

Support to succeed in civilian life

Edward: My name's Edward. I was in the United States Navy for four years, 2000 to 2004. The Operation Enduring Freedom, we were actually in Darwin, Australia, and then we got called out immediately when 9/11 happened. It was definitely exciting, but it was a shock to go from, "Hey, I'm out in the Navy, I'm having a good time," to, "Things are getting serious now."

I saw people who were really hurt and I've seen people at their lowest, basically, when I was in bootcamp and when I was in the military.

What it was for me was definitely changing back and going back to civilian life. And that was a nightmare. Really, it was. It was hard.

My first job was at an airport, and I'm like, "Okay, cool," I work at an airport, "I've worked on a flight deck. These things will match up." But my personality and the personalities around me didn't mesh very well and I kind of felt like, "What's wrong with me?" "What's my problem? Why don't these people like me? Why don't they understand me?" And it took me years before I understood it.

I was doing something back when I was in the Navy, back when I was pushing planes around, and made it seem menial to somebody else, but it was actually part of the big picture, so to speak. You know, if I didn't do my job, right, something down the line would go bad and things wouldn't happen.

I was working at the airline and I came and I told my boss, "Hey, I'm scheduled from this time to this time. I'm going to get off at my normal time." And he said, "That's fine," but when that time came around, they expected me to stay longer. And I said, "Hey, I'm not going to do any overtime today." And the person got confrontational with me. And I, as soon as they got confrontational with me, I was sort of like, "Listen, you don't need to get confrontational with me. You don't scare me. I am not intimidated."

It was just more like I dismissed him immediately, which to him was disrespectful. And then that's what just basically caused me to lose my job.

After that, I was unemployed for the longest time because I was depressed. I was just like, "I can't even hold down a job. Here I am," "Here I was doing something. Now I can't hold down a job. My wife's yelling at me all the time and stuff like that," and it was, that's when I started just drinking and, I'd just try to shut myself up.

What finally pushed me over the edge was I had gone through everything. I thought I was doing well for myself. And I felt I wasn't getting recognition, and I was still drinking.

I remember my wife looking at me and saying, "You're acting like your father." And that was a kick, you know, that was a kick in the head right there. I mean, to me, that was nothing, that was the most worst thing you could ever tell me was that I was being like my father.

I didn't know what I could do. But we had gone to the VA hospital before for other reasons, and I had seen all the posters, "Real warriors ask for help," and stuff like that.



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And I was like, “Oh, that’s for those World War Two Veteran guys or Vietnam era people” But then I said like, “Oh, well, maybe they can at least point me the way.”

I first went into, just for a normal physical, and the nurse asked me, “How much do you drink?” And I said, “Well, I drink until it works.” And that answer obviously is not a very good one when they ask, “How much do you drink?”

So she offered to me, she says, “Well, you can go see a counsellor or you can see a psychologist or a psychiatrist,” and I said, “I’ll start with the counsellor.” He asked me what my goals were, and then he just structured them. And, we just went down the list. The number one thing was being angry. And number two was, drinking. Number three was, just allowing myself to just go out and not feel so negative all the time.

I went in for sessions. It was two times a week—two times a month. And then it started becoming once a month. And it became every three months. And eventually, I kind of just, I didn’t go, but not because I didn’t want to. You know, I didn’t, feared it, or anything like that. I just felt good. And I just kind of just rolled with the punches, so to speak. And that wasn’t me before. I had to control everything, you know. I had to have complete control over every single situation any way I could. Otherwise, I wasn’t happy.

I don’t feel I have to, put down a fifth of anything just to get to sleep. I don’t feel I have to live up to anybody’s expectations anymore, which I didn’t realize until I started going to see somebody that I was actually living a life like that, where I was living up to somebody’s expectations.

Seek whatever help you can, because you’re not going to know what kind of help you need until you actually go in there, lay it out, and then say, then they’ll tell you. They’re like, “Well, you need this and this and this.”

You got to put yourself first, and that’s what helped me is just saying, “I got to put myself first. I really got to take care of myself, because if I don’t take care of myself, I can’t take care of anybody.”

And then once you do, it’s life-changing, and it’s really awesome.



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