

You just need to find some ways to move forward

Stephen: My name's Stephen, I served in the US Army from 2005 to 2010, but I was Human Intelligence, so I spent a lot of my time behind a desk. For part of my deployment we did some patrols through Baqubah, so most of my incidents were in direct fire. When you've got mortars and rockets coming in from above, they're indiscriminate, so definitely there were some scary moments in there for sure. I wanted to preserve my career and do some of the contracting side of things.

I was at a gym in the UAE, of all places, when I was working for the Air Force and somebody, if you work with sound equipment, you don't pull a cable while it's live, you shut it off. Well, they didn't know that, they pulled the cable, the volume was up really high, so it made a really loud, sudden noise and I had to leave. Any time you have a sudden, boom you're not expecting you instantly have that turn into a flashback to the time that you took 20, IDF rounds coming in on your base and it's gonna to set anybody off.

In 2010 when I was getting out there wasn't a huge emphasis on mental health at that time. Because I wasn't an Infantryman, because I wasn't Cav or Special Operations or anything like that. A lot of times I felt like I couldn't have PTSD because I didn't go through what those guys went through. I never had any Counselors until I really got beyond that, honestly until I moved to Arizona to start going to school. So that's when I first started saying okay the VA in Tucson has a good reputation and I'd like to get involved with this.

I was diagnosed with mild to moderate PTSD, and that goes obviously all the way up to severe. PTSD can present itself in any way that's traumatic to the person. It's not just one experience that can cause PTSD, and it's okay to admit that you have some things that you need to work through. You have Counselors who have gone through those things and have been to those places that you have, so I think that was the most positive side is just being able to sit across from somebody that's lived it and have a conversation with them about how to constructively move on from that.

For a while I had a touchstone, and that was one that one of my Counselors had kind of mentioned, he was like carry something on you that has some sort of significance, that when you start feeling these things happen you touch that as a reminder. And one of the other pieces of advice was to have conversations with my professors and let them know that these are things that I have, these are issues that may present themselves and I may need to walk out of your classroom from time to time, and learning how to cope and talk and have conversations and be open was some of the best advice I got, for sure, and as a result I really don't have a whole lot of flareups or any more triggers that really present themselves. I think I'm fortunate in that respect.

I lead a team of mentors that help Veterans transition from service to the college lifestyle. A lot of times folks get to college and they don't understand that they need to create their own experience. In the Military we have so much structure and rigidity that need to do this at this time, and then I have this at this time and this at this time and if I don't do those things, I know that there's consequences. College can be different. You have to give yourself a new mission and those hit times are now your classroom times, and those deliverables are now your homework assignments, and those consequences are you can fail. To me the most beneficial experience I've had in my life other than the



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Military is definitely college, is getting out there, learning something new, bettering yourself and finding who you are through that process. You're not weak because your mind is reacting to some things that you've gone through in the past, you're a strong individual, you haven't changed any of that. Now you just need to find some ways to move forward.



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