual team members,
- shipping packages
- printing projects
- answering emails
- maintaining and updating the company website
- networking

- marketing
- pitching story ideas to media outlets and,
- landing a high profile / celebrity client

What is Virtual Business Ownership?

Business Ownership, except that your company is exclusively Internet-based.

Why is Virtual Business Ownership so Appealing to the Military Spouse?

For a number of reasons, as a Virtual Business Owner:

1. Technologies like high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi hot spots, wireless Internet access, faster personal computers and laptops, advanced cell phones and mobile devices, make it possible for you to work virtually from anywhere (*home, beach, vacation spot, car, plane, train, or bus*)

2. You're able to build a military spouse-friendly career that transitions with you, regardless of where the military takes you
3. Full control over the direction of your career
4. You are your own boss
5. Flexibility to work *anytime and from any location*
6. Establish a steady income-base and client roster
7. Family / Work Balance
8. Personal fulfillment *doing work you genuinely enjoy*

In the past, each relocation meant a new job search, not so when you are virtual business owner.

Relocation now means, new opportunities to:

- Expand your business nationally /
Internationally
- Expand your services and product offerings
- Expand your client-base

History of Virtual Business Owners:

VBO is an entrepreneurial / portable careers training initiative that was initially launched back in June 2002 as a partnership of the Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, LifeLines Services Network and my company VSSCyberOffice who served as the project manager.

Thanks to the original partners who recognized self employment as a professional career option for military spouses, today we now have the Virtual Business Owners Training Program (also known as VBOtp) which is paid for by the Department of Navy and free to all military spouses.

The Goal of VBOtp:

To provide guidance, mentoring, and training to any military spouse who wishes to become a self employed virtual business owner.

At VBOtp, we believe firmly in training spouses in the virtual environment in which they will ultimately work as self-employed virtual business owners or telecommuters.

We call this training method **vHot** (*Virtual Hands on Training*).

About the Online Training Campus:

Military spouses enrolled in the VBOtp have 24/7 access to a wealth of information and resources:

- Message Board Forums
- Flashed based Course Modules
- Community Instant Messaging
- Event Calendars
- Work at Home / Telcommuting Job Oppty Listings
- Grades
- Quizzes
- Certificates of Completion

- Business Directory
- Live Voice-Interactive Virtual Classroom
- Downloadable User Manual / Tutorial
- 223 Page Participant Electronic Workbook
- Streaming Video and Audio
- Assignments and Lessons
- Student Chat Lounge with Downloadable Chat Transcripts, and, much more.....

Costs for Starting a Virtual Business:

One key benefit to starting a virtual business is the extremely low startup cost.

Let me ask you a few questions: Do you currently possess the following:

- Desktop or Laptop computer? Yes or No
- Printer (*inkjet or laser / color or black & white*)? Yes or No
- A personal cell phone with voice mail? Yes or No

- Internet Access (dialup or high-speed)? Yes or No
- A personal email account (free or paid)? Yes or No
- Productivity software (*Microsoft Office, Microsoft Works Suite, WordPerfect*)? Yes or No
- Microsoft Outlook Express? Yes or No
- A space to setup your office? Yes or No
- Pens/Pencils/Writing Paper & Computer Paper? Yes or No
- A money making hobby or marketable talent/skill?
Yes or No

If you answered yes to the majority of these questions, chances are that you have about 85% of what you need in terms of skill sets, equipment and basic office supplies to get started in your new virtual business...

Some Truthes about Business Ownership:

- Though rewarding, business ownership is not an easy path and it's not for everyone

- Interests in doing business with self employed business owners (entrepreneurial workforces) through formalized outsourcing or contracting is on a steady rise
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics:
 - In November 2005, *10.2 million* Americans identified themselves as self-employed
 - There were *10.3 million* independent contractors (*A person who is hired by a company, but works for himself/herself. The company is a client, rather than an employer.*)
 - 20 Million employees worked from home at least once a week
 - 27 Million workers have flexible work schedules

These numbers signify a CHANGE in our workforce, a CHANGE in the mindset of American workers.

As a military spouse in the 21st century, know that you have options when it comes to choosing a career. Virtual Business

Ownership is not the fix all solution for those of you seeking a portable career, but it is an option.

In closing,

I want to encourage each of you whether you're a brand new spouse to the military lifestyle or a seasoned one:

- Explore all available career options, that one option you fail to explore, could be the ONE, that leads you to the place you're trying to get too....
- CEASE opportunities where there are none (What do I mean?), If there is a need or demand for a service or product within your community, and no person or company is there to fulfill the service or product need, DON'T be afraid to STEP UP TO THE PLATE, and make it happen,

Especially if you have the skills and know-how to make it happen. And, if you lack skills in certain areas, take college courses, get some formalized training, reach out and ask for help.

- Challenges are always going to be there
- Obstacles are always going to present themselves

The one thing you must continue to do in spite of is to....

THINK BIG

DREAM BIG

AND ALWAYS ALLOW YOUR PURPOSE

TO BE YOUR PASSION!

Thank you for your time and attention.