MMQB: Life’s Penalty for Military Service

It is the gift that keeps on giving. Following service, many military veterans are forced to not only bear the burden of disability but also bias in the court system and employment.

But the tide is changing. Many veterans are moving to the forefront in policy and law to address these issues head. The move runs across the spread of civil and criminal law in America as well as employment. Law is the topic this week on DisabledVeterans.org.

Hi and welcome to another edition of Monday Morning Quarterback for Veterans. This week I decided to talk about problems veterans face while seeking justice in the courts and also employment.

Some of you may be aware that veterans suffering from mental illnesses from service are also being dinging in courts as being unfit parents, unfit people, unfit criminals, unfit business owners, and generally just being unfit.

Sadly, this is another symptom of America sending its sons and daughters off to war without wanting to face the unfortunate reality that war has a real human cost. We still, after over 200 years following being founded from a war, have yet to address the real after effects on our culture.

A “just society,” and for you Christians out there, a “Christian” society, would be willing to clean up its messes. (So would many of our children after being asked.) This would include the human harm caused by war. Veterans involved in that system are giving it their all to right the wrongs.

I’m going to keep this one a little shorter than normal and just give resources for you to evaluate on your own. I think the text below is important and a must read for any veteran.

Here’s what I’ll cover today:

* Veterans on Trial: The Coming Court Battles over PTSD
* Employment and the PTSD ghost

**Veterans on Trial**

A friend introduced me to the new book [*Veterans on Trial*](http://www.amazon.com/Veterans-Trial-Coming-Court-Battles/dp/1597976962)*.* It is a must read for veterans and advocates trying to help us.

*Veterans on Trial* covers the myriad of problems veteran face when returning from war with America’s legal system. The topics range from divorce, job loss, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide, and criminal issues like murder.

The author, [Barry Schaller](http://www.jud.ct.gov/external/supapp/appjudge3.html), is a lecturer at Yale Law School. He is a retired Connecticut Supreme Court justice and author. He lectures on Public Law and Ethics, Bioterrorism, Human Research Ethics, and the Law. He is what we call a smart dude.

This one is my next read on a very long list. Here is what is on Amazon about the book:

Experts anticipate that more than 350,000 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will return to civilian life with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Barry R. Schaller, a judge and a bioethicist, chronicles the events leading to what he predicts will be the most challenging PTSD epidemic in U.S. military history. Although combat veterans have experienced similar disorders in previous wars, Schaller explains why these two contemporaneous wars in particular are a breeding ground for the condition.

*Veterans on Trial* deals with the problem of PTSD from the ground up, starting with the issues that returning veterans and their families face. When they leave the battlefield to become civilians again, many soldiers are not prepared, or are unable, to cope successfully with the challenges. Their compounded anxieties often result in serious trouble: divorce, job loss, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide, and even murder. Schaller also explains how PTSD now operates as a means of defense in the criminal court system and how it will affect the courts in the next decade.

After unveiling this invisible injury among the walking wounded, Schaller offers far-reaching solutions for returning veterans and their families. He specifies what political and judicial officials, military leaders, legislators, and the mental health communities can do to meet their responsibilities to the men and women who serve our nation.

I have had my own degree of run-ins and biases against me for the fact of being a disabled veteran. Many individuals find it hard to believe that an enlisted guy with a disability can make it through college and through law school.

In reality, there are tons of veteran who go on to get advanced degrees. However, the American discourse is such that civilians still find it surprising.

And it is just this “surprise” we are trying to change.

**The PTSD Ghost and Employment**

For years, I have heard that certain high level companies are reluctant to hire war veterans for fear of the “unseen disabilities” some veterans have. Apparently, these hiring managers have watched too many reruns of A-Team.

However, A-Team or not, many hiring agents still refuse to hire veterans for this reason. My old Voc Rehab Counselor confirmed that many Chicago firms refuse to hire vets for that reason. And, even if they did hire veterans, they tended to be slow on the draw in how to deal with veteran related issues.

Personally, I had a struggle with my first employer out of college. One manager used the term “kill ratio” during a business meeting to brag about his high sales rate. I, of course, had a visceral reaction to use of this term because it is offensive when used by a non-veteran in that kind of context for me, at least. So, I accidently spit up due to my own reaction.

Of course, this point was missed by the employer, and I did get my butt chewed afterward.

But the bigger issues with employment revolve around real disabilities and how to treat veterans. Many employers have been noted to ask vets to just “suck it up” without a real adult approach to providing accommodations in line with the ADA. Now, 14 years after my own separation from service, companies are taking the ADA more seriously.

Still, employers are rumored to dismiss veteran applicants for the above reasons, despite a peculiar reality; veterans are not the only disabled people in the workforce. In fact, there are many more millions of disabled civilians in the workforce than disabled veterans. Sadly, veterans tend to get the bad wrap.

This is a strange fact that the stigma of PTSD seems to miss. PTSD is not exclusive to military no more than traumatic brain injuries or bad backs. In all instances, many more civilians than military veterans have the conditions. These same individuals are in the workforce in ratios that dwarf the relative number of veterans with the same conditions.

Nonetheless, as a group, “military veterans” is the hiring group tagged with the stigma. Perhaps the reason is because this same group was in combat, and most uneducated civilians believe that anyone who is trained to “kill” has an actual “kill ratio.”

Maybe they are afraid we may turn at the drop of a hat with no warning. Ridiculous.

The real problem with the stigma has more to do with the implication. Like problems with law, America’s inability to grow up and treat veterans fairly has a huge impact on our nation’s ability to recruit top talent from across the socioeconomic spectrum.

If many families with options want their children to succeed, why would they encourage military service? Aside from “patriotism,” these same families would probably not encourage service due to the impact of service and the handicaps veterans face later.

In today’s examples alone, veterans face enormous hurdles in matters relating to law and employment. Beyond these two things, I cannot imagine bigger detractors beyond the obvious risk of death or lifelong disability.

For these reasons, it is imperative that military veterans across the country get involved in local and national politics because we need to help our nation grow up. We need to help our nation understand that war is messy both on the battlefield and afterward.

In order to maintain our superior military forces, we need the best recruits we can get. To do this, we need to bolster the voices that are pushing America to own up to its responsibilities.

Doing so will make military service something that should not be feared, at least when you return from service.

For those readers who can, please make a point to support your local veteran-owned-business or run for local office in your community.

Hire more veteran employees into places of upper management. Contribute more to training and outreach in your local community.

Pick the veteran accountant or attorney if you have an option. Do your part to support your own and in so doing to support the nation moving forward.

And until next time, have a good week.