The American Institute *of* Stress

# COMBAT STRESS

BRINGING YOU ALL THE WAY HOME

**Volume 7 Number 4** **Winter 2018/2019**

## Healthy Humor

**The mission of AIS is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.**

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# COMBAT STRESS

We value opinions of our readers.
Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries. Email: editor@stress.org

**Combat Stress** is a quarterly magazine published in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter with news and advertising designed with Service Members, Veterans and their families in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between combat stress because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Combat Stress is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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**The Editors of Combat Stress advise of the following corrections made by the authors of the "Military Moral Injury" article (O'Hara & Vicars) in the final paragraph on page 27 in the Fall 2018 issue:**

*The Listen to a Veteran! Project* (www.listentoaveteran.org) was incorrectly cited as *The Listening Project* and erroneously referenced "listening circles".

Correction: *The Listen to a Veteran! Project* was launched by Paula Caplan, PhD following publication of her book *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home* (2011). The revised paperback edition (*Open Road*, 2016) and the website describe the critical need for civilians to volunteer to listen, one-to-one, to Veterans of any era. The listening process is conducted in private, open-ended sessions that bridge the divide and connect civilian with Veteran by giving the gift of presence and sharing the human connection. Opportunities to volunteer, to learn the process, and to read civilian and Veteran experiences of the listening sessions are described on the site.

*Cover Photo Credit: Kathy Keaton, Therapeutic Clown and Certified Humor Professional*

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**Havstad family from the article: Are You Taking Mindfulness Too Seriously?**

*Photo: Derek Coleman*

# Editor's Message

*By Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS*

I am so delighted to be guest editing this special edition of Combat Stress with my BFFs (Beyond Funny Friends) at the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. As an organization, we study and educate others about the many healthy and helpful elements of humor and laughter used intentionally and strategically for good.

Many of us have worked with and been inspired by military men and women, and many of our community are active or retired service providers or family members. While we appreciate there is often very little to laugh about in the day-to-day lives of those who protect and serve, we also know that when we proactively practice seeing the lighter side of life, we build our cognitive and emotional resources, enabling us to be stronger, more resilient providers to others and more sustainable with our own self-care.

We take our humor seriously, and we hope that as you read through the pages of this special humor edition of Combat Stress, that you too will understand the value of adding a bit of levity to your day. That you will join us in proactively building your mirth muscle, and that in times of stress you will have the reactive ability to see things through a more flexible, resilient lens.

In addition to the stories, tips and techniques shared in this magazine, we'd also like to provide you with more ways to connect with us and learn alongside us and invite you to

*AATH Conference Attendees.*

*Heidi with Comedy for Caregiver Speakers, Yakov Smirnoff (new AIS Fellow) and Brenda Elsagher.*

share your stories of healthy humor with us, so we can support you in your training.

You can find free resources at my personal non-profit, Beyond Funny, including a library of "Moments of Mirth" you can access throughout the day. We are also releasing a new book I'd like to offer readers of Combat Stress for free, which you can access at www.beyondfunny.org starting November 5, 2018. If you're interested in learning more about healthy humor or attending our annual conference, please visit www.aath.org. We'd love to connect with you in person!

Remember, it's not about being funny but seeing funny. Sure, we love a good joke, silly meme or funny cat video just like the rest. But the true power of healthy humor comes from training the brain to recognize what's amusing in life. The purpose is not to ignore or minimize our sad or painful experiences, but to build up our capacity to cope and our flexibility to see things in a new way.

Please help us spread the good word of healthy humor by posting something you find funny on social media and tagging us at @ais_stressnews and #BeyondFunny.

Everyday Health link to article re: stress and humor (re: Announcement of Heidi being named to Advisory Board for the United States of Stress Study by Everyday Health): https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/united-states-of-stress/advisory-board/heidi-hanna-phd-q-a/

*Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS – Executive Director, The American Institute of Stress*

*Thank you Linda for all your contributions to making this very important Healthy Humor issue possible. – Heidi*

# Army Wife – Air Force Mother & Hospital Clown
## *"Sharing Laughter While Seeing the World"*

*By Kathy Keaton*

Strolling past the administrator desk, the nurse looked up at me and said, "Any chocolate today?"

While she is digging through my canister containing a variety of candy, she says, "…try room 232. He's pretty depressed."

After quietly "tap-tap-taping" on the door, I hear a muffled response and slowly peak in. I see him in sitting in a chair, in the corner, in the dark, attached to an IV. I immediately know he's a veteran because along with his hospital gown, he has on his blue baseball cap that says, "Retired Air Force."

"Good morning," I say in my cheeriest voice. "Could use a little humor today? Let's get a little light in here." He nearly growls his answer, "No, I don't need a clown! Clowns are for kids and as you can see, I ain't no kid!" My challenge is on. I quickly establish that his perception of a clown isn't necessarily true. I begin. "Where were you stationed?" "When did you retire?" Then I listen.

After spending 20 years moving my own family all around the world, courtesy of the U.S. Army, while listening, I find we have some things in common. He and my husband were both in Vietnam. My older son is also Air Force retired. By the time our visit is over, he is relaxed and laughing. He finally admits, "Well, maybe clowns are not just for kids. I'm sorry I barked at you. I am ready to go home and hate the hospital." Before I leave, I am able to connect him with our hospital chaplain, who has experience with depression, is also retired military. My job here is done. I move on to the next room and the next patient.

> "Laughter really is good medicine. Therapeutic clowning is a very delicate and specialty area of clowning. It gives me purpose and the opportunity to make a difference."

By the time I stumbled into clowning to entertain for birthday parties, as a young military wife, I'd already lived in six different houses, three different states and Germany. Being an Army wife was fun, certainly exciting and often stressful! I'd learned about protocol, Army Intelligence, Tops Secret Crypto Clearances and how to make a house spotless for inspection when moving. I was happy as a wife and mother but during times when my husband would be away, I was also looking for something to fill my time alone.

My husband was not excited to return after a mission to find out his wife had become a clown behind his back. Now people were referring to him as "Mr. Piccolo" (my clown name). After his return, I remember attending a military ball one Saturday. I only had a brief time to get ready. Going from a clown to a princess quickly was a huge accomplishment

*Entertaining a Staff Sgt.in the hospital hall as she waits for a friend*

with my big hair, sequined dress and high heels. I had been looking forward to the event because our speaker was a Vietnam POW. When it came our turn in the reception line, our Wing Commander, Colonel Powell, who I had met a few times at military picnics and events, introduced me as Mrs. Keaton. "She is also a clown and I never recognize her with her clothes on." Today, after forty years – both retired near Goodfellow AFB, San Angelo, TX, we remain friends and the joke still stands.

We were stationed at Kelly AFB, San Antonio. I had only been clowning for a short time. I would visit the pediatric ward at Wilford Hall Medical Center on Lackland AFB after performing at birthday parties. I smiled at the thin blonde woman as she stepped into the elevator. She was crying and wiping mascara from her eyes. Seeing a clown holding balloons seemed to distract her for a moment. She asked, "Where are you going?" "To see the children," I answered. Beginning to cry again she said, "When you are done, could you please stop by and visit my husband?" Instinctively I said "yes" and immediately began to have second thoughts. "What are you thinking? He's an adult. Clowns are just for kids." "He's a Marine," she shared. "A helicopter flew him in this morning.

