

Why Veterans Struggle After Transition

(And What No One Talks About)

If you talk to enough veterans, you will hear a common theme.

On the outside, things look fine.
Good job. Staying busy. Moving forward.

But underneath that, something feels off.

In a recent conversation on *The Enduring Mindset Podcast*, I sat down with fellow Army veteran and West Point graduate Rich Mulder to unpack this exact issue. Why transition is harder than most people expect, and what is really going on beneath the surface.

The Problem Is Not Discipline

Most people assume veterans struggle after service because they lack direction or discipline.

That is not it.

Veterans are some of the most disciplined people you will ever meet.

The real issue is identity.

As Rich put it, your identity gets shattered twice:

- Once when you enter the military
- And again when you leave it

When you join, the military strips away who you were and replaces it with something new. Rank, role, structure, purpose.

Then one day, it is gone.

And no one really prepares you for that.

The Hidden Struggle

One of the most dangerous parts of transition is this.

You do not even realize you are struggling.

Rich described being successful on paper:

- West Point graduate
- Combat deployment
- Leadership experience
- Starting a business

But behind the scenes:

- Struggling with alcohol
- Burning through relationships
- Making impulsive decisions
- Not caring if he lived or died

And the hardest part is he did not see it.

Why This Happens

In the military, everything is external.

- Performance evaluations
- Rank and status
- What others think of you
- How you show up

You are constantly being judged.

So you get very good at building an identity that works for that environment.

But when you leave that environment, that identity does not transfer.

Now you are left asking a simple question.

Who am I without this?

The Turning Point

The shift does not happen with more discipline.

It happens with honesty.

For Rich, that started in a room full of other veterans. A place without judgment.

For the first time, he was able to:

- Say what was actually going on
- Admit the struggle
- Stop performing

“Once I was able to name the shame and guilt, it gave me space to sit with it long enough for it to dissolve.”

That is where things started to change.

What Veterans Actually Need

Most transition advice focuses on:

- Jobs
- Resumes
- Networking

Those things matter, but they are not the root issue.

What veterans actually need is:

- A way to rebuild identity
- A way to process what they have been through
- A way to reconnect with purpose

A Better Way Forward

If you are a veteran feeling stuck, here is the truth.

You are not broken.

You are not behind.

You are not the only one feeling this way.

But you do need to do the work.

Start here:

1. Get honest with yourself

No filters. No performance.

2. Stop relying only on external validation

Rank is gone. Structure is gone. That is okay.

3. Find people you can talk to without judgment

This is not optional.

4. Rebuild your identity intentionally

Not based on who you were, but who you are becoming.

Final Thought

Transition is not just a career change.

It is an identity shift.

Until you address that, nothing else will fully click.



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 With Identity After the Military (And How to Find Purpose Again)*
- *Who Are You When You Can't Go Back?*
- *How Veterans Rebuild Their Lives After Hitting Rock Bottom*