

Recovery Support Specialist News

September 2013
Veterans RSS Institute 1

Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way

By Lyle Ford, U.S. Army Veteran

You know the saying “Lead, follow, or get out of the way!” Typically you hear that when someone is emphasizing that they feel you are being uncertain and indecisive... and that therefore they feel you should step aside. It is quite possible you heard it many times while you were in the military. Well today I want you to look at that phrase – lead, follow, get out of the way – in a very different light. What if we lead, follow, and get out of the way? Is that possible? Let’s look at each of the three parts individually and see how they apply to your new roles as Veteran Recovery Support Specialists.

Lead: Each of you are leaders. As a Recovery Support Specialist you will lead by example. People embarking on the journey of recovery will look to you as role models and will watch how you handle situations, so be mindful of how you go about your wonderful work as advocates and how you use your lived experience to help others. You are leaders now.

Follow: As Recovery Support Specialists, while we are leaders, we are also followers. We look to others who traveled roads of recovery before us for guidance. Be wise about who you follow. Make sure you follow those who are good role models and always be sure you seek their guidance when you have doubts. You can lead and follow at the same time.

Get Out of the Way: As people who have big hearts and the best of intentions for others, we sometimes have the tendency to want to help those in need by doing things for them or with them. Like parenting, we can want to shelter those we care about too long, and not let them grow and stand in their own power. So make sure you are attuned to the signals that someone you are helping is ready to stand on their own. By being sensitive to their

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Lyle Ford

“This RSSI was provided pro bono to these Veterans. We hope to meet in the future to bless those who serve us.”

Beverly McGuffin

Accept, Adapt & Overcome

By Engel Indo, U.S. Army



There have been many ups and many downs in my life in relation to my own personal journey to recovery, perhaps maybe even more than I can care to relate to anyone, or express here. Is it shame? Or is it maybe weakness? Pretending to be safe and sound, while in reality, I am still affected by

memories of pain, sorrow, hate, etc.? Who is to say what is right or what is wrong? Who is to say what is normal or what is not? Or what the best way of dealing with a disease or illness is ... or isn't?

There was a time, back in the late 1990s, when my life no longer had meaning, or so I thought. I had lost everything I had known to be 'mine' and then some. I woke up in the morning to *wake up*, I went to sleep in the evening to *sleep*, and I breathed in between just to *breath*. Close members of my family were passing away left and right and I was not available to them before, during or after. I had lost my wife and kids to a divorce that was always coming, but could never get here soon enough. I had drowned in lamenting, drinks and other stimulants. I was already dead.

At the time, I decided to make one last phone call to the one person I thought would have 'the answer' or the 'right way' to deal with this. After telling him my story and crying to the point of no return, I expected his final words of wisdom (or maybe even of support) to come out in a certain way. They didn't. They came out in a way that I was not expecting ... at all.

This is what he said: "Son, if you have passed the point of no return, and you know there is in fact, no way out of this, then you do what you must do, pull the trigger and call it the day. But do so NOW, because I, and others, will be able to cry for you for a few days, will be able to grieve our loss for days to come, and will be able to remember you standing tall. And that will be that! But if you continue living like this, we will live our lives knowing that YOU are suffering, and we will suffer with you and for you. YOU are living a life that you do not want to live, and we will suffer with you and for you again and again. Son, only YOU can end or change your life NOW. No one else can do this for you. If you don't end it, then change it, and begin again ..."

And so here I sit, writing this short story to you, simply stating that, perhaps there is a right way to do or deal with problems, but that was not for me. I was given a challenge and I pushed forward. I learned that pain comes from within and that I must learn to accept, adapt and overcome in order to make it through the day ... and the night.

Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way ... *continued from previous page*

growth and realization of their own recovery capacity – by getting out of their way – you allow them to step into their own strength.

