

NVTI Podcast Series

# Strengthening America's Trucking Workforce

E8 | February 24, 2022

[Upbeat intro music plays]

**NARRATOR:** Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute Podcast Series, where we discuss employment challenges and other pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** I'm James Rodriguez, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Department of Labor VETS, a retired Marine first sergeant, I am proud to introduce one of the Marines I was very fortunate to serve with in the Second Battalion, fourth Marines out in Camp Pendleton, California, in 2007 to 2008. And we deployed together as part of Operation Enduring Freedom out in Southeast Asia. So, I want to introduce Sergeant Jesus Davila, who is a Marine, I want to get a chance for him to kind of talk a little bit about himself and his amazing story and how proud I am to be able to have served with him. So, Sergeant Davila over to you.

**JESUS DAVILA:** Thanks, James. I was in the United States Marine Corps for a little over 11 years. Served six deployments overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Served a lot of my time with fifth Marines as an infantry rifleman, 0541, 8541, and 0521, psychological operations specialist. Was medically retired after I got wounded in Sang Afghanistan 2014. And left the Marine Corps, kind of did some soul searching, entered into college, didn't really feel like that was the best avenue for my future re-entering the workforce. I am a professional driver with Werner enterprises, a Werner Enterprises Road Team captain. I was also just recently selected to the American Trucking Association's America's Road Team. I'm glad to be here and honored to be here to speak with you. Thanks for having me.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** That's awesome. When we were talking originally, before about which I'll get to here in a second, before about your recent selection as one of America's Road Team captains, but I was thinking about, you know, some of the experiences we had on our last deployment. And the one that came to mind, and always does I really talked about this, oftentimes with other veterans, was when we were out in the East China Sea 25 miles out roughly, out in the sea getting ready to do an amphibious operation, we were on black zodiacs. For those who do not know what those are, they're inflatable rubber boats, roughly 10 feet, and then they can carry Marines and equipment anywhere from 600 to 1000 pounds worth of equipment. So anyway, we were out on the East China Sea, we had 17 boats, we're getting pushed out or kicked out as I always say, out the back of a Navy ship in the middle of the ocean 25 miles out from shore. And

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we started off with about two-foot waves. And then a storm that we were expecting to come in we thought we're going to be able to get to the shore before the storm came in actually came in faster than we expected. And by the time we got all the boats out of the back of that ship, we were in seven-foot waves that I remember we were trying to figure out if we were going to be able to pull this mission off or not. And then next thing you know, we scrapped the mission and then our next thing was to try to get all the boats back onto the ship safely, which was an extremely wild endeavor if you recall, and next thing you know, we're in anywhere up to 10-foot seas I believe something like that, getting bounced around in these boats, walls of water coming over us and fortunately, all of us were able to get back onto the ship successfully. But if you remember, we were the last boat because we were the command element trying to make sure all of the boats got on safely. And I think after five maybe six hours I think, getting tossed around out in the ocean, we were able to get everybody back on safely. What do you think about that? What do you remember about that day?

**JESUS DAVILA:** You know, those were the great times being a boat company. A small craft company being Amphibious Raiders, you know the model Raider two, four Raider, Raider company. Those moments are always you know, forever instilled in our minds and will always be with us till we leave this earth. But that day, getting out on the water being that that was roughly my second or third time running through a boat company operations, it was always nice getting out in the open ocean, but that time wasn't nice at all. I remember being able to see the ship and then the ship disappearing, and then seeing the ship, and the ship disappearing, and we were above the flight deck, and we were below the flight deck man. It was, at the time it was exciting. But then you look back on it as probably some pretty scary moments that we could laugh about now.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree. And I remember vividly getting after we got everybody back and accounted for, people are looking around and saying, "Geeze, I can't believe we got everybody back here safely." And people were actually laughing about it. Because I think it was one of those nervous laughs that many veterans are familiar with. But that experience really lives vividly in my mind, and what it really does it, I think it really talks to the tenacity of our veterans, right? And then, of course, of the camaraderie not only between the Marines that were part of this, but the sailors that were getting us back on the ship safely, as well. And they were just as concerned about getting us back on the ship safely. And they were excited, and we got everyone back on. So, it really talks about the camaraderie of all of the services who get a chance to do some joint work. And I think that's the same thing that happens when people transition out of the military, they're looking for that camaraderie. And, and oftentimes, it's hard to find, but in many industries, you can find some similar pieces of it that you experience in the military. And so, with that, as part of your transition, and you're, you know, looking to your next career out of the military, what do you think as part of your transition was probably the most challenging?