*Hospital Chaplin Travis Monday - U.S. Army Retired*

He's so badly burned. The doctor said he is in a deep depression. We are all concerned. Maybe you could help? His name is Kenny." She stepped out of the elevator. As the doors closed self-doubt continued to surface. "Why had I said yes?" "What was I going to do now?"

My balloons and I continued to make our way to the children's ward. Afterward, the ride to the second floor seemed short. Panic was beginning to set in. I prayed, "Please give me the right words. Show me what to do and guide me." When the elevator doors opened there were people everywhere. I thought Kenny might have died. That's when I heard the whispers. "Here she comes. She's here." Kenny's wife had told everyone the clown was coming to visit. They were all anticipating my arrival to see what I was going to do and say that might help. I remember I was so scared I was actually trembling. As I stepped into the room I took a deep breath and silently asked one more time "please" for guidance.

With a little bounce and a merry heart I confidently walked around to the far side of Kenny's bed, slowly scooted the visitor's chair right next to it. In one giant step in an instant I was standing high on the chair looking down at Kenny. I began to play "The Marines Hymn" on my brightly decorated Kazoo-sa-phone that my uncle had made for me.

Looking down, while I was playing, I could see the young Marine's eyes looking up at me. A sheet covered his body, shielding me from any burns or physical damage he may have had, but I could see his eyes were emotionless. As I continued to play his service song I saw the corners of his mouth, ever so slightly, begin to turn up. His eyes began to brighten and then there it was. A smile! His wife immediately began to cry. His friends began to applaud and cheer. A nurse appeared, and someone called for the doctor and I heard the word break through. I slowly got down off the chair and quietly left the room. I sat outside in my car full of emotion trying to figure out what had actually happened. How had a simple act created such a difference in him and changed the atmosphere surrounding him in an instant?

For the next twenty years, where we went, "Piccolo" went. I was invited to entertain at military picnics, schools, hospitals and various events, not only on base but outside in the community.

After our retirement, I started working alongside hospital staff, as well as with hospice patients, cancer patients, survivors and various support groups and caregivers, delivering my message of healthy laughter around the state.

Today, not only for the military but for most, long-term stress is a nationwide epidemic causing illnesses like: high blood pressure, indigestion, anxiety, depression, heart disease and sleep disorders.

Laughter is the perfect antidote for stress. It lowers your blood pressure, is good for your heart and creates special cells that help fight against the flu, colds and infections.

A heart study presented to The American Heart Association in 2001 indicated that those who have a good sense of humor, good attitude are sixty percent less likely to have a heart attack or heart disease. That's pretty significant and pretty powerful medicine!

How can you (we) find humor daily to help us over the stressful challenges and changes that are bound to come our way? Make humor a habit. Watch for and listen for it. It's all around us once we become aware.

## Start with your family.

*My son was in the Air Force for twenty-six years. He was stationed at Dyess AFB, about an hour and a half from where I live. When he was deployed to Afghanistan, my daughter-in-law would meet me half way, so I could bring my granddaughters to visit for the week end. During such an exchange, inside the convenience store my younger granddaughter asked:*

*"Grandma… do you have to go to the bathroom?"*

*"No," I answered.*

*"Well… you should try!"*

*Another time we were driving together, and she asked*

*"Grandma… are you looking for a boyfriend?"*

*"Well, I 'd like to have someone to go to the movie and dinner with," I answered.*

*"You need a Mustang," she said.*

*Retired Goodfellow AFB 17th Training Wing Commander Charles Powell and wife JoAnne*

## Watch for Billboards as you travel

*I once saw a billboard on the way to San Antonio. It was for a medical facility and said "Vasectomies. No kidding."*

*I saw another for a boot maker that said "Steel-toed shoes are not sexy… neither are nine toes!"*

*Yet another that said, "YOUR WIFE IS HOT!" Invest in double pane windows."*

## Watch when you read magazines

*Photography is my hobby. One of my magazines had an advertisement in it that said, "You shoot your mother and we'll blow her up."*

## Watch reruns of favorite funny movies or comedians.

*Entertaining students from the 17th Training Wing, Goodfellow AFB, Texas at a military appreciation picnic.*

## Listen at work

*Since I work at the hospital these stories are all associated with patients.*

*The Veteran was sitting in the hall slumped over in his wheelchair. I wasn't sure he was awake, so I quietly stood in front of him. He gazed at my huge red shoes and slowly raised his head until our eyes met. He then said, "What are YOU in for?" I thought it was hilarious at the time but after thinking about it awhile, I thought to myself, when one has a stroke and is unable to move they probably feel like they are in prison. We often use humor to help us cope.*

*A young mother undergoing chemo shared that her four- year- old daughter kept telling everyone that her mother had breath cancer.*

*In the day surgery area one day, during the month of October, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I spotted a nice looking, tall cowboy with boots, buckle, cowboy hat, starched jeans and a pink shirt.*

*"Is that shirt for breast awareness?" I asked.*

*"Sweetheart, I'm aware of breasts no matter what color shirt I wear."*

Humor is an attitude, the way we look at and perceive the world and what is going on around us. Laughter is the physical response to humor and creates positive chemicals in our brain that surge through every cell and organ in our body. Laughing not only helps relieve stress but is healthy and fun. It bonds us together with others and is helpful tool we can use as often as we choose. A good sense of humor is the number one trait listed when looking for a mate. Laughter is free, no insurance, HMO or prescription needed and no negative side effects.

No matter where in the world you may go… laugh harder, laugh longer and laugh louder whenever you get the chance.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kathy Keaton** works at San Angelo Community Medical Center as a Therapeutic Clown and is a Certified Humor Professional, Keynote Speaker and Author of *"Prescription Humor: Compassionate Stories of Medicinal Humor"* www.piccolotheclown.com.

# too soon?

## THE TIMING OF HUMOR

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## WHAT IS AATH?

**The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor** is both a personal network and a professional resource for those who use humor and laughter in their careers, downtime or both. Our nonprofit, international community is occupationally diverse, representing the academic, healthcare and public speaking communities among many others.

Our goal is to promote the study and use of applied and therapeutic humor as a potential solution for any challenge, from the everyday to the extreme! We do so through continuing education, publications, online resources, and our pinnacle event: AATH's Annual Conference.

AATH is about making one-to-one connections with like-minded people.

For those who love humor, there's simply no resource like it!

AATH

**ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED AND THERAPEUTIC HUMOR**

Visit www.aath.org or call 815-708-6587

220 East State St., Floor G, Rockford, Illinois, 61104

# More Grace, More Joy

*By Chip Lutz*

I'll admit it. I have some hair triggers that push me past the point of good judgement. I won't name them and, most of the time, I have a really slow fuse in getting angry but there are some things that give me the crazy brain. The crazy brain is when you say (or do) something in the moment and later, when calm, you think "Why did I do that?"

How about you? Do you have some hair triggers? Some interaction with another person spurs you to think (or say) things like…
"I can't believe they did that!"
"I can't believe they posted that!"
"Don't they know how what they're doing is impacting me?"
"I can't stand the way they do that!"

You're not alone. It's human nature and, quite frankly, it's doubtful that the person that spurred those thoughts did it intentionally. Granted, there are some that do go out of their way to be annoying, but they are the exception and not the rule. Furthermore, I'd go as far as to say they didn't even realize they were being "like that" and haven't even given it another thought.

Like I tell my coaching clients (and my kids), "You'd be surprised at how much people don't think about you as much as you think about you." So why hang on to it? Hanging onto it only hurts you. I know… I've been there. It also degrades productivity and team trust. I've been there too!

