



HISTORY STORIES

After the War: A Soldier's Struggle to Come Home

A soldier describes the 5 steps of veteran transition.

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War is ugly, but it's not the worst part of military service. I like to explain war as the "easy" part. The "hard" part is getting out. Transition is by far the biggest battle. In war your only worry is death, you don't have to worry about bills and food and all the other small things we worry about back home. I struggled with transition like anyone else. After many years, I have learned to know my place.

I'm a 15-year veteran, four of those were active duty with the second of the 75th Ranger regiment, and three combat deployments, two in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. I lived for many years for the memory of my friend killed in combat. We sat in a hooch in Afghanistan, talking about our plans once we got out. He told me he wanted to be a Border Patrol Agent and join the Special Operations, because they do badass stuff.

How do I pay tribute to my fallen friend? I tried to live his dream. It was fulfilling and fun, but in the end it wasn't my dream.

Transition is hard, but it is doable. I struggled with drinking; I lost my wife and my kids. The hardest part for me was proving myself as a father, as a husband and an individual. There a million reasons I can find to drink in the memory of those I lost – on the anniversary date, on Veterans day, on Memorial day. But that doesn't help me be successful in life.

Eventually I teamed up with some veteran buddies and started a clothing business, [Article 15](#). We made videos that veterans enjoyed and looked forward to. People would send stories how the videos helped save them. That's when I knew I could help

others transition and help veterans find their path, whatever it may be.

The 5 Stages of Veteran Transition

(Not all veterans go through all these, but I'm willing to bet many took a similar path)

1. Veteran with entitlement

This is the one who is always looking for a handout, looking for the government to help them because it's what's owed to them for serving their country. This is the one who forgets that his service to the country was a volunteer decision, and nobody owes him anything.

Note: A lot of veterans have trouble finding jobs. If I went to apply for a job at McDonalds today I would get that job. Do I feel I deserve more? Of course, but if I need to eat and feed my family I will start at any job and build myself up one step at a time. I know this because I've done it. This isn't about not getting the benefits owed to you. Get them and use them. Just don't get out and expect the world to magically hand you a career.

2. Veteran with self-pity

This is a tough one, a lot of us lost friends in some way. This is the one who holds on to the anniversary dates for a reason to get trashed, and feels bad because he is still living. Survivors guilt: the shoulda, coulda, wouldas. This is the one who doesn't realize he is wasting the very life his friend would have done anything for one more day of. What little respect he is actually showing his friend by wasting his life on guilt and pity. It's time to grow, time to move forward; if not for you, for them.

Note: I still struggle with this from time to time, I can find a reason to drink any day of the week because it reminds me of them. But this is a downward spiral, and I have to step back and regroup.

3. Veteran with identity issues

This one holds on to their military years as if that's what defines him. He holds on to being Infantry as if anyone in the civilian world really cares. These are the Al Bundys of the veteran world – they scored four touchdowns in one game but are now miserable shoe salesmen. They hold on to what they did and don't realize it honestly means nothing if you aren't doing anything now.

Note: Be proud of what you have done, but understand it won't carry you in the civilian world. You have to take the skills learned in the military and apply them to your new world.

4. Veteran who feels like being a veteran makes them better than the rest of society

This veterans feels that because they served, it makes them better than the person who didn't. They think they are better and deserve more. They don't realize the civilian world also deals with PTSD, loss and depression, and that civilians also have transitions in life and fall on hard times. We are all human and all have our own stuff, but most people don't look down on others for that. They find peace and continue moving forward, building lifelong bonds with people who care and can relate. They live knowing we all have our issues and we all find ways of getting through them.

Note: Before you were in the military you were a "civilian." Only 3 percent of Americans have served, which means most employers won't know - or care - what you have been through. They just want to hire quality workers.

5. The veteran who gets through these stages to realize he is a civilian now, a civilian who has tools he learned in the military. And that these tools can make him successful.

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