

I've found an ability to have joy

John: I'm John. I served from 2002 to 2017 here in the Army Infantry and I did four total tours in combat, each a year a piece. Two of those were extremely violent and bloody.

I was recruiting at the time when I realized that I really needed intervention. I was having angry outbursts professionally or in my professional life. I... every task that came up seemed like it was almost impossible. I would accomplish it, but I dreaded every new deadline that would come up. I was a high functioning person with major depression for several years. My unwarranted worry over my career and things like that made it so that there was a considerable amount of distance between me and my family and some emotional detachment.

It gets harder and harder to go outside. You start to feel sick. You don't ever want to do anything except for maybe one or two activities that you engage in for stress relief. I mean, it just got to the point where I consistently felt like my life was out of control and that I was more or less a victim of my life rather than living it. And I had been thinking about suicide probably for the last year and it had simply been with increasing clarity and I thought like, "This is the point where I can either get help or I can ignore it," and I chose to go get help.

I went to the hospital and asked to be taken in as an inpatient. At that point, I was facing getting out of the Army. You know, 14 years being in the Army and now I'm about to be processed out because I can no longer serve effectively with my mental health issues. The first step was four days of inpatient treatment, which was like you go to an emergency room, you turn yourself in, they hold onto you for four days while they make up a plan to make sure that you retain that stability as best as possible. They administered electroconvulsive therapy, which I found extremely helpful.

After that, I spoke with a therapist for a little while and I had a psychiatrist assigned to me that, you know, we met up every couple of weeks, discussed medications that I was on, and after that I went to 30-day intensive outpatient care which was functioning like a group environment for several hours every day for a month.

I found an ability to have joy and to appreciate beauty, which you don't really miss when you're at the deepest part of depression but are worthy things to have in your life. And appreciation for beauty isn't like, "Oh, that's a beautiful painting," my son, being able to appreciate just having him around and seeing him develop, see the nice things that my wife does for me.

If you have severe mental health problems or you're under an incredible amount stress, when it becomes more and more difficult to just do your job and even ever more impossible to do things outside of that, you have to be willing to let go of that stress. We take ownership in the Army of our organization and our institution's needs and we derive self-worth from the realization of our goals. You have to be willing to put those things down to get help.



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