So I challenge each of you to go forward today and lead, follow, and get out of the way. You will succeed when you do all three.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to lead a lot

of great people, been fortunate to follow many wise leaders, and now it is time for me to get out of the way...because I see you, an entire room full of new leaders, ready to take what you've learned at the Recovery Support Specialist Institute for Veterans and, with your good hearts, go out and strive with others to make this world a better place.

Experience of Hope

By R. Scott Williams, U.S. Army

Once the pain of change outweighed the pain of misery, I took that next step. In retrospect, that “downward spiral” of misery has earned its place in my personal experience of Hope.

Despair

My drinking and drugging career started at sixteen. The dysfunctional family of origin has always been present, and I didn't outgrow the self-centeredness that most children have until my early forties. Toss in a traumatic event at the age of six and all the elements are in place. Over the next twenty two years I would join the Army, cross the Atlantic/Pacific Ocean's twice, pick-up two felonies, visit two prisons (inmate); countless jobs and relationships, and a blatant disregard for others, their feeling, needs, or concerns. All the while, running in the background, would be the signs and symptoms of the disease of addiction— lying, stealing, promiscuity, shams, scams, and a lot of drinking and drugging.

Hope

In January of 2000 I show up in Tucson to arrest this disease of addiction for the 3rd time in fifteen years. There are many events that are attributed to my turning my life around—coming clean with the skeletons in my closet, the therapeutic community of Comin' Home, NA, 12 steps, and a whole lot of therapy. Though, I believe it's the subliminal

forces, which are still being cultivated, leading the charge—faith, my will for a better life, and hard work.

My life today is one that I cherish, participate, maintain, and the best part it's one that I've earned. It's hard to say what the objective was during my old life, and I don't put much thought into anymore. I have learned that the problem wasn't the drinking and drugging, it was that I did not love myself. Once I learned to love myself, I was introduced to one of life's ultimate gift – unconditional love. Once a person has that, life doesn't get much better.

This life changing process has showed me the meaning of my life's purpose—I am only here to better myself, so that I can best serve God and others; I have an obligation to provide my children with the tools that they need to succeed in life—health, safety, welfare and education.



UA Named a Top University for Student Veterans

The University of Arizona is one of the best institutions to consider pursuing a higher education degree, according to U.S. News & World Report's inaugural list of the Best Colleges for Veterans. ***The UA is ranked 23rd on the list, which includes 234 U.S. schools.***

The publication noted that the new ranking is meant to “provide military veterans with data on which top-ranked schools offer benefits to veterans and active service members that can help them pursue a college education.” Top-ranked institutions had to meet set criteria, such as being a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity

Colleges Consortium, being certified for the GI Bill, and being a participant in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

“It is an honor to be recognized by U.S. News & World Report,” said military veteran Cody Nicholls, the UA's assistant dean of students for **Veterans Education and Transition Services**.

Since 2000, the number of veterans enrolling at the UA has increased 56 percent, from 194 in 2000 to 303 in 2012.

“We've had a long-standing, very close relationship between the UA and student veterans on campus,” said Shay Stautz, the UA's associate vice president for Federal Relations. “The UA certainly understands the broader societal commitment to our returning veterans who have served their country. These individuals are an important part of our community.”

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Something Amazing Happened

By Andrew Young, U.S. Navy



One of my favorite experiences of hope was the day when I was approximately six months sober. I was returning from a hard day's work. The day had been rough and I was frazzled, on edge and angry. For whatever reason, as I waited to cross at the corner of an intersection,

a passenger in a car spit on me as they drove by. At that moment I said, "I've had it, I'm going to get a drink". I started to make a beeline for the liquor store. On the way I had the sinking feeling of defeat once again about maintaining my sobriety. Then something amazing happened, I ran into an

old drinking buddy walking from the opposite direction.

I asked him out of desperation to "please take this five dollars and go get drunk for me". For some reason it seemed to make perfect sense that I could get drunk through someone else without having to drink myself. My old friend, who I had been homeless with for over a year, said to my surprise, "Andrew, I will gladly do this for you, as your old drinking buddies, including myself, like you a lot more when you are sober".