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**JESUS DAVILA:** It's finding that drive, that sense of purpose, you know, in the military, we had that purpose, we had the mission statement, we had an execution, you know, we had tasks that we were assigned to do, every day that we were in, and having that subtracted from our lives, you have to find that purpose for you out in the workforce, and that drive and the transition process, it's eye opening, you know, it comes fast. I wanted to be a 20, 25 year, retire from faithful service. And, you know, the Taliban had another mindset for me, and, you know, I couldn't complete my time. So, I was medically retired. But that transition process is important. You know, with the programs that you get, as you're getting ready to exit active duty, those programs set you up to be successful in transitioning. The hardest part is finding that connection with other people. And I think that's what I struggled with in college, the bond, the camaraderie that you're talking about. That bond that you build in the military, you know, with Marines, sailors, soldiers, airmen, Coast Guard, you build that bond that can never be broken. And no matter where you are in the world, if you see somebody that was a prior service member, you automatically have that instant connection. And I think that is something that takes some time to realize. And once you see that, that it's there, you flock to those groups of people like that. And it kind of helps with the transitioning from military to civilian life.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I think you're spot on. I know, you know, it is a challenge, and it's a constant influx of information that has flow into you, right, as you're trying to make the right decision for you when you're transitioning out. I know there's [a] tremendous amount of resources that also are provided to you when you're in that process of transitioning out. But it can be overwhelming. And many times, we hear that from veterans, often, they talk about how much information is overwhelming, good information, but is overwhelming when you're trying to make the right decision during the transition process. You know, I get asked that all the time, "How were you able to transition out of the military successfully?" That's always been a process, right? It's not something that occurs overnight. It's a process and you have to understand the process and learn to process continuously. So, I know you just like I did, I went through TAP in 2008 when I was after our deployment, and learn some stuff from there, wish I could have learned more. And now actually, I'm leading the Department of Labor TAP space here, but you've also went through TAP when you were transitioning out. What advice would you give to service members who are going through TAP now or getting prepared to go to TAP?

**JESUS DAVILA:** I would say take the information and listen. It's not just a check in the box you know, you would get your checkout sheet, checkout form that you would go around and do certain classes and checkout with different departments, S1, S2, S3, CIF, and that class is required, you know, to take before you leave military service, and a lot of guys are, they're already over the fence already. They're one foot out the door. It's if I would have known what I know now back then, I would have been paying attention more

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during that class and listening to the resources that were available. And taking advantage of a lot of those resources. You know, it could seem like a safety brief or a liberal brief every week that you hit. And you could take it like that. But those classes are meant to set you up for success and being attentive and listening and taking down notes. And following up and asking questions, that's really what's going to prepare you for when you leave and get into the civilian life, which is a total different lifestyle from what we're used to as service members.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree, 100%. And I'll tell you, I went to TAP about 10 months before I finally retired. And then I got a sense of the fact that how important it was to all of the younger Marines that I was able to lead. And so, after that, you know, I was really encouraging all of my Marines to get to TAP as soon as they possibly could, when they made that decision that they were going to get out of the Marine Corps and pursue other options. So, I think as a leader, we're also responsible, both the senior enlisted leaders and noncommissioned officers, the officers in the chain of command to ensure that the service members can get to TAP as early as possible. So that really helps inform their decision-making process. And in many cases, I mean, if you had the opportunity, would you go to TAP again, before you got out? Right?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Oh, yeah, yeah. You know, hindsight is 2020, and everybody wishes they can go back in time and fix things. But everything, it's not just a mandatory fun day, it's something that's going to prepare you for something that you have not been involved in, in a while. And there's tools out there that are there for you to use, that you may not know about, that are going to set you up for success. And utilizing those tools is just going to help you become a better, well-rounded person to enter that workforce.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree. 100%. And on top of that, you know, now we have veterans who've been out of the Marine Corps or out of the services that you know, of course, it's easy for me to always go back and say the Marine Corps, but being out of the service for a period of time, whether it's a year, a couple of years. Now, we have programs like the Off-Base Transition Training program that VETS has currently in our pilot stage. And we're trying to really work with veterans who now are looking for another opportunity to hone their skills, right? Build out a stronger resume, look for new career opportunities. And so, we're encouraging veterans to get to those programs as well, because maybe they didn't, as you mentioned, get enough information while they're on active duty. Now that they've been out and they've been kind of indoctrinated, if you will, to the civilian community and see what the challenges are there, when it comes to translation of skill sets, would you recommend something like that to veterans?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Oh, yeah, you know, hearing and talking to you before this, and catching up, knowing now that there's a lot more progress that's been made to help and

