

Who Are You When You Can't Go Back?

A lot of people build their life around one identity.

The job.
The role.
The mission.

And it works.

Until it gets taken away.

In a recent conversation with Ryan Pote—former Navy pilot turned author—we got into something a lot of people experience but don't always talk about.

👉 What happens when the thing that defined you... is gone?

When Your Identity Is the Job

For Ryan, it wasn't just a career.

It was everything.

- Naval aviator
- Squadron culture
- Call sign
- Mission

That wasn't just what he did.

👉 That was who he was

Until an injury took it away.

The Pain Most People Don't See

When people talk about transition, they usually focus on:

- jobs
- resumes
- logistics

But that's not the real problem.

The real problem is identity.

Ryan said it clearly:

👉 He didn't know who he was without it

And that created:

- anxiety
 - frustration
 - loss of direction
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When It Starts Showing Up in Your Life

It didn't look like what people expect.

No dramatic breakdown.

No Hollywood version of PTSD.

Instead, it showed up as:

- constant anxiety
- inability to focus
- feeling overwhelmed by small things
- anger and tension

👉 A slow erosion of who he used to be

The Turning Point

What started to change things wasn't a big moment.

It was something simple:

👉 Writing

It started as journaling.

Just getting thoughts out.

But over time, something shifted.

Why Writing Actually Works

He described it in a way a lot of people will recognize:

You don't have to explain everything to someone else.

You just have to get it out.

That process:

- creates awareness
- organizes thoughts
- reduces internal pressure

And over time...

👉 It starts to give you clarity

When Pain Becomes Purpose

What started as journaling turned into something more.

Stories.

Ideas.

Eventually... books

Not because he planned it.

Because it evolved.

The Hard Truth About Transition

This is the part most people need to hear:

👉 You don't "fix" identity loss overnight

You rebuild it.

Piece by piece.

And sometimes it takes:

- new skills
- new environments
- new challenges

To figure out who you are now.

The Decision That Changed Everything

Ryan had a choice:

Wait for the perfect transition...

or step into something new immediately

He chose action.

Even when it wasn't perfect.

That matters.

Because a lot of people get stuck waiting.

Faith Shows Up at the Bottom

One of the most powerful parts of his story:

Faith didn't show up when things were going well.

It showed up when everything fell apart.

- career uncertainty
- family stress
- personal struggle

👉 That's where clarity came from

The Bigger Lesson

This isn't just about the military.

This is about anyone who:

- loses a career
- changes direction
- hits a wall in life

Because the question is always the same:

👉 Who are you now?

What This Means for You

If you're in a transition or about to be:

1. Don't ignore the identity piece

That's the real battle.

2. Expect it to feel uncomfortable

That's part of the process.

3. Find an outlet

Writing. Training. Building. Something that gets it out.

4. Take action before you feel ready

Clarity comes after movement.

5. Be open to a new version of yourself

You're not going back.

You're moving forward.

Final Thought

The hardest part of losing something important...

is not the loss itself.

👉 It's figuring out who you are without it

 **Listen to the full episode:**

👉 <https://open.spotify.com/show/7fQ5oHlOZe94Jcjj6ytL2h?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:

- *Why Veterans Struggle After Transition (And What No One Talks About)*
- *How Veterans Rebuild Their Lives After Hitting Rock Bottom*
- *What Happens When Life Forces You to Slow Down*