

## VA taught Richard how to manage his triggers

**Richard:** Hi, my name is Richard, United States Marine Corps. I deployed to Iraq, and I was there a little under 40 days. I was injured in late '04. I severed nerves and tendons in my arm. Doctors said I wouldn't be able to use my arm fully ever again. And that put me in a path. It put me down that dark path. So, as you can see, I can use my arm. I can't feel the left side of my hand or the right side of my back of my arm. Advantages, disadvantage, can't feel. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't.

But like I said, it put me down that path to where I started second-guessing if my decision to join the military was the best one, was the right one. Luckily, my current wife is a Marine. So, she was there. She had been deployed. She had been to Iraq. So, she was there through every step of the process. I finally gave in and started doing PTSD counseling. I started outside the VA because I wasn't comfortable just working with the VA system as a whole.

He understood and texted, "We got some great resources that you can kind of start outside for free and then they'll work you into the VA." So, I started counseling outside. And she kind of broke it down. I was having all the symptoms of PTSD. Then I finally gave in and said, you know what, it's time for me to do this the right way. So, I started going to VA mental health. And I think I took a couple of steps back before everything started really working in my favor. And it opened my eyes and let me see that I really did have a problem and there was no way I was going to do it by myself.

What triggers are is something that makes you relive that moment again. And for me it was watching the news, seeing fellow brothers and sisters in arms giving that ultimate price. Loud noises, loud bangs that now I'm okay with because I've recognized it. If something drops and you don't know it and you can't tell the difference, automatically your brain thinks that it's gunfire. So, it takes a little training to realize that that's what it is. So, it's kind of like muscle memory but for your brain.

She laid out everything, all the symptoms and issues, in front of me. And she told me point blank that this is what you have. You have PTSD. And this is how we're going to help you get through it. When I noticed the changes, I was finally sleeping through the night was the first notice. And of course, my wife noticed it right away. I wasn't so short fused. I was actually slowly...she was getting me out, unaware to me. I started going with her to the grocery store. I really knew that everything that she was telling me was working because now I can get through the day without having a flashback. And I was finally sleeping through the night where I could actually function the next morning.

It's tough because, as we all know, in military life you know exactly what time you're waking up. You know what you're going to wear, and you know roughly about what time you're going to get home and roughly what you're going to do throughout the day. And there's that same situation that no matter who you're working with, they know that they have a job to do and they have to do it.

Where in the civilian life, you may know what time you're going to wake up, you may get to work at 8 o'clock if that's your shift, but if you show up late there's really no repercussions. The person sitting next to you can call in sick and may not be doing their workload which hinders you and your workload because you have to rely on somebody else. So, that's the hardest part. It's still using your military values and beliefs in everyday life knowing that you can't turn around to the person next to you and be like,



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hey, you're not doing your job. You need to get it going before I go tell the colonel.  
That's really not out there.

The things that work for me may not work for you. It may not work for somebody else out there. But at least that dark road is not a dark road anymore. There's light being shone because somebody else has done it. Somebody else can truly sit there and say I've done it. There's no way to do it by yourself. I've tried that road and it doesn't work. There's people out there and resources out there to help, so just take advantage of it.



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