After that exchange, I was able to turn around and walk quickly home. I called my sponsor immediately and was able to make it past the insanity to drink.

I found hope in this experience because it was the first time in sobriety that I had been successful in making it through a "throw it all away" craving. It was in that experience that I gained confidence in my ability to be more than my illness and that recovery was really possible.

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The UA offers a range of programs and services geared toward student veterans. They include:

- GI Bill counseling, priority registration and a series of for-credit transitions courses, called "Supportive Education for Returning Veterans" (**SERV**), offered by the UA Department of Agricultural Education through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- The **V.E.T.S. Office** and the **Student VETS Center**
- **Pat Tillman Foundation** partner campus
- **Adaptive athletic sports teams**
- UA **chapter** of the Student Veterans of America
- Support for applying for **Pat Tillman Foundation** scholarships

"Other universities have one or two elements of the support infrastructure we have on campus," Stautz said. "Very few of them, to my understanding, have all of these elements."

In addition, the UA has just opened a new student center at the Arizona Health Sciences Center for military veterans and their allies. The center, which is located in the Arizona Health Sciences Library, offers meeting and study spaces and is staffed by student veteran work-study recipients.

"It's the most central area there and can bring in people from pharmacy, nursing, public health and medicine," Nicholls said, emphasizing the importance of providing a space specifically for those in graduate and professional programs. "It's a great location and it is easy to get to."

This spring, the one-credit "Transitional Resiliency" course will be offered, providing a condensed version of the three-credit SERV courses. Each of these courses is designed to help student veterans have an easier transition into higher education, aiding them in their academic success and in building resiliency. The courses also include workforce development training.

"What we really pride ourselves on is what we do above and beyond for our student veterans, especially in what the rankings recognize in terms of meeting the needs of our students," Nicholls said.

Contact: Cody Nicholls

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By La Monica Everett-Haynes and Amanda Ballard

University Communications | November 26, 2013

<http://uanews.org/story/ua-named-a-top-university-for-student-veterans>



Fisher of Men

By Joel Peacock, U.S. Marine

My personal experience of hope happened 8 years ago after a relapse from alcohol and being jailed for my 3rd DUI. AA was right and my negative attitude was wrong. I was admitted into the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System "Dual Diagnoses Program" where I learned about my mental illness and substance abuse. I was told by professionals in the mental health and AA community that I needed to get better by helping other people with mental health and addiction problems. I became very humble and forgiving while riding the bus to the VA hospital to volunteer 1,100 hours in the substance abuse department. I also volunteered over 2,000 hours at a recovery home for veterans and I became active in a local church to help deal with my anxiety of being around large crowds. I believe my journey of recovery and having a wide scope of active therapies can help others. I want to be a fisher of men.

Seven and a half years ago, I was fishing at a little lake snuggled up in the Catalina mountains outside Tucson. I was sitting lakeside gazing into the water of life and inner tranquility. As crystal clear as the water brushes up on the shore and frequency of light reflecting into my eyes, a memory unfolded before me.

I was riding my motorcycle in California and looking over at the lake's beautiful glittering reflections. The time was around 5p.m. and I was heading west with the blinding sun in my eyes. Darn I said, I'm stuck behind a

truck pulling jet skis. I swerved around the trailer into the oncoming traffic to see around the truck. I was thinking, "Man, I sure could use another beer. That is it, I'm outta here"! I rocketed past the truck. I glanced at the speedometer. I was going 90 and as I looked over at the driver of the truck her face was white with a look of horror. I looked back at the road and BANG!! The sound was louder than I have ever heard before. I had been hit in the head, but never like this. My helmet cracked and my left side was violently yanked backward. It was a black SUV and I was flying in the air for what seemed like an eternity. THUG! I slammed onto the burning hot pavement like a broken bag of bones, naked to the world. My clothes were ripped off of me. I landed on my head and shoulders. I came out of the roll with this hot spray all over me. I reached to wipe my sunburnt face off with my left arm but darn it was broken. I was screaming that it was such a hot day. I started staring into the blue sky with this spraying blood in my face. I went into tunnel vision and I got angry. I started screaming again. I heard my Sargent's voice yell, "Get up you piece of crap"!

