

We fought too hard to be miserable

Zach: My name is Zach. I was in the U.S. Army. I was active duty from January 2005 to January 2010. I reenlisted for three years in the U.S. Army Reserves. Now I'm stationed in St. Pete, Florida.

I spent all of my active duty time in jail, pretty much, working with service members who had been convicted of various crimes. And I spent one year of that time in Guantanamo Bay with the detainees.

So we were on guard all the time and my expression that I like to use is, be on high alert, all the time.

I think immediately after getting out in January 2010, I had like a two-week I'll call it a honeymoon period where I was just happy to be out, happy to be able to sleep in, and, you know, not having somebody yelling at me about shaving or whatever. And then, almost immediately thereafter problems started to arise and it became an issue of dealing with anger and getting upset and blowing off all this steam all at once. And it progressively got worse.

In the military you have your platoon and your squad that you're friends with, and then getting back out of that and coming back home to our hometown, I found it real hard to pick up where I'd left off. I had, I felt like I had gone and done so much and grown so much as a person and all these kids were still just kids to me.

So, I lost a lot of my friends coming back just, not because of any kind of confrontation but just I didn't want to be around them.

I got married in the service. I'd been dating my wife before I went in, and I got married about a year and a half into my service.

I don't think she would say she noticed a change during my time in service. It was after. It was the transitioning from an everyday soldier to a weekend warrior. The transition was the hardest part.

I tend to transfer that to my relationship with my spouse, and I constantly want to be in control and feel like I know what's going on. I know what's going on in the house, I know what's going on in our relationship. So it's been tough to shut that element of high alert off.

Almost to the point where I was going to get a divorce. And I'm real close with my mom, so I would call her and discuss things with her and tell her where I was at and get just motherly advice.

And she had some mental health issues and so she would always say, "Well, why don't you go talk to somebody about it? Why don't you go get help?"

For the first several months, you know, I just blew it off, like, I don't I don't need to talk to anybody. This isn't this isn't a problem.



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But she eventually came down for one trip to come see me and hang out, and we had a good sit-down talk, and, you know, she just brought to the surface a lot of issues that she saw and was like people go get help for this kind of stuff all the time. Like, just go see. If you go and they say, you're fine, then you don't have to go back. But just go and see.

So, it was kind of that last face to face interaction with my mom that finally convinced me to go to my primary care doctor at the VA and say, "I think I need to talk to somebody," and he happily referred me to mental health.

The first time I went, I just remember being extremely nervous. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know who I was going to be talking to.

But it was a real relaxed conversation with this doctor, and she spent a good time just getting to know me and my backstory and where I came from, what I've been through.

Eventually, she referred me to a counsellor to just, somebody to talk to. And that's, I think, where a lot of the real healing, I guess, started to take place because she would kind of talk me through some of my issues, ask me to recount. When was the last time you blew up or, had an anger moment? What led you to that point? And looking back now, what could you have done differently?

My relationship with my wife has never been better. I'm one semester away from my secondary education in social science degree, and I currently coach high school football now, so that's kind of my tie-in.

We fought too hard to defend our freedoms and for the liberties that we have to come home and come back to being a civilian and be miserable all the time. At what point does your masculinity or your fear of getting help outweigh your happiness? There are so many services and so many organizations and so many people who do appreciate our service and will bend over backwards to try and make life easier for us. But you have to, A, know you want it, and B, go get it.



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