

Dan,

I'm up, awake at 3 a.m., and this has to come out. The show today made me understand there is at least one person who outwardly and publicly wants to know "what do we need to do for you..." to make this transition home complete. Thank you (...and those like you Dan) for being you. I needed people to be like more like you. Understanding and acceptance are very high on the list along with reasonable expectations. I've been learning about mindfulness and acceptance therapy through a series of workbooks provided by my VA therapist.

To continue to answer your question, I'd ask anyone who wants to welcome home their Veteran to be mindful of the possibility this person will likely be changed forever and to accept the fact their family member desires to 'come home' mentally as they have done physically, but initially at least, they cannot. Part of me will live on in Iraq for the rest of my life. Blunt, thought crashing memories and flashbacks of extreme tragedy now have the right to interrupt my day at their convenience, so if I have to make room for them, so will the others in my life.

I need a little extra space and time to recover from these moments and the constant distraction life presents with every little reminder friends of mine like SGT Dale Hardiman are gone forever. I need a little break occasionally at work to cope with my sleeplessness and insomnia or to miss time all together without being seen a damaged person or slacker. I need extra care not just during my first week home, but for weeks, months and maybe years following the combat experience. Much of that will require professional care to include mental health treatments that don't come along with stigma. The mental health section of the VA should be as welcoming as the dental clinic. And the clinic should be open 24/7 in some ways without it having to be an emergency to get in. Veterans that have been near to suicide shouldn't need to escalate to such an extreme place mentally in order to have an appropriate channel for outreach and care.

From my wife, my children, and those closest to me, I've had undying support yet we practice constant brinksmanship of family failure. I can't blame them for being tired of hearing about the Army. After all I've been through, I've still tried to get back into the Army twice in the last six years. I miss the uniform everyday as being a soldier was part of my being. Something might be able to one day replace it, but my optimism that activity exists is faint. I would ask the families of the 40,000 Marines coming home this month to be mindful, to try to understand, to give their Veteran room to stretch out in the light of love and to slowly come back into their hearts. Please have reasonable expectations of these men and women and make a plan together to transition them back into some form of normalcy of life. Ask them what they need on an individual basis and they might answer, they might not. If they don't, that is okay too. Then after weeks and months have passed, be honest with yourself if you can accept the new person or not. Then open whatever lines of communication possible to reach what I'm sure is still in their heart.

Combat Veterans also need to be with their comrades but not for drinking binges or VA bashing sessions. Perhaps families and friends can open up their lives to the relationships formed in combat. These are brothers and sisters I need in my life and that takes time away from work and home to accommodate. Perhaps reunions of a new and unique form must take place. Finally, just stay open to the possibilities and accept what you have noted Dan, that only those that experience a thing will fully understand it. Lets make it okay to be a combat Veteran, the new normal, part of a new and great generation of wisdom and experience. Lets care for our Veterans the way we care for our classic cars and wide screen TVs.

Best wishes, and thank you and Jennifer and the entire crew for the love and support to effect this amazing show.

- Sam