

## Don't deny yourself access to good programs

**Steven:** Steven. United States Airforce roughly 23 ½ years. My daughter and two sons, they're all in to some capacity now with, well with the exception of my youngest son. He just separated from the military after six years. As my career was ending, you know 9/11 came about. They were all called to duty and I've noticed since all three of them have returned, my children as they left did not come back as the same children that we saw them off each time. Each time they deployed and each time they returned, there was a little difference, a little bit more of a resiliency to them, a little bit more of seriousness about their attitude, about life in general, dealing with civilian sector and coming back was completely different. What we were trying to do is when you come back, try to make it normal, but normal doesn't exist. Normal for that had been peeled back. Now we were having a new normal; trying to address how do we do this; how do we allow you to blend back in and give you your time and your space and then allow you to speak when you want to speak and that's a challenge.

When you meet Shonte, you find that she's a very, very easy, very happy, she's attracted to people. She loves all people. Very approachable. I think she had a big challenge in knowing that the realities of what was down range, you know in the desert so to speak, and then you come back here and individuals are kind of lighthearted about whether it be shopping or doing lunch, but I did notice that there were times when she was maybe withdrawn or maybe insecure about dealing, not her own insecurity, but in perhaps what she may say and people may take it wrong. I think she lost a little bit of the innocence that her friends still carried. Suffering and pain are an equal opportunity employer. War brings all that, to full color. To say it is one thing, to pay lip service is another and then, but to see it bear itself out in the lives of these young adults, my children are not someone's else children; that's tough.

To be competitive a good deal of time, these individuals get out of the military and they're in society, competing and have nothing to show for it. They've slayed a lot of dragons. They have a lot of medals and a lot of awards and yet at some point in time on the bottom of a resume nothing to do with education. Nothing to show how they invested in themselves to gain their education. My 23 plus years of experience told me that as many accolades as I may have acquired, if I didn't have a Bachelor's or Master's or something to account for that, all the rest of the awards didn't really matter to the civilian world.

Typically, when you retire, you go to a VA, have a briefing. There is a lot of transition assistance that the military tries to present to you. A good deal of time, I think military don't take advantage of it. You're busy transitioning out and it's just one additional step. I actually utilized my 9/11 GI bill as well and I promote any of the VA programs. When you go to Yellow Ribbon events or any of the other programs that they have out here, you'll see that there are easily 20-30 agencies, VA representatives, Yellow Ribbon, One Source. There's a myriad of programs out there that deal with counseling or self-help, family. The military is really moving forward in trying to position these types of programs in place and knowing that individuals are coming back. I think one of the toughest things is to actually acknowledge that you might just need to talk to somebody and that just then begins the process for you. And if at the end of the day, you realize that hey, you're okay and it didn't hurt you at all, but to not pursue it; to deny yourself that access or to at least be a sounding board, have someone be a sounding board, diminishes your ability



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and I think that everybody should pursue that type of program that allows you to at least have a voice.



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