

## Asking for help is a sign of strength

**Justin:** My name is Justin. I'm still in the Marine Corp Reserve. I am a Major in the Reserves. I deployed to Iraq in the summer and fall of 2006 and I was injured on October 18, 2006. I was shot at by a sniper. We had been a convoy and we got out, we were on just a routine combat patrol and trying to - we knew there was a sniper in the area and we were just surveying the area, and he shot me behind my left ear. I went down immediately, in fact other Marines around me thought I was dead. I'm only here because a young Navy Corps man showed amazing courage under fire and saved my life. I woke up a couple weeks later in a hospital because of that.

Once I realized where I was I had incredible survivor's guilt because I was a team leader, I was responsible for eight Marines, a small team. I felt terrible I was back in America and they were there in Iraq. I know it is odd, survivor's guilt is a weird phenomenon. Frankly, of course my friends, they just finally got me there. They were able to do everything they needed to do. They probably felt worse about me being injured than I did. I just wanted to get back there and be with them back in Iraq.

The recovery has been a long time effort. I have had, I don't know, somewhere between 20 and 25 surgeries although we were very fortunate in my recovery and all of that. Still, it is not like I didn't have dark days and didn't have issues. I would over-react to things. I, like many other Veterans, still don't like being in crowds, I still don't like loud noises, 4<sup>th</sup> of July is out of the question, stuff like that.

But on a more personal level I had a much shorter temper, I would get angry quicker and say a lot of things that normally I wouldn't say and don't say anymore, but pretty mean. The signs were definitely there. If I was just driving in a car and something would trigger a memory maybe I would start crying or I would feel emotional and I just didn't understand why that was going on. I thought, that was 5 years ago, that was 4 years ago, why am I still feeling this way. I consider myself well educated, I have plenty of education but still I didn't understand why my body was doing this. I want to get an understanding of what was going on just so on a daily basis if I encountered that I would know how to deal with it.

I was also looking to identify triggers and some techniques I could use when I can feel that happening inside me as well as I needed a good outlet for these things so my body could deal with them in a healthy manner instead of keeping them bottled up inside.

I do have a rating of posttraumatic stress disorder. I was diagnosed pretty early on when I first had my VA conversation analysis. That was probably within a year of being injured we knew, maybe even within six months. Since then I have gone to a fair amount of counseling and I am currently in counseling now even though it has been over 5 years. It is very helpful. I thought this is crazy not to take advantage and get free counseling and help fix myself. Now I go every two weeks.

I truly believe that asking for help is a sign of strength not weakness because it is easy not to ask for help. It is easy to self-medicate, but it is hard in our society which kind of teaches us especially in the military to keep quiet about your weakness. You don't want to scout on yourself. I consider it a sign of strength and I was proud of myself for doing that. I am proud of every returning Veteran or service member who goes and asks for



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that help. I know it is a tough first step but you owe it to yourself and your family to do that.



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