

## Support Networks

**Steven:** This is actually our company coin from our deployment in Iraq. It's my go-to when I'm having a hard day. When it's bad you just remind yourself that these were some of my worst days. My name is Steven. I served in the United States Army from 2008 to 2011 and did a combat deployment in Kirkuk, Iraq in 2009.

**Moses:** Moses, United States Marine Corps. I did two deployments, one in 2004 in Camp Taqaddum, Iraq. The second one was in 2006 in Ramadi in Iraq, and I served from 1999 to 2006.

**Steven:** We were actually at a Veteran's event. The Padres game. He had been working in the Veterans field for quite some time and, graciously introduced himself. And then from then on, the evening, we just kind of talked about what was going on in the space of mental health and how I could be more involved and how we need more people to be involved with Veterans.

**Moses:** I'm trying to enjoy a game here and he's picking my brain about mental health.

**Steven:** I got out in 2011. Within the first six months I didn't know what to do. I was having the biggest struggle of my life. The transition is one of the biggest issues for our combat Vets because you're gonna to feel that loss of self-identity, and no one's going to be able to understand who you are.

**Moses:** We all have our bad days. The depression hits and all of a sudden you don't want to get out of bed again. And it's like here we go again. Mental health isn't a Veteran's thing. We don't have the market cornered on PTSD and TBI. And so mental health is such a human issue.

Growing up in the 90s where mental health issues was an automatic crazy sentence or you're just weak or the toxic masculinity or you're crying so you must be less of a man. And realizing how damaging all that was for, you know, the first 20 years of my life and wanting to create something better for my kids to where vulnerability and saying that maybe I'm not okay is completely okay. That's a sign of strength more so than sucking it up and, you know, bottling it up and exploding later on in life.

**Steven:** To be able to deal with my own issues, it's actually made me stronger and more resilient. And hopefully that I'll have the ability to pass that on to my son.

**Moses:** Treatment and, you know, going to see a counselor and, working all that stuff out was incredibly crucial to helping me put things in their place so I could move on in my life.

**Steven:** It's hard to be strong all the time. And having people like Moses, it allows you to be somewhat, not weak, but vulnerable, so you can allow yourself to really kind of go through those emotions that we try not to go through because we're trying to be strong for everyone else. I think everybody should have someone like that in the corner. People need to talk about what's going on. There's tons of organizations. There's tons of groups. There's tons of places they meet up and reconnect with the community. You need to find the Veterans that are out in the area, get connected and then they also have



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been out for a while, so they can help guide you on what you should be doing to make a successful transition.

I keep these with me. I used to wear them every day. These are the Army values. The acronym is LDRSHIP. Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor Integrity and Personal Courage are our values. And that's what I continue to live every day.

**Moses:** This is a bad picture, but it encapsulates what I love the most about just being healthy. And that's a view of me grabbing coffee in Southern California. There's days where I'm just really taken aback by the beauty of this place, and just having that ability to be in the moment. Just, drink coffee with a clear head and not worry about a thing. You look around and it's beautiful.

**Steven:** Our worst days are behind us. You're here. You have goals. You want to do certain things, so get the help and get going.



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