



American Legion Auxiliary

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January-February 2020

NATIONAL SECURITY

At Fall Conference we presented the Psych Armor Institute video *“15 Things Veterans Want You To Know.”* PsychArmor Institute provides free online training videos delivered by national subject matter experts who are fiercely committed to educating the civilian community about military culture. PsychArmor asked hundreds of veterans what they wanted civilians, employers, educators, health-care providers and therapists to know about them. These comments were used to create topics of their course including 5 questions you should always ask veterans, one question you should never ask veterans and 15 facts that promote greater understanding of our veterans. The information was compiled by Heidi Kraft, PHD, Clinical Director PsychArmor Institute, A Navy Veteran with 9 years of active duty. This video presented a new way of thinking about military culture. The video was very well received, but went very fast. It was promised that a synopsis would follow in the Unit mailing. The following has been written to enable those who could not attend might benefit from the content.

“15 THINGS VETERANS WANT YOU TO KNOW”

Ask, Did you serve in the military? It matters and begins the conversation and engages the veteran. Veterans are not like you. The veteran and his/her family are tough, but they have the biggest hearts and have gone through huge sacrifices and a broad spectrum of emotions many times. Knowing that, please start the conversation, ask if he/she has served. If the answer is yes, let’s move on to the 15 things veterans want you to know.

#1) We are not all soldiers. Even the media refers to military personnel as soldiers, but soldiers are only in the Army. There are four other branches and they are quite different in missions and subcultures. Although they are all part of the same larger team, military personnel are proud of their specific service branch. Have patience.

So, Ask, which Branch? Asking this question demonstrates that you know the difference between the five branches. This earns you credibility with that veteran and keeps the conversation going, which is the whole point.

#2) The reserves are part of the military. There are two ways to serve. Active duty is serving every day. In the Reserves, one would train on weekends and return to their civilian life during the week, but will help our country when they are needed, whether to help on a national defense related mission or situations with domestic, national or local emergencies.

#3} Not everyone in the military is infantry. When we think of the classic generic version of the military person, we think of infantry. This is our image, probably fed through our culture, probably from when we were young. But the truth is the range of what our military does is remarkable. They are expertly trained in hundreds of jobs. **Ask: What did you do in your service?** This validates that you know there are so many jobs and you know how to ask.

#4) We have leaders at every level in the chain of command. There is a sense of real leadership in the military. Those who wear the uniform feel responsible for others and accountable to others and is a large part of the pride they take in their service.

#5} We are always on duty. In the military, there are no days off, even when one is on leave. They can be called back at a moment’s notice – the unit may be ready to deploy.

#6) We take pride in our appearance & in our conduct. Physical fitness matters. They need to train physically so when they are called, they are ready to accomplish that mission. Likewise, they are responsible for maintaining a code of conduct.

#7) We did not all kill someone & those who did do not want to talk about it. This does not take a lot of common sense, but unfortunately, it is a question that get asks of or military far too often. People are just curious, but this is just a question that any military veteran does not want to be asked, whether he/he has lived through this or hasn't. **This is not a question that should be asked of military veterans. PLEASE DON'T ASK. EVER!**

#8) We do not all have PTSD. There is a general perception that anyone that deployed to combat develops PTSD and that is just not true. The majority of veterans, including combat veterans, do not go on to develop PTSD. Some may have symptoms as with any type of trauma, but then experience a natural recovery time. While combat can certainly be very traumatic, it can also lead to great moments of reward, friendship and love.

#9) Those of us who do have an invisible wound are not dangerous and we are not violent. Invisible wounds of war, including PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, depression and substance abuse disorder are not obvious for someone looking at a veteran, but they are real injuries causing real suffering and they deserve the same respect and treatment as many physical injuries. The media has created a bias that PTSD may be violent, but this is not true. Those with invisible wounds of war may be injured, but they are not violent.

#10) It is really hard for us to ask for help. The military culture is based in service, sacrifice and helping and even recuing others. It is others-based and historically has not valued self-care or help-seeking behaviors. There is an expectation of "mission accomplishment" even at personal cost. Because of this, reaching out for help for one's self is difficult for military people. For some veterans, asking for help is a sign of weakness and takes a great level of trust to allow themselves be vulnerable.

#11) Our military service changes us. That change is permanent and that's okay. Remember it is a culture with it's own traditions, rituals, language, standards, expectations, stigma, wonderful moments and horrible moments. It's unreasonable to think someone would go through those experiences and not change.

#12) We differ in how much we identify with the military after we have active duty. Some people find themselves truly defined by their service and their association with the military. Others consider it a part of their past ad move on from it. There are some questions you could ask your veteran. **Ask: How has your military service shaped you?** Then, **Ask: How does it factor into how you define yourself now?** Instant credibility as everyone is different while they serve and after they serve.

#13) Our families serve with us. Military families have some of the hardest jobs in the world. They're faced with frequent separation from their loved ones and moving from place to place, sometimes every two to three years. It is difficult to establish schools for their children or jobs for heir spouses. All of this requires flexibility, bravery, strength and resilience.

14) We would die for each other & we would die for our country. They would and they do. It doesn't matter where they fight, the geographical location nor the technological or political background. It doesn't matter what the mission is or who's in charge of the country. Why we fight has always been the same, it's about the people to the left and to the right. The people with whom they serve become brothers and sisters to them and they would die for them and they do.

15) We've all made the sacrifice for one reason: to serve something more important than ourselves. When it comes down to it, this defines their culture. People who chose to serve in uniform and sign on that line saying they will make that sacrifice, they live by a code. We like to say it is honor, commitment and duty, Most of all, these are people who made a choice. They made a choice to serve something larger and more important than themselves. That is a unique part of the military culture. They are choosing the concept of military service.

In summary, asking the right questions gives you credibility and brings you closer to the veteran. It opens the door for a better understanding of their experience and their military culture. 1. *Did you serve in the military?* 2. *Which branch?* 3. *What job did you do?* 4. *How did your military service shape you?* 5. *How does it factor into how you define yourself now?*

Dee Dee Buckley
Department National Security Chairman

Wear RED on Fridays!