I couldn't move anything except my head and I could see my lower leg ripped off still with its shoe. "Damn", I say, as the blood was spraying out of my thigh, "oh no". I was thinking it was the femoral artery! Then this lady had her elbow at my thigh and I was staring into the beautiful blue sky. "Look at me" the lady was yelling at me "you're not going to sleep"!

I heard a chopper. I was thinking, "Oh shit, I'm back in the infantry". Tears started rolling down my face. I woke up again on a gurney with a nurse pumping my chest. I hear "Mr. Peacock!" I was seeing tunnel vision again and people were working on a new body for me. "Wow" I thought, "where am I, heaven"? I was still burning up on the hot road in my mind and the doctor's face was in front of mine. "Mr. Peacock," he said, "you have a 50/50 chance to live and you have sepsis going to your heart. I need to amputate more of your leg or you will die, okay?"

Over a period of 2 months of torture: back burns; a snapped forearm; broken ribs; internal bleeding; traumatic brain injury; hand surgery; broken nose; a

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Fisher of Men *continued from previous page*

shattered femur with a pin in it placed and then taken out again as to amputate higher; and wound vacuums that had to be removed on my back and from my amputated leg.

I would hear labored wheezing then wake up every hour to realize that it was me wheezing. I smelled this sweet almond smell and rotten meat. Yuck! I heard a nurse outside of my door say "He is an alcoholic and he is just going to die anyway".

I thought about crawling down the hallway to the elevators and into the parking lot to cut that nurse's brake lines on her car.

She didn't know that I use to be an iron man in the Marines and was awarded a letter of appreciation from the colonel. I use to even come into this hospital to the NICU to record infant polysomnograms for another hospital.

I was sent to a bay area VA hospital after the private hospital got me stabilized. I was given an \$850,000 bill for that 2-month stay in the hospital. I spent 3 ½ months in the VA hospital for therapy and skin grafts. I had hope that one day I would master my prosthetic leg, but my balance was bad. There were a lot of people who worked on me and cared for me. I am eternally grateful to them.

All of a sudden something was tugging on my line. Wow, this fish has got to be a big one because he is putting up a fight. In and out, side-to-side, he was fighting. Finally out of the water comes this small trout and I started laughing. I looked into his black eyes and he looked into mine. I carefully removed the hook and said, "You're a fighter little feller". I gave him a kiss and let him go. I thought, "Hmm, he reminds me of someone I know". I gazed off into the sparkling water and tears rolled down my cheeks. I said, "I want to be a fisher of men"!

The Light of Hope

By Kris Hamilton, U.S. Army

During the first 30 days of rehabilitation at the Veterans Administration a light finally turned on for me with the help of the able peer caregivers.

For me, this light was the light of hope. I spotted this event out by being asked to write out my goals in life without the drudgery throws of being a person with an alcohol abuse disorder. Hope gave me a new energy to layout a logical guiding path to the type of life I really wanted to live.

Along with my rekindled spiritual strength, I realized that if I wanted to see that life come to fruition I had to own my own recovery, period! I had to want it to make it happen.

Hope helped me see through the darkness I had let overtake me. It showed me that I did not have to be defined by the wreckage behind me, regardless of how many others who wanted to rerun my past addiction wreckage on me.

I have HOPE!
I have worth in knowledge and experiences exclusive to me, whom God created, that not only would help others to have a happy productive life but for myself as well. My "Higher Power" was and is my recovery support person and the Hope that carries me through. My hope shines so that it may be a light for others to see and own their recovery hope, what ever works best for them personally.



