

Character Doesn't Show Up in Crisis... It's Revealed

Some people talk about leadership.

Others live it.

In this conversation with Wayne Stiles—former Army Major, company commander in Afghanistan, and someone I had the privilege to serve under—we got into something deeper than rank, deployments, or career paths.

What leadership actually costs

What faith looks like when things break

And what stays with you long after the uniform comes off

The Moment That Tells You Who Someone Is

I didn't realize it at the time.

We were sitting in a Burger King at Fort Campbell.

Wayne and his wife bowed their heads and prayed before eating.

Simple moment.

Didn't mean much to me then.

But looking back...

That told me everything about who he was.

Grounded. Consistent. Quiet in his faith.

Leadership Is More Than Rank

A lot of people think leadership is authority.

It's not.

Wayne talked about what it actually felt like to command in combat:

- 190+ soldiers
- Massive responsibility
- Every decision carrying real consequences

And the part most people don't understand:

You don't stop carrying it when you leave.

The Weight That Stays With You

This is where the conversation got real.

Losing soldiers.
Second-guessing decisions.
Wondering if you could've done more

He said it plainly:

“Maybe I should have called one more time.”

That's leadership.

Not the highlight reel.

The weight.

Combat Isn't What People Think

Movies get it wrong.

It's not clean.
It's not controlled.

The enemy gets a say.

And most of the time...

They make the first move.

Everything after that is reaction, training, and leadership under pressure.

The Role of the Leader When It Matters

Anyone can lead when things are calm.

The real question:

Who do people look to when everything goes sideways?

Wayne broke it down simply:

- People don't need noise
- They need clarity
- They need direction

And most importantly:

They need someone they trust.

Why Good Leaders Don't Need to Yell

One of the most important leadership lessons in this conversation:

You don't need to yell to lead.

His First Sergeant ran the organization.

Wayne backed him.

That trust created:

- order
- accountability
- execution

Not ego.

Identity After the Uniform

This is where a lot of people struggle.

Rank is gone.

Title is gone.

Structure is gone

But Wayne never tied his identity to that.

He said it clearly:

If your identity is your rank, you will struggle when it's gone.

That's where a lot of veterans get stuck.

Faith Isn't Surface Level

This wasn't a casual belief.

This was faith through:

- combat
- loss
- transition
- uncertainty

And one of the most important points:

Faith shows up when everything else is stripped away.

The Civilian World Shock

Another reality check:

The military has standards.

The civilian world does not always.

Wayne talked about:

- lack of accountability
- lack of ownership

- people avoiding responsibility

That transition hits harder than most expect.

What Actually Matters Now

Not rank.

Not title.

Not what job you have today

Because today?

He drives a truck.

And he's at peace with it.

Why?

Because his identity is not tied to what he does.

What You Should Take From This

1. Leadership is responsibility, not status
 2. You will carry decisions longer than you expect
 3. Trust matters more than authority
 4. Your identity must be bigger than your job
 5. Faith gets tested when life gets real
-

Final Thought

A lot of people want leadership.

Very few understand the cost.

Because leadership is not about being in charge.

It is about being accountable... even years later.



Listen to the full episode:

👉 <https://open.spotify.com/show/7fQ5oHIOZe94Jcjj6ytL2h?si=0c4c82fc29c6465f>

If you're a veteran or leader trying to figure out your next move, I share conversations and insights like this every week through The Enduring Mindset Podcast.

Related conversations:

- *What Great Leaders Actually Do: Lessons from a Command Sergeant Major*
- *Why Great Leaders Demand Excellence*
- *What Really Happens to the Mind and Body in Combat (And Why It Matters After)*