What we all need now is a little more grace and a little less anger. You can call grace by a lot of different names and (in this case) I'm not using it in a religious manner at all. We could refer to it as cutting someone some slack, turning the other cheek, giving them a pass, forgiveness (or any other phrase) but I really like the word grace. And, since I'm writing this, that's the term that I'm going to use.

For me, grace is giving someone the same consideration I would want if the conditions were reversed.

For instance, I have good intentions on finishing tiling the bathroom that I started. My wife is pretty chill about it being incomplete and never hounds me about getting it done. I appreciate that (really, sweetheart, I do). I try to do the same for her when she has five projects going at once and the chaos that surrounds me is toying with my mental equilibrium. That is giving her the same grace she gives me.

I also can say the wrong thing. I hold my convictions pretty close and rarely hold back sharing them when a topic is emotionally close. Furthermore, I think a lot of things are funny that other people don't. I've been known to say something in jest that has been taken wrong and hurt another's feelings. When someone shares their convictions or jests (and I take it personally) I try to remember that I've done the same. That is grace.

I have also been known to screw the pooch (figuratively, not literally). I make mistakes. I can be quick to judge or act without having all of the information. That can cause a chain reaction of unintended responses that stir emotions in others or hurt feelings. When I'm on the opposite

> ***You'd be surprised at how much people don't think about you as much as you think about you.***

side of that chain reaction, a little grace for the initiator goes a long way in breaking the cycle.

We live in a very angry world. All you have to do is turn on the TV, open up Facebook or take a drive and you'll see (and hear) it. Wouldn't you rather hear a little less anger and a little more grace? I know I would. It starts with you and it is your choice. Choose not to hold on to anger.

When my trigger is pulled, and I feel my inner anger starting to bubble up, here's how I try to invoke that grace. Perhaps it will work for you as well.

**Take a breath.** Seriously, breathe. Don't say anything or do anything that you'll regret until the crazy brain is gone. Taking a deep breath triggers neurons in your brain that tell you it's time to relax.

**See it from their perspective.** Is that person really going out of their way to hurt you or is it your perception of the situation? Most people are ignorant to how what they say or do impact those around them. That doesn't make them bad people, it just makes them people. Take a moment to walk a few feet in their shoes.

**Ask yourself if you've done the same.** Have you been misunderstood? Have your intentions ever been misconstrued? Have you ever done something really stupid? Sure, we all have (me, more than most).

**Pull out your grace wand.** This may sound a little crazy but stay with me. Reach in your pocket, pull out your imaginary grace wand, wave it in the air and say, "I'm giving you grace on that." It's the silliness of the action that really makes this work. Just thinking about doing this makes me laugh and it's impossible for two competing emotions to occupy the same place at the same time in your head. You can't laugh and still be hurt or angry. It also helps to imagine yourself dressed up as the "grace fairy" and using your "Glenda the good witch" voice.

**Move on.** That's it. Move on. Quit thinking about them because they're not thinking about you.

Are there things that you can't give grace on? Sure, there are. I know what they are for me but only you know what they are for you. Mine include (but are not limited to): stealing from me, lying to me with intent, hurting my children (and/or grandchildren), actions that show you have no moral compass and eating food off my plate (I'm territorial about my food).

I like things easy. I strive for a life with low drama, fun relationships, and minimal anger. But, like I said, I have some things that push me past the brink of good judgement. I can choose to live in a cesspool of negativity or I can give a little grace and have a little more joy. What's your choice? Pull out that wand and choose joy!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chip Lutz** is a retired Naval Officer, author of "*Get Past the Crap: Lead Yourself First, Bounce Back* and *Get SH*T DONE!*" and (on most days) a pretty decent guy. You can connect with him at www.unconventionalleader.com.

# Are you Taking Mindfulness Too Seriously?

*By Paul Osincup*

Savasana..."

I'm lying on my back at the end of an intense 6:00 am yoga class, dreading the part everyone else seems to love... "Savasana." This is where I'm supposed to just lay here for the next 5-10 minutes and pretend I don't still need to rush home, pack a lunch, feed my dogs, shower, and get to work early to prepare for, what can only be described as a 'colorful' day according to my Outlook calendar. I suck at "Savasana." I honestly just want the extra ten minutes right now, but I'm already the only guy in the class so I'm sure as hell not gonna be the first one to get up and leave.

The fact is, learning to slow down, relax, breathe deeply, and even meditate is good for our mental and physical wellness. Another fact is, that it can be hard - at least for me it is. It doesn't mean I won't stop trying (cut me some slack I'm already putting myself out there with yoga), but I'm just not sure I have the natural sense of calm and patience that some do. You know what I do have though? A sense of humor.

## Why Meditate, When You Can Laugh?

According to Time Health, a good laugh can actually give you a mental boost similar to what you get from meditation.

Dr. Lee Berk, Associate Professor of Pathology and Human Anatomy at Loma Linda University found that:

"Joyful laughter immediately produces the same brain wave frequencies experienced by people in a true meditative state."

Essentially, laughter produces gamma waves which are the same ones produced when we meditate, and both activities end up stimulating our entire brain leading to mental clarity. There's a plethora of other research about the positive effects laughter has on our brains including this information from The Mayo Clinic which states that laughter:

- Stimulates organs. Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases endorphins released by your brain
- Activate and relieve your stress response. A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- Soothes tension. Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress

## What's Your Strategy?

If we believe the research, or just know intuitively that laughing, having a sense of humor, and trying to take life lightly are all good for us, then the question is how do we do it more regularly? Intentionality is key. If I say I want to eat healthier, workout more often, or even be a more patient person, I need to have some sort of a plan. I'll need take some action to make these things happen, because just sitting back and hoping that healthier food simply finds its way into my life isn't realistic. The same goes for humor. I can hope that funny things happen in my life and make me laugh or I can be intentional about finding and cultivating humor.

## 4 Ways to Add More Humor to Your Mindfulness Strategy:

### 1 Laugh at Yourself

This is common sense, but not common practice. I've seen "Laugh at Yourself" as advice given in countless leadership and self-development articles, but nobody tells us how to do it and it's much easier said than done. When am I supposed to laugh at myself? When I lock my keys in the trunk of my rental car on the way to a job interview? Not realistic. Perhaps I can laugh about it later but having a sense of humor about it isn't my initial reaction; I get scared, mad, and freak out. Here's a modification to a mindfulness strategy to help you begin to see humor in your life in real time rather than just retrospect:

According to research from Dr. Willibald Ruch from the University of Zurich, people who write down 3 funny things that happened each day for one week increase their overall levels of happiness and decrease depressive symptoms for up to six months! At the very least you'll end up with 21 funny anecdotes to use in conversation with people to let them know you don't take yourself too seriously. But what's more, is ultimately there will be a moment where something negative will happen during your day that would typically upset you, but instead you'll think "I'll be writing that one down tonight." That's when you know you've begun to train your brain to see more humor in real time, causing you less stress.

## 2 Play with Pain

Bad stuff happens in life, and it's normal to feel like crap about it, but it's also ok to actively seek out anything that might be humorous or make you smile, even during difficult situations. My home town of Santa Rosa, CA was absolutely devastated during the wildfires this fall. I was evacuated from my home for a week and friends of mine lost their houses. During and after that tumultuous week, here are a few of the things that made me laugh:

Photo: Derek Coleman

**1.** Tons of people were at Wal-Mart looking for masks for protection from breathing the smoke. A family in front of me was told they were all out of masks, but later as they passed the Halloween aisle, their young son, yelled "Daddy, there's some masks over there!"

