

## Reaching out and finding strength and confidence

**Omar:** My name's Omar, I served in the United States Marine Corps. I was a Corporal and served as Security Forces, and I do urban warfare training.

We assisted around the country and the world in securing nuclear facilities as well as Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Our job was to train those Marines to be able to stand guard and react if there was ever any type of situation that arose where someone posed a threat to that facility, and once 9/11 happened, security was extremely high and every few weeks or so we had a new flourish of young Marines coming in, training, and then shipping them right off. I actually felt a tremendous amount of guilt because I wasn't over there trying to help them or, because we're always supposed to have each other's backs, so not being able to be there for them put some guilt on me. Friends of mine, other Marine colleagues of mine just not coming back at all or coming back and they're obviously no longer the same. It hit me pretty hard.

I could no longer sleep through the night. I'd wake up sweating or not being able to even function anymore in my job. After that, I started getting pretty angry quickly. I couldn't talk to other people at all about my feelings. The more I spoke about it, the angrier I got. I couldn't relate to people. I just always had to be doing something so that I could get my mind off of all the other different issues that I was thinking about.

The fortunate thing that I had was that my commanding officer was bar none probably one of the better one's I've ever been a part of. When he started seeing the short tempers and some of the things that I was missing as far as instruction was concerned, that's when he pulled me aside. I was at that point, ordered to start looking into taking counseling. It definitely hit my pride, but it was more of a "Let me go ahead and do it because my mentor's telling me that it's probably a good idea." Literally, it was across the street from our office or building. And so, all you've got to do is just talk to them and see if they can help you out. If they can't, at least you tried. So, I started doing that. At least I was able to start, I think lessen the symptoms or lessen that cycle of constantly destroying myself internally. The first thing that I still actually even use to this day is you can only control what you can control. You can control the way you react to something or somebody. When I was able to actually start doing that, that was an immediate help.

I guess it's just really more of the fact is that I think what helped me out is I was able to do that one on one and kind of not be afraid to be judged by some of my peers. But you've got to break through that barrier and say, "Alright let me...", at least say "Let me give it a shot." We always thought that sharing, it's really more of the way we looked at it as sharing your feelings and that you were weak. And I think it's you're a lot stronger of a person if you're able to share certain things that are really personal.

And then as a result of being able to kind of handle things better, not that the problems went away of course, but to be able to handle things, good things started happening. I ended up getting meritoriously promoted again. Kind of gave me a little bit more confidence to continue to do what I was doing.



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Without counseling, I don't think that I'd ever be able to get remarried and really, truly find someone that I could share a life with. I have two additional kids now and we all get along wonderfully and beautifully but I still do go back to counseling from time to time and try to utilize it. You may not need it every day or every week or whatever the case may be, but then when you go through a hard time, having someone else come in to kind of weed out the garbage essentially and get to the real roots of things helps out tremendously.



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