

## There are so many programs out there to help

**Darren:** My name is Darren. I retired in 2004 as a Lieutenant Colonel, and spent most of my careers an Armor Officer doing everything tanks, culminating at the Pentagon from 2001 to 2004 as the Abrams Tank Fleet Manager basically.

When I got out and retired, it's a lot of apprehension because you're leaving a life that is so structured. It's so routine and what kind of policies you have to follow, what kind of uniforms you have to wear, and a whole different speak and so when you get out after 20 years of doing that and you get into the society where they may not have the work ethic or the work values that you are accustomed to. It can be very frustrating.

I had a lot of apprehensions when I got out of what I was going to do, where I would fit in, what kind of job I would get, and what I found out is that the skills that you bring out of the military, , the leadership skills that the organizational skills, the commitment, the work ethic, and all of that is highly valuable in civilian life but you have to also realize that civilian life is not military life.

When I found out that my son was going to be deployed to Iraq as an Army Medic it gave me that feeling like, okay, at least I know he's going to be the best prepared, best equipped that he can, now what happens to him over there, I have no idea and you just kind of hope for the best and expect the worse sometimes and you worry every day. He was over there for 14 months and once he came back it was like, thank God we got him back. He's good to go. He's back in the states and four months later he was killed in a motorcycle accident. These kids that are coming back that, they feel like they're invincible. They're young. They've just been through a war. They've just been through hell and they come out of it unscathed and they have this invincibility about them, this mentality that nothing can happen to me, look what I've just been through. And so, that, after thinking that he was going to be A-okay, after doing 14 months in Iraq, to have him killed four months later on July 3rd was devastating basically.

Being an officer, you're always kind of the one that is standing out front saying, " we got to do this and we got to do that." You have that mentality that I have to be upfront leading, I have to be the best PT, I have to be the best runner, I have do to this, I have to know everybody's position on the tank, and so, you have the mentality of taking care of your troops but not always taking care of yourself but it's that Officer mentality I think that sometimes is to a fault that we don't take care of ourselves and we maybe not realize that when we should.

I guess, my one thing that I would recommend anybody and everybody to do that gets out of the Army, whether they get out after four years or two years or 20 years or 30 years is to check in with the Veteran's Service Officer in their neighborhood or in their county and just say, "hey, I'm here," and just kind of keep in touch with them. Go in, have a cup of coffee with them and if they do start feeling anxiety about not being able to get a job or having trouble at the home or family life or just any kind of situations that you might find them in, there's so many avenues that they can take now. It's not a stigma anymore to ask for that help as it may have been in the past.

My dad's a great example. He's 81 years old. He was a Korean War Vet and the first time he stepped into a VSO office was last Christmas and he had no idea what was available to him because he just thought, he did his time, he did his time in the Army, he



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got out, he had a successful career, and that was the end of it. And, 60 some years later he finally steps into a VSO office and finds out, hey there's a lot of other things I could've taken advantage of and so why wait 50 or 60 years to find that out. Find it out as soon as you get out and there's so many programs out there to help.



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