**2.** People shared a list of the most random things they grabbed when they evacuated that included "A lingerie nightgown and some Disney movies", "a tub of Chick-fil-a sauce" and "My kids homework". My thoughts were: a. What are all the other people going to think of this woman watching Disney movies in her lingerie at the shelter? b. Where do you even get an entire tub of Chick-fil-a sauce? c. Those poor kids finally had the best excuse ever not to do their homework and mom ruined it.

**3.** The Havstad family (left) who lost their home, but decided they were still going to take their Christmas Card photos in front of the fireplace!

In order to play with the pain of bad days or events, you can try these 3 ways to tease out humor:

**– Compare it to something:** *"This is worse than..." "This reminds me of..." "It's kind of like..."*

**– Exaggerate it to a ridiculous extreme:** *"Hi honey, I blew a tire and I've been waiting for AAA for 3 hours, but I'll be home as soon as I can... Please tell the kids I love them, wish them luck in college, and text me photos if and when they produce grandchildren."*

## 3 Use Technology

According to New York Magazine, 88% of millennials define their sense of self more through humor than music, sports, or even fashion. Humor is more widely accessible now than it has ever been, so use that to your advantage. Before the ability to dial up anything you want on your phone or computer, we used to have to wait until

late night and hope Letterman, Leno, Carson, or Conan were funny that night. Now, if you really want to laugh, you just need to have the presence of mind enough to seek it out. This isn't the same as mindlessly scrolling through Facebook like a finger-painting zombie hoping something funny appears.

Actively cultivate a humorous archive for yourself. Find sites, videos, blogs, etc. that make you laugh and save them in a "funny file". From podcasts like Comedy Bang Bang! or one of my favorite shows right now, the all-female sketch comedy show "Baroness Von Sketch", there's no reason to hope for humor when you can harness it.

***Tip: Check out the app called "Laughable" – you can search through all types of comedy to find just the right type of humor to listen to!***

**4 Interact with Human Beings**

Technology is great, but in a day and age where interacting with other human beings has become optional, people are still the best way to find humor. Have you ever watched something on TV you thought was actually funny, but didn't laugh? I definitely have. You just maybe smirk a little and think "that's hilarious" but no laughter happens? The truth is, we're 30 times more likely to laugh around other people than by ourselves. So, if you're not having luck adding more humor to your mindfulness regimen on your own, then get social and specifically find those friends of yours who make you laugh!

If you don't have any funny friends, find a group. Believe it or not, there's even a professional conference you could attend that's all about the study and practical application of humor! The Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor is an international conference where people across occupational disciplines come together to present new research and demonstrate novel ways of incorporating humor into things like business, education, healthcare, and well... mindfulness!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Paul Osincup** is a speaker and positive workplace strategist who delivers a rare blend of inspiring content and side-splitting humor to help organizations create more connected, fun, and intentionally positive places to work. A conflict resolution specialist, former university administrator, and comedian, Paul equips individuals with strategies to boost resilience, cope with change, and successfully communicate with other human beings. Paul's TEDx Talk, *"Leading with Laughter: The Power of Humor in Leadership"* has been viewed more than 170,000 times and his work has been highlighted in *Forbes, Success Magazine*, and on his mom's refrigerator. Paul is the President-Elect of the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor, an international organization dedicated to the study and application of humor to improve health and human performance.

# Mind Maneuvers for Managing Stress

*by Allen Klein, MA, CSP*

## 1 Put It in Neutral

If you put your car in neutral gear, it detaches the transmission from the motor. Putting a stressful situation in neutral is like that; it will detach you from your upset. One simple question you could ask yourself to neutralize and change any stressful confrontation is "Do I want to be right, or do I want to be happy?"

## 2 Make the Less-Stress Choice

You always have a choice. Change the way you view a stressful situation and you change the meaning the event. The same situation that stresses you out might not be so stressful for someone else because you see everything, yes everything, through your own eyes. For example, you might be fuming because you are stuck in a traffic jam while the driver of the car right next to you might be smiling because now they have a good excuse for missing a meeting that they didn't want to attend anyway.

## 3 Watch What You Say

Our self-talk, the words we continually say to ourselves, is perhaps the biggest indicator of whether a situation will be stressful or not. Our mind cannot hold both negative thoughts and positive thoughts at the same time. Every moment of the day, through the words you say and the thoughts you think, you are deciding what kind of day you will be having. Words can bring you down or help you rise above a stressful event.

To help you have a less stressful day, here are a handful of affirmations you can repeat to yourself whenever stress starts to mount:

"I have the power to step away from any stressful situation."

"I only focus on things that serve and help my wellbeing."

"I will not let anyone, or anything, ruin my day."

## 4 Accept the Situation

In the Buddhist tradition, suffering comes from non-acceptance. Stress is often created because we try to push away things we can't control or don't like. So, to have less stress, try embracing a situation instead of pushing it away.

## 5 Keep It Light

Carry something around that will remind you to lighten up. Red rubber clown noses are great for this. You can't be stressed out if you look in the mirror wearing one.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Allen Klein, MA, CSP** is an award-winning professional speaker with a Lifetime Achievement Award in therapeutic humor, a bestselling author of 26 books including, The Healing Power of Humor, and the world's only Jollytologist®. www.allenklein.com. TEDx talk: http://tinyurl.com/z4hfsx5.

# BODY ELECTRIC

## Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine

A documentary film to revolutionze the way we think about health and the human body

The American Institute of Stress is an executive producer of Body Electric: Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine, a documentary film aimed to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body. This 68 minute movie, by British producer/director/writer Justin Smith, is available online and on DVD for purchase through AIS.

Members stream for free at stress.org
Click here to buy the DVD for $29.95

**WATCH NOW**

AIS

www.stress.org

# Transformational Growth: Your Life Matters!

*By Sporty King, CHP, ACS/CL*

That's the title of a session I've created for and deliver to Military audiences. What you will not see in this article are the individuals profiled for the sessions, because that would really require showing the presentation including power point. There are any number of life stories we could profile, yet the blessing is to profile ourselves…

Three synonyms I like for 'transform' are 'change, convert and metamorphize.' For 'growth,' I like 'develop, evolve and progress.' And for this article I like that those words are the essence of who you are. So, if we (you and I) were to speak to your spirit with a rhetorical question, what we'd really be asking is, "Are you ready to take the next step?" You've already taken several.

When I began putting this article together I thought about that pendulum of fame that came from failure. Yet, after marinating about the message I decided that 'success' didn't have to equate to 'fame.' And that 'obstacles' were enough to overcome without being seen as 'failures.' So, I've chosen 8 things I think will resonate for you in measuring success and transforming your life.

Many of us know that 7 is the number for 'completion' and 8 is the number of 'new beginnings,' which is what every day and, in fact every moment is… a private message to your spirit that says, "There's still *something* you can do."

**1 Talk to yourself** – Many will say that's fine, "… just don't answer yourself, or then you're crazy." I say answer yourself… if you won't answer yourself, why would somebody else? Who could be more interested in what you have to say than you? And you also know the full reason behind your question or comment. Of course, I'm talking about staying in touch with your spirit… saying things *TO* yourself like, "thank you, I love you, I forgive you, I believe in you, I am you…." Nothing too crazy about that!