Laugh Within the Midst of a Storm

By Emerald Wallace, U.S. Military



My hope experience was when I was going through the pregnancy of my son. I was alone and his existence was not announced to me within a normal setting. You see, I was not aware of this man-child growing inside of me until I was already going on five months pregnant. I was on birth control (an implant), not eating regularly, and going through an abusive marriage. I had just had a miscarriage in the beginning of that same year. At this time, I could not acknowledge this blessing from God as so.

I had set up an escape plan to get away from the man who had made me a captive in my own home.

This was supposed to be my role in recovery. The irony was that this child became the voice that I no longer had. He became the fighter that I forgot how to be. This child became my focal point, leaving me no room or energy to tolerate just anything. You see, this baby was pronounced “scientifically impossible to survive”. He was lacking the proper nutrients and I had such a great deal of chemicals in my body from medications prescribed to me to numb the effects of the birth control. My migraine medication alone was not supposed to be taken during pregnancy, and that was only one of the medications I was taking. Yet he was still withstanding all of those challenges.

When I heard his heart beating as strong as I did, I knew from that moment that I needed to do things differently. I had to commit myself to focusing on understanding that this child deserved all the fight I could pretend to have. As I began to pretend, it came to be.

I fought each obstacle that showed up – he was not supposed to be breaking my body down (I was 3 centimeters dilated a month later); I was placed on bed-rest because I proceeded to dilate to 5 centimeters; his heart rate was not functioning properly; the doctors began pushing for me to induce labor early because the preeclampsia was causing me to have serious medical complications; I had to be given oxygen because my breathing and heart rate was null and void.

You see, this child was the connection I needed to truly understand that you could laugh within the midst of a storm. You can fight when you may not believe there is any fight left. He defined the person that I wanted to be. At the time, I didn’t believe in anything let alone anyone. He pushed me to pray again, laugh again, try again, and believe again. He took my life physically, forcing someone to literally resuscitate the life back into me. He came early for a pregnancy cycle, but it was right on time for me. My son came into this world and gave me life, just as he was brought to this life through me. He has been teaching me ever since that day.

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Back Row (L to R)

David Thurman, Engel Indo, David Robinson, Andrew Young, Joel Peacock

Front Row (L to R)

Emerald Wallace-Foulks, R. Scott Williams, Scott Lohman, Alan Linebarger

Not pictured: Kris Hamilton

RSSI Panel of CRSSs

Lyle Ford, Jeanne Bishop, Will Tilley, Tim Kness

The training was held at the VFW 4903

1150 N. Beverly

and was hosted by

Commander Scott Ingersoll

Special Thanks To

The VFW 4903

for providing the training site

and to

Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA)

Dan Steffy and Jody Gardner

and to

HOPE Incorporated

for providing the meals

and to

• **SAVAHCS**

• **VFW 4903**

• **Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA)**

• **Rally Point Arizona**

• **Rally Point Tucson**

• **Old Pueblo Community Services (OPCS)**

• **HOPE Incorporated**

• **The Crisis Response Center (CRC)**

for providing information and employment tables



*Funded by the University
of Arizona,*

*College of Medicine
Department of Family and
Community Medicine,*

*Workforce Development
Program*

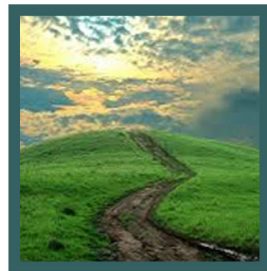
*The Recovery Support
Specialist Institute
is administered
by the Workforce
Development Program
in the Department of
Family and Community
Medicine (DFCM) at the
University of Arizona.*

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MSN, RN, CPRP
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*UA Workforce Development
Program promotes recovery
and expanded opportunities
for people with mental illness,
substance use, and dual
diagnosis by employing a
collaborative approach to
advocacy, service, education,
and research.*



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Recovery Support Specialist Institute

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