

Adventure Parks Offer Veterans the Opportunity to Re-Acclimate to Civilian Life

Team building programs that require strategic thinking and improvisation re-create the military experience helping veterans to gain confidence, reintegrate into the civilian world and thrive.

(Middleburg, VA) July XX, 2017 – After the shock and horror experienced on the battlefield, many veterans return home with intrusive memories or flashbacks, feelings of hypervigilance, negative changes to beliefs or feelings, and a desire to avoid situations that trigger memories of a traumatic wartime event.^{1,2} These are symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Between 11-20% of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF) suffer from PTSD.³ As 60% of men and 50% of women experience some kind of trauma in their lifetime, it is not surprising that about 8 million U.S. adults have PTSD during a given year.³ Aside from PTSD, many soldiers returning from the front lines have a hard time with commonplace emotional connections, making it hard for them to connect with friends and family members the way they did prior to deployment. Normal every day interactions and small talk is often difficult for veterans until they find a way to overcome the emotional barriers created by combat.

“When soldiers are deployed, their reality changes,” says Joe DeRing, Founder and President of [Empower Adventures](#). “They become instruments of war and are expected to perform and behave in ways that are otherwise unimaginable. This reality changes you emotionally and, after 10, 12 or 14 months away, can make one lose sight of who they were prior to deployment. This is painful to deal with upon returning home and takes patience and understanding on behalf of loved ones to help the service member overcome these challenges.” Because of the emotional stress induced by combat, soldiers - with or without PTSD - often have difficulty reintegrating to civilian life: a Pew Research study found that 44% of post-911 war veteran struggled to readjust to civilian life.⁴ Meeting everyday needs that were once taken care of by the military, like preparing meals and earning money, can cause culture shock and stress.⁴

To re-acclimate to civilian life and reconnect with loved ones, experts recommend engaging in military-like activities with friends and family, or former vets.⁴ The programs offered at an [adventure park](#) offer a setting where veterans can form or strengthen meaningful bonds that eventually create a new reality built with love, compassion and a new sense for who they are. In addition, adventure park survival challenges mimic the type of [team building](#) exercise common in military training. The canopy tours and zip lining offered at these parks tap into the courage that veterans exhibited during combat.

“Having served multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, I know the mental strain combat can create and how tough it can be to readjust to civilian life,” adds DeRing. “I founded Empower Adventures so that people could truly *empower* themselves. We all limit ourselves in so many ways in everyday life. The Army taught me that limitations we put on

ourselves are nonsense. Statements like, 'I'm afraid of heights' or 'I can't do it' are excuses that hold us back from being the best versions of ourselves." DeRing believes that veterans need to learn to think positively and reconnect with the inner strength that helped them get through military training in order to take on the emotional demons that hinder them.

The management team at Empower Adventures works with different groups of people, including veterans, to help them find personal empowerment through physical challenges while overcoming emotional or mental obstacles. DeRing encourages participants to push themselves outside of their comfort zone in order to transform their outlook and gain a sense of accomplishment that allows them to reach their true potential. For veterans, the experience parallels a military operation where there is a clear mission involved, requiring strategic thinking and improvisation, which can only be accomplished with your team.

About Joe DeRing:

Joe is a true American hero. Having served multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Joe returned from service seeking to use his leadership skills in a way that would allow him to contribute to society. Partnering with advisors Dev Pathik and Jason Clement, Joe developed Empower Leadership Sports in Middletown, Connecticut. Later, the team created Empower Adventures in Tampa Bay. The center and Joe's incredible personal journey from battlefield to inspirational adventure operator has now been featured on CNN, FOX, and numerous other media outlets across the U.S.

About Empower Adventures:

Empower Adventures operates canopy tours, zip lines, ropes courses, and leadership development and adventure activities at the central location in Tampa Bay, Florida, Connecticut and Virginia (in the Washington D.C. area). At Leadership Sports in Connecticut alone, Empower Adventures has served over 75,000 guests since 2009. The company's goal is to help guests overcome fears in order to gain confidence and empower themselves: In the past three years, 10,000 guests have visited the Virginia Empower Adventures location and only four did not continue to the Tree Top Zip Tour.

Empower Adventures utilizes best-in-class techniques to train guides and offers the highest standard of safety protocols within the outdoor adventure industry. Empower Adventures provides a guide for each adventure group, regardless of size. The adventure center guides at Empower Adventures aim to provide customers with a powerful, memorable and inspirational experience which engenders a positive attitude and encourages teamwork. Outdoor adventure guides are specially trained to cultivate the creativity and problem-solving skills that are necessary to overcome challenges and develop leadership skills. Special team building sessions are also available to facilitate bonding in any group.

1. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 July 2017.

2. "Symptoms of PTSD." *PTSD: National Center for PTSD*. N.p., 15 May 2012. Web. 15 July 2017.
3. "How Common Is PTSD?" *PTSD: National Center for PTSD*. N.p., 05 July 2007. Web. 15 July 2017.
4. Price, Brook. "4 Tactics to Help Veterans Transition to Civilian Life." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 01 Apr. 2016. Web. 15 July 2017.

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