**2 Listen to yourself** – I heard a Chaplain say that the lesson behind the story of the 3 Little Pigs, is not as much about what kind of house you build, as it is about the fact that the storms are coming. So, here's what you have to be hearing yourself confirm: "I can and will make it through this storm, simply because I'm a survivor. It's what I do." Motivation is internal, and so often our gut feeling is right. Listen to your track record. It shows you've been through some storms already. It says you can handle the next

one, which is surely coming.

**3** **Like yourself** – most people 'kinda/sorta' love themselves. Yet the bonus is in 'liking' yourself. More often than not we'll not like the way we look in an outfit, how we acted during a situation, what we said to a person…. Like yourself enough to exercise all of your emotions. Don't be ashamed of who you are. Listen to that inner "positive" pride.

**4** **Trust yourself** – you've made a lot of good decisions, and you'll make more. If one door closes, go for the windows. There are usually more windows than there are doors… and we have to put ourselves in position to continue to add more good choices to the many we've made. There are some things you just have no control of. Yet your track record has a heading of resilient. Give yourself credit. Like your chances.

**5** **Share yourself** – you can't do it alone. Build your support system if it's lacking. Engage others – you can't do it alone. Every success story you hear has 'someone' in the picture with them. Did I mention 'You can't do it alone?' Trust your quality team.

**6** **Know where your cameras are** – somebody's always watching. Your reputation is always at stake. No need to give in to paranoia or think yourself crazy. Someone IS watching you. The key is to remain tapped into the mindset that they're learning from your actions that were introduced by your words.

**7** **Laugh** - A full day, and a heck of a day is anchored by laughter.

**8** **Choose your messengers carefully** - When we were kids we played "Follow the Leader." Remember that as you follow one, you lead another. You need the people in your life who want to help lift you up, and vice versa.

## Change, Convert and Metamorphize Develop, Evolve and Progress

Transformational growth understands and embraces those 6 words, thus will never be about being lucky. To get where you're meant to go, you have to see yourself as being worthy, and good enough. So, I close with one of my signature poems, *"Sometimes I Wish I Were Lucky,"* because I don't believe in luck… I believe in being good and recognizing that gift as worth expressing. And though I've had people say, "Sporty you're just self-centered and conceited." I reply, "Actually I'm self-confident and convinced." I'm convinced I'm good and I know how good I am. And so are you!

Here's what you have to be hearing yourself confirm:

**"I can and will make it through this storm, simply because I'm a survivor. It's what I do."**

Think about it… are you looking forward to rolling in on the stretcher in the ER and the 'lucky' doctor is hoping you're their chance to operate like they've seen it done on Grey's Anatomy, or because they're feeling lucky? Nope! You're looking for the good doctor who will be able to offer you an honest diagnosis of recovery and life. You look for the good people

to add to your life. And you know that you can only attract them by being one of the good people… 'Like' attracts 'Like!'

So, remember:

- You're not lucky to be in a relationship… You're good enough to be loved!
- You're not lucky to pass a test… You're good enough to get an education!
- You're not lucky to make the team… You're good enough to be in the game!
- You're not lucky to have a job… You're good enough to be gainfully productive!
- You're not lucky to be alive… You're good enough to enjoy this gift called life!
- You're not lucky to find God… You're good enough to be blessed that God never gave up on you!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sporty King, CHP, ACS/CL** helps people become better listeners through his use of humor, positive original poetry and wisdom, focusing on ENJOYING their personal and professional success. King believes that success is about confidence and listening… how people feel about themselves affects their ability to listen. He gets tangible positive results by helping people contribute to the bottom line by envisioning themselves as an important piece of every puzzle based on feeling good about themselves. He calls it *The Top Line*… and without it, there are no bottom line results.

## SOMETIMES I WISH I WERE LUCKY

Sometimes I wish I were lucky
Instead of just so… good.

If I could just be lucky
I might share my luck
No (in fact) I know I would.

Some people think that I'm lucky
I correct and remind them that I'm blessed
I'm fortunate, spiritual, in tune with myself
Nothing outweighs my thirst for happiness

You see luck, itself, doesn't last
It supplies a glimmer of hope or chance
Luck forces you to take risks
Being blessed allows you to take a stand

Luck can give you that "On top of the world" feeling
That instant fix of elation
Being fortunate keeps you "on top of the world"
And allows you to enjoy the sensation

Spirituality is such a popular thing now
But it means much more than meets the eye
If you get lucky enough to get spiritual
Hold on, don't let that spirit die

If you get lucky enough to find yourself
Enjoy the challenge of introspection
Realize its value toward your growth

Understand that you're supposed to have success
Your purpose is ordained
You must choose to lead a prosperous life
You must make sunshine out of rain

But, I must admit
Sometimes I wish I were lucky
Instead of just so… good
But would I stand out from the rest?

If you're lucky you can be in good company
If you're blessed, you can be with the best

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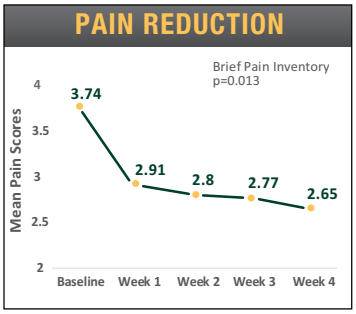


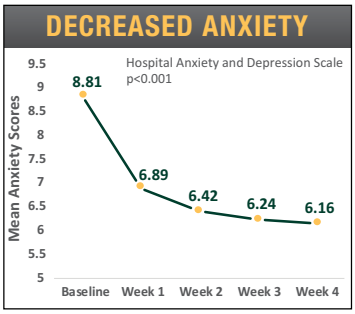


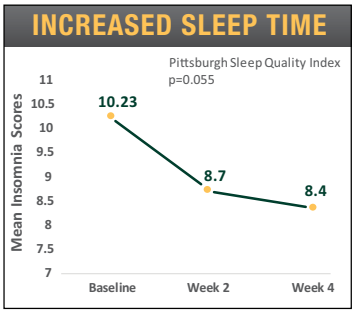


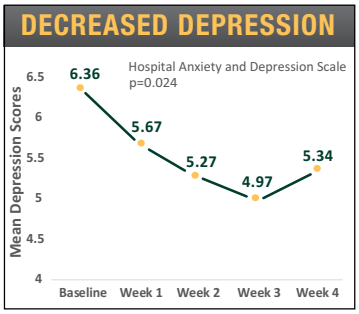


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# VETERAN SPOTLIGHT

## An Interview with Medal of Honor Recipient SGT Dakota Meyer

*by Dr. Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS*

After completing U.S. Marine Corp basic training, Dakota L. Meyer deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, in 2007 as a Scout Sniper with the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. He gained national attention for his actions in Afghanistan during his second deployment to the Kunar Province with an Embedded Training Team.

On September 8, 2009, near the village of Ganjgal, Meyer learned that three U.S. Marines and a U.S. Navy Corpsman were missing after being ambushed by a group of insurgents. He charged into an area known to be inhabited by insurgents and under enemy fire. Meyer eventually found all four dead and stripped of their weapons, body armor, and radios. With the help of some friendly Afghan soldiers, he moved the bodies to a safer area where they could be extracted. During his search, Meyer personally evacuated 12 friendly wounded and provided cover for another 24 Marines and Soldiers to escape likely death at the hands of a numerically superior and determined foe.

General James Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, told reporters during a visit to Camp Pendleton, California, on November 6, 2010, that a living U.S. Marine had been nominated for the Medal of Honor. Two days later, Marine Corps Times, an independent newspaper covering U.S. Marine operations, reported that the unnamed individual was SGT Dakota Meyer.

