

Helping other Veterans to transition

Craig: My name is Craig and I served in the United States Marine Corps. I served in Hawaii for four years from 2002 to 2006. I got out of the Marine Corps for about a year and a half. I actually spent about eight months unemployed looking for work. Couldn't find anything in my field or where military would substitute for a degree or anything like that, so it was very tough. One of the other things that was a big issue and still is to this day is that fast-paced kind of life and you know everybody has a specific job, everybody knows what they're doing and you can just kind of roll into it and it's not like that in the civilian world at all.

When I went to Walter Reed and Bethesda Hospital, I became a patient liaison. My job was to take care of the patients and the family needs for all those coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan. Mostly at Walter Reed, I took care of amputees. A lot of times the Marines, when they were coming back, they didn't want to get out, they wanted to stay in because they weren't comfortable with that transition from military to civilian life, so a lot of them did everything they could to stay in. My job was to try and help and take care of that transition period, whether it was you know get them the mental health that they needed or to get them into programs, which would kind of take their mind away from those things. The physical disabilities that they were dealing with was just a small portion of what it was that they were going through. The nightmares, the visions, the feeling of losing some of their comrades. You know, those are the biggest issues that they had. There was just so many things going on at once that it was hard for them to you know, to really just even put a feeling to it. Most of the Marines that I dealt with wouldn't even speak up about their mental issues, mainly because they didn't want to be labeled, they didn't want to feel that they had any problems. They didn't want to show any weakness or anything like that. It would just build up and build up and then it would lash out in other ways, whether it was abusing their prescription drugs or started doing other recreational drugs, and some of the guys were, got abusive, whether it was with their partners or with somebody else.

The VA is the biggest I think that anybody can offer anybody, because they're gonna be there whether they stay in or they get out. I think that there's a lot of programs in place. There's, like you said, a wide variety of different organizations, different groups and different sports that they can all play or get involved with, where they're not only coping with, or dealing with people who have dealt with those things before, but doctors and professionals who can help them and guide them through those things. The biggest change was with the guys who got involved, who got out and played sports, who got out and got into these community groups. They're the one's who would start to feel better about themselves, start to feel normal so to speak. The guys who kind of kept things to themselves and didn't want to get involved, you could tell that their demeanor would always diminish over time, they would kind of get worse until it would all come to a head.

The biggest advice that I can give to anybody who comes out of the military is to talk about it. Find people that were in similar situations and just share your experiences and how you're dealing with it or what you're doing to you know make it better for yourself. Use Veteran organizations, use the VA, use all those opportunities that are afforded to you, and just get out there and talk about it. Don't hold it, don't hold it back.



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