On June 9, 2011, the U.S. Marine Corps announced that two other U.S. Marines on Meyer's team in Ganjgal would receive the Navy Cross, the second-highest award for valor a Marine can receive. Captain Ademola D. Fabayo and Staff Sergeant Juan J. Rodriguez-Chavez were recognized for their roles in retrieving the Marines and Corpsmen. Before Meyer went looking for the missing men on foot, Rodriguez-Chavez drove a gun truck into the kill zone, with Fabayo manning its machine gun.

When U.S. President Barack Obama's staff contacted Meyer to arrange a time for the President to inform him that his case for the Medal of Honor had been approved, Meyer was working at his construction job and asked if they could please call him back when he was on his lunch break, which they later did. Dakota then returned to work.

Meyer was awarded the Medal of Honor at a ceremony on September 15, 2011. When a White House staffer contacted Meyer to arrange the ceremony, Meyer asked if he could have a beer with the President. He received an invitation to the White House the afternoon before the ceremony. Meyer also requested that when he was honored, simultaneous commemorative services should be held at other associated locations to honor the memory of his colleagues who died or were mortally wounded during the ambush and his rescue attempts.

Four Americans died in the ambush: 1st Lieutenant Michael Johnson, a 25-year-old from Virginia Beach, VA; Staff Sergeant Aaron Kenefick, 30, of Roswell, GA.; Hospital Corpsman Third Class James R. Layton, 22, of Riverbank, CA.; and Edwin Wayne Johnson Jr., a 31-year-old Gunnery Sergeant from Columbus, GA. A fifth man, Army Sergeant First Class Kenneth W. Westbrook, 41, of Shiprock, NM, later died from his wounds.

SGT Dakota Meyer is the youngest living Medal of Honor recipient, the third living recipient for either Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan, and the first living Marine in 41 years to be so honored.

MINI 400

**American Institute of Stress Executive Director Dr. Heidi Hanna sat down with SGT Meyer in September 2018 to discuss his experience as a Marine, his resultant anxiety, his reintegration into society, and giving back by helping others.**

DR. HANNA: Thank you Dakota for joining us – we appreciate you. I actually have a bit of a personal question to start off with. I always want to say to veterans, "Thank you for your service," or something like that, to show appreciation. And yet I always feel lwwike that's such a wimpy thing to say. So, I find myself not knowing quite how to engage people, but I'm really so grateful, so I thought, well, I'll just ask Dakota because here I am finding myself doing the same thing.

**SGT MEYER: It's kind of like the same thing back. I mean – for us, it's the same way. It was my honor. I should be thanking you. The way I feel about it is, I should be thanking you for letting me go and represent you and serve our country. It's always good to hear, "Thank you for your service," but I mean, you don't owe me anything. You don't owe me that. You know what I'm saying?**

DR. HANNA: Right. Well, of course. I feel like I want to share appreciation or give gratitude. There's so many people out there doing amazing things and -

**SGT MEYER: So many.**

DR. HANNA: It feels good to be able to share that. And at the same time, it's like – I know you weren't there for me specifically, so it's not about me.

**SGT MEYER: Well, I was. I was there for you. I mean I was there for you just as I was for anybody else.**

DR. HANNA: Yeah.

**SGT MEYER: At the end of the day, you paid your taxes, so we all did our role. You know, you paid my salary, so thank you for letting me represent you. That's kind of where the whole thing just comes into it, you know?**

DR. HANNA: It's interesting that you think that – and I think it says a lot about who you are. Looking at your website, and your background, it seems you're about; that we are all in this together, and it's cool when we can do what we can to help other people.

**SGT MEYER: Everybody has to be a "cog" in the wheel.**

DR. HANNA: Yes. I know your website Own the Dash speaks about us all as kind of knowing what your thing is and how you can serve and go after it, right?

**SGT MEYER: Yeah. It takes everybody just playing the part that they're made for. I believe that everybody has a part they're made for, and that's what they've got to do and be okay with and be comfortable with and be content with, you know?**

DR. HANNA: Right. I know you've gone through your story a lot, but I'm hoping that you can share a little bit of background for our readers who may not be familiar with your story. And maybe just start by sharing how many times have you deployed and where you deployed to?

**SGT MEYER: Sure. I was in the Marine Corps. I was a sniper. I was the youngest sniper in the Marine Corps in 2007 and**

**ended up going to Iraq. I served in Iraq in 2007, and then I came back and returned to Afghanistan in 2009. I was in Afghanistan in 2009 for a couple of months, and I was in a pretty big gun fight over there. I lost my whole team.**

DR. HANNA: Wow.

**SGT MEYER: And that was what I was awarded the Medal of Honor for.**

DR. HANNA: Wow. So, I can't imagine the challenges of that. Can you talk a little bit about what that was like – losing your team, can you share a little bit about how that affected you?

**SGT MEYER: It forever changed my existence. It wasn't the first time I'd seen somebody die, but it was just that you lost everybody; the people you cared about the most, the closest to you, the people that were relying on you the most. You always know the risk of going over there that – we all took that risk together, and we all knew the risk before we went there, but I think the reality of coming home with nobody was a tough thing to swallow, and it's something that affects me every single day.**

DR. HANNA: Of course. I know you've shared a little bit about your struggles with anxiety. Did you struggle with that before you went into the service – or was it more a result of what you experienced when you were there?

**SGT MEYER: I didn't really start struggling with anxiety real, real badly until probably October of 2016. And it's just gotten worse. I mean I'm to the point now to where I have to go in once a week to get a stellate ganglion block.**

DR. HANNA: So, when you were there and when you were in the service and you had this traumatic experience and came back, did you notice that you were starting to struggle at all with any of those challenges or do you think it was delayed?

**SGT MEYER: I think it was delayed. I think that I struggled a lot when I came back. I mean I had a – I had a suicide attempt in 2010. September of 2010. But I think when I – when I look back to that struggle, I think that that struggle was totally different than this one. That struggle was more of a transition struggle than a true combat struggle. I think there was a difference. And so, I think that what I'm dealing with now is – it's kind of like I can only keep Pandora's box closed so much. And I think that the more I'm squeezing on that Pandora's box lid to keep it closed - it's pushing out in other ways, and I think that's what's happening, that it's coming out through anxiety, you know?**

DR. HANNA: And you said something – I watched one of your videos on your website, and I wrote this down because it really impacted me. You said, "When the body can't close the door or a file on something, it has to come out somewhere."

**SGT MEYER: Yeah.**

DR. HANNA: That makes me think of that.

**SGT MEYER: Yeah.**

DR. HANNA: Something what happened in your life that doesn't have a chance to get resolved or closed or something happens with it, and then it's embodied.

**SGT MEYER: And I think what happens is that we have to do a job, and we're taught to shut this stuff down. We're taught to take emotions away from it. And I think emotions are what the body uses to process feelings**

**– I think it's like you go through a hard workout, then your soreness comes in after that workout, that's your body growing; that's it processing through lactic acid and all that, right?**

**I think that's what emotions are for, an event. I think it's the same thing. Without having those emotions tied to it, I don't think you ever get to process and grow and be better from it. And so I think that what happens is, with our training, we disconnect from that and we just push it down, right? Because emotions will affect your job. If you don't take emotion out of doing your job, you cannot do your job 100%, you know?**

**I think that we do that so much that the body never really gets to recover and process, and I think that's when you start seeing guys like me. And I think once you've turned those emotions off so much and so long and the trauma is built up so much, I think that my problem is I would be scared to do a treatment that would turn my emotions back on, because I don't know how to deal with it. I mean I don't even know if I've ever faced that I will never see my teammates again yet. I don't even know if I've processed that yet.**

DR. HANNA: Because it's so sudden and so emotional and so deep that that disconnection kind of helps you survive the moment, right?

**SGT MEYER: It did. And I've had to do that for so long, because I've still got to go to work, right? I mean I've still got to go and function every day. I couldn't – I mean what if I needed some time off to process everything? I don't have time for it. I've got kids that rely on me every single day. I don't have time to open Pandora's box and kind of shuffle through it. It's like that box is in the attic. You just stored it up there, and it's like, I need to get to it to go through it and get rid of what I don't want. And you just don't have time for it, because life is going on.**

DR. HANNA: And to your point, it's scary to think that if all of that emotion, that powerful emotion, has been locked up in there, what happens if you go in there and it's too much?

**SGT MEYER: So that's my problem, right?**

**That's my fear. And so, what I especially do is use the Alpha-Stim. Alpha-Stim has been a tool in my toolbox to help me go through my daily functions.**

DR. HANNA: Uh-huh.

**SGT MEYER: It's more of, you know, to try to put the Band-Aid on it.**

DR. HANNA: Have you found a way – are you engaged at all in talk therapy? Do you have someone that you talk to about things or do you have a group? Have you done any kind of group work with other people who have had similar experiences? This isn't something most people experience, so it'd be hard to even have other people to connect with around it, I would think.

**SGT MEYER: I don't. I don't know. I don't ever label trauma. I don't ever think that my worst days are worse than your worst days.**

DR. HANNA: Sure.

**SGT MEYER: Like, whatever is traumatic to somebody and how they process that – I don't ever go through it like that, right? I think people shouldn't try to say, my trauma is worse than yours – no, I don't think that anybody could ever understand anybody else's trauma, because they weren't in it together. And even if you were both in the same situation, it's still seen and comes at you a different way. You know what I mean?**

DR. HANNA: I certainly do. You just defined the stress reaction.

**SGT MEYER: Only you can deal with your own trauma. I mean, look, I think the closest people who can relate to combat trauma is a sexual assault victim. I believe their trauma is a million times worse than the trauma I went through. And so I haven't done any talk therapies because I don't trust anybody in that aspect.**

DR. HANNA: Are there other things that you rely on to process those emotions, in addition to Alpha-Stim? I know you mentioned working out. Is physical exercise helpful?

**SGT MEYER: Yeah, physical exercise, if I can get to that. I use Alpha-Stim every day.**

DR. HANNA: That's good.

**SGT MEYER: I do physical exercise, and I do stellate ganglion blocks quite a bit, which is incredible. It's probably – as far as the medicine or as far as a procedure, it's by far the most relief and hope that has been given to me in this whole thing. And then I also do a Ketamine nasal spray.**

DR. HANNA: Do you have a social support network at all? Do you keep in touch with any of your fellow Marines at all?

**SGT MEYER: I don't. But I have buddies. I have close friends, but not Marines. I mean I've got close buddies. I've got a lot of close buddies. I'm fortunate that I have the people around me that I do. Marcus Luttrell has been just incredible. He's close – and Melanie, his wife. I can go down a list of a ton of people like that, yeah, absolutely, that would take care of me.**

DR. HANNA: Does it feel helpful to have people like that who have been in similar situations? Maybe it's not the exact same situation, but as far as dealing with emotions and dealing with loss?

**SGT MEYER: I don't think so. Obviously, Marcus and I can relate on a whole different level, right? Because I mean it's not like his is worse than mine, but it's kind of a similar situation. But, no, I mean some of the people**

**that are around me never even been in combat. They never served. It's just people who are – I call them emotionally intelligent.**

DR. HANNA: Sure.

**SGT MEYER: There are people who care and people who are there to love and support you no matter who you are, right? The people who choose to see good in you.**

DR. HANNA: Right. Do you feel like there's anything that we can do better to help prepare people for the experiences that they're going to have?

**SGT MEYER: I think the one thing that screwed me in the whole situation, was the kind of mindset that I never went through training that if I did everything that I could I could still fail. And I think that's a mental block, because we live by the credo that you either get them out alive or you die trying. If you didn't die trying, you didn't try hard enough.**

DR. HANNA: Hmm, wow.

**SGT MEYER: And so I think that is a big piece of it – and then I think another thing that we can do a whole lot better at, and where I think our biggest gap is in this – and it's such a low-hanging fruit – is what are we doing to educate the support systems of these people coming home?**

DR. HANNA: Yes.

**SGT MEYER: Like, what are we doing to educate the spouses and the support systems to understand, hey, here's the process, help them get through the process. This is not just about an individual. I mean this is a family business, you know?**

DR. HANNA: Yes.

**SGT MEYER: I just lost my marriage and everything over anxiety – over everything. And, I think it's because – I mean, I think she choose not to – I gave her all the resources she could use, so some people won't. They'll choose not to care about it. I still think that we have to do a better job of educating people on the support systems.**

DR. HANNA: Yeah. Well, I think understanding better what anxiety is, what's happening in the brain, how the brain rewires itself – I mean there's a lot of stuff that's going on that is happening, especially in a situation like you were in where the brain has actually rewired itself to operate in a really different way that most people would ever understand. I totally get that.

So, it makes me wonder then in educating support systems ahead of time that this is going on and this is the way the brain works, if that would be helpful. To know what to expect when the person comes back and how to support them. But it always makes me wonder, especially for a situation where you've been in the military and you come back, just feeling like other people don't get it.

You don't seem to have that same perspective. I've heard other people say, unless you've been there, you really don't get it.

**SGT MEYER: But I think anybody who says that, that's a cop-out answer. I look at an answer like that as somebody making an excuse, and it's them not wanting to take accountability for things, they just don't want to be called out. That's their safe spot, right? There's some people who don't get it, and they're never going to get it. But I mean even people who were standing next to me don't get it. You know what I mean?**

DR. HANNA: Sure.

**SGT MEYER: It's just that – when I hear somebody say, well, you weren't there, you don't get it. I think that's them saying, hey, I'm not secure enough with myself to deal with this and so I just need an excuse. Because I used to do that. I used to do that shit all the time. Well, you don't get it, you weren't there; you've never seen combat. Well – you know, I don't have to see combat to be able to understand. It's just one of those deals.**

DR. HANNA: Yeah. To your point, I mean, everybody has their own drama, their own trauma –

**SGT MEYER: Everybody has their own struggle. Everybody has done life. Now, obviously, you can never go talk to a 12-year old about trauma and expect them to be able to emotionally and intelligently understand. But I think that when people say you can't understand what it is like – it's kind of the easy thing way out, you know, like an African-American saying, well, you don't know what it's like to live as me.**

**Everybody in some way, shape, or form has been discriminated against. Whether I've got tattoos on my arms or whether I am a young man walking into a room full of older businessmen or anything, right? We all know what it feels like, maybe not the same level, but we can all relate there. I think once you look at other people and you say, you can never understand what I've gone through – I think that's a defense mechanism. You know what I mean?**

DR. HANNA: Yeah.

**SGT MEYER: But, yeah. I mean that's just my uneducated point on it.**

DR. HANNA: Well, you're plenty educated. Plus, you got a lot of life education real fast.

**SGT MEYER: Oh, gosh. Yeah, I got a little bit.**

DR. HANNA: So, I'm thinking about what it is that we want to be able to share with people, whether it's lessons that you've learned or – I think what's really important is what you said; this low-hanging fruit where we should have better educational support systems. I think that's super important. It's certainly something I'd like to do.

You've mentioned 2010 being really difficult and kind of it being transition trauma. So, was there something about that coming home, transitioning back to this other life that was harder than you thought it would be?

**SGT MEYER: Well, I made it harder on myself. I got out with that chip on my shoulder of, you know, I've just served this country; the world owes me; they've never been to combat. You know, I mean I walked out with that mentality. I was my biggest enemy. And I think understanding that entitlement attitude, getting rid of all that – I think I was my biggest enemy. Look, I didn't prepare**

**myself to get out. You know, I procrastinated and I kind of set myself up for failure.**

DR. HANNA: It's hard for me to hear you say that. I feel like it's respectable that you take so much ownership of what you could have done differently. And then at the same time, I feel like that's a really radical step to take. I mean did you feel like there are services or educational programs or different things that you could have taken advantage of that maybe you didn't?

**SGT MEYER: I don't know if I could have then, but I do know that they're there now.**

DR. HANNA: Yeah.

**SGT MEYER: Because I've been – that's one of my big, leading things I do.**

DR. HANNA: Tell me about that.

**SGT MEYER: I work with Hiring Our Heroes, and Toyota, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on a transition program to help veterans transition out of the military.**

DR. HANNA: Hiring Our Heroes. Oh, very cool. And so, part of it is transitioning with the perspective of finding a job, job placement?

**SGT MEYER: Yeah, employment and getting back to the right spot, getting back in the community, getting that support system back around you, and understanding how important that is.**

DR. HANNA: Are there educational components of that program that teach you things like dealing with emotions?

**SGT MEYER: No. No, it's not that those emotions do stuff – I mean that's a whole different level. But I think you can't deal with those emotions unless you have a secure life. You know what I mean?**

DR. HANNA: Sure.

**SGT MEYER: They're kind of twofold, right? It's kind of like that three-legged stool.**

DR. HANNA: So, getting a job, having the community support, feeling more stable could bring you to a place where maybe you could start dealing with the emotional component of it?

**SGT MEYER: Yeah, because you want to amplify – you want to talk about amplifying and start the downward spiral. I mean it's already emotional enough from the combat stress you've seen but go ahead and make it to where you can't pay your bills and you can't be the provider, and you take out a whole other level of stability of your foundation.**

DR. HANNA: That makes a lot of sense. That's a huge piece. So, if you were to do this over again – if you were just getting ready to enlist or if your son was getting ready to enlist or someone you knew was getting ready to – do you have any advice or guidance that you would give them?

**SGT MEYER: For getting out or getting in, going on?**

DR. HANNA: Either way, I guess?

**SGT MEYER: Well, for getting out, be proactive; understand that your service is going to end sometime, and you never know what it's going to be like, whether it's an injury or something like that. Always be proactive and be preparing yourself to transition out. It will do two things: Number 1, it makes you better prepared for getting out, but it also makes you a better Service Member as well. Do that and also understand – have your spouse with you or your support system with you and bring them along with you, right? I mean so many times we want to do it all on our own. And utilize the services that we have inside the military, use them and be proactive about it. Don't wait until you're out to start worrying about finding a new job.**

DR. HANNA: That makes a lot of sense. So where are you at right now? I know you're still dealing with a lot of these different things. Is there something that you're excited about? It seems like you're contributing to a lot of different things and involved in a lot of different things. Is there something that kind of keeps you focused?

**SGT MEYER: Trying to make a difference in the world. Obviously, I've got my two daughters and I'm living for them every day. I mean they're my why. But I just believe in people. I believe in humanity. And I just want to change the world. I want to make – whatever I can do every single day to make someone's life better is what my goal is. I just hope that someday I can look back and – like, I don't hope; I'm going to. I'm going to change the world and make it a better place.**

DR. HANNA: Right. And right now, among the things that you're working on – is Own the Dash something that you're actively working on?

**SGT MEYER: Own the Dash is a community that I have. I'm trying to let people know that they matter, they're important. They can't believe the lies that their mind tells them. If they don't think that they're important enough – they're important to me. Everybody matters to me, and so that's what the Own the Dash community is about. I also have a company called Flipside Canvas, – it's art. It's canvas art that I've put out. So those are my two big things in addition to the work with Toyota and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce trying to help veterans transition back.**

**I also have a podcast called Owning It, where I'm trying to use my platform to give other great people a platform and share their stories of the struggles and tribulations that they've gone through. I'm trying to do whatever I can in order to make a difference and reach as many people as I can that don't want to be the victims, right? We've got a world full of victims out there, and when you're a victim, you have no control of anything. But at the point that you finally take accountability for it, you've now got control again.**

**Life is full of obstacles, but you should never be like, I have anxiety, and my anxiety is really, really bad. But I'm not anxiety. It doesn't define me. And I think there's got to be that – that ownership of it, but this is just a part of me, this is who I am, and how do I still go out and accomplish the things I want to accomplish with this piece of it. –Like I said, it's a part of me. It's not who I am.**

DR. HANNA: I think that that is also really

important, because I think a lot of times when we share our stories about things like anxiety or depression or suicidal thoughts and you feel like once we share it then we have to suddenly be perfect. The reality is that a lot of that still stays with us on our journey and yet we still push through it. You hit on so many things that I think are important. Your creativity, your community, and your contribution all seem to help you get through it.

**SGT MEYER: Exactly. But they also make you who you are and your scars are kind of what help make you be able to relate to other people going through their situations.**

DR. HANNA: Right.

**SGT MEYER: That's part of who you are, and that's part of making you understand, and that's part of – you know, it's how you handle those scars. Are you going to be the victim to those scars and go around and play the victim or are you going to empower yourself to go out and help other people who are struggling with the same thing? That's your choice. I made mine.**

**Dakota Meyer** is the third living recipient of the Medal of Honor since the Vietnam War, and the first living United States Marine in 41 years to be so honored.

Born and raised in Columbia, Kentucky Dakota enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 2006 after graduating from Green County High School. He completed his basic training at Parris Island Recruit Training Depot later that year.

A school-trained sniper and highly skilled Marine infantryman, Dakota deployed twice to combat duty. In 2007, he deployed to Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom; and in 2009-10, he deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.

In September 2011, President Obama awarded Dakota the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government, in recognition of his acts of extraordinary valor on September 8, 2009. Over the course of a six-hour firefight, without regard for his own personal safety, Dakota repeatedly braved enemy fire in eastern Afghanistan to find and save fellow members of his embedded training team.

Wounded by shrapnel, Dakota personally evacuated 12 friendly wounded and provided cover for another 24 Marines and Soldiers to escape likely death at the hands of a numerically superior and determined foe. Following the battle, on his fifth trip in, Dakota recovered the bodies of three missing Marines and a Navy Corpsman killed in the battle: 1st Lt. Michael Johnson, Staff Sgt. Aaron Kenefick, Hospital Corpsman Third Class James R. Layton and Gunnery Sgt. Edwin Wayne Johnson Jr.

Dakota completed his active duty in 2010 and now serves in the Individual Ready Reserve of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. Since returning to civilian life, Dakota has started Dakota Meyer Enterprises Inc. in hope of establishing a company that not only leaves a mark in the construction industry but also provides a workplace for his fellow veterans.

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