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more resources that are available, those programs when I hear about them, it's like man, you know, you always hear about those things after you're out. And it's like, man, I wish that was there. I wish that was there when I was getting out. You know, man, I wish I had that when you know, when I was in, that those programs that are coming out are they're top notch, and they're really going to help a lot of service members get out of the military successfully. So...

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree. I mean, it's information that, we talk about information overload, but when you have specific programs like that, after you've had a chance to breathe from separation of the military, I think are going to really be beneficial. We're excited about it. Then, of course, we've got another program called the Employment Navigator & Partnership Pilot, that is at a few bases around the country and overseas. And it's really putting that individual emphasis on the transition process. So, they go through TAP and now they're being connected with the Employment Navigator, as we call them, to help them really define and shape their vision of what they want to do when they get out of the military, what kind of career path they're going to choose. And we know that has worked extremely well for our transitioning service members and military spouses. So, what are the things as you know, well being married, is that you know, our military spouses we have to pay attention to their transition as well. Speaking of that, how's your wife doing?

**JESUS DAVILA:** She's doing really well. You know, we just bought a house you know. We got one that's getting ready to get off and go to college. Some more that are in high school and then of course, we just had the baby. He's one years old now. And I'm having to redo all the growing up and everybody was getting ready to be on their own and now we have somebody that's going to need us again for another 18 years. So, the wife is good. She's transitioned very well. And she keeps busy. And she'll be going back to school here soon. So...

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, that's amazing. That is a full-time job in itself, obviously. So, we're glad the family is continuing to do well. So, we've talked a little bit about transition, right? It's always important. And we always talk about what, you know, what could we have known more, things like that. I think we talked about earlier, when somebody asked me, you know, do I wish I had known more when it came to transitioning. I told him I wish I knew more about taxes, because of the fact that, you know, there's a lot of things that you do not pay when you are on active duty in the military. And then that tax bill comes quickly, right? Once you get out of the military, retire, and those are unexpected costs that we're not used to paying. So, on that same vein, you know, what are some of the things that were unexpected to you, when you made that initial transition out?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Yeah, I think having to do your property taxes and different things. And instead of having somebody tell you, "Hey, you're set up for a school seat at this school,

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this is your check in date, here are your orders, here's your flight information.” Everything's done for you. Now, you're actually having to do all that on your own. It's a lot different. Transitioning into my job field today, as a professional driver, it's a job and a workforce that's similar to the military. It helped my transitioning process. The trucking industry brought me back to that sense of purpose again. I tell a lot of drivers or students that I meet at schools and at truck stops, or guys that are interested or girls that are interested in the industry, I tell them, you know, that our, especially that our veterans, and some you know, when you were in the military safety was paramount at all times. You know, whether that was in the backyard of San Mateo doing patrolling, or outside the wire in Iraq and Afghanistan, safety was the number one priority. Making sure that you were safe and the people that you were with were safe, and protecting yourself and others. Inspecting your rifle before patrols or every day, making sure that your weapon was serviceable before leaving the wire, because that was a tool that was used to keep yourself safe and others safe. That, there, sets a lot of veterans up for this industry. When you wake up in the morning as a professional driver, your first task, your first duty is a pre-trip inspection. You're inspecting the truck, making sure that it's serviceable. The tires are properly inflated to the legal specifications. You know, you have windshield wiper fluid, you're following all rules and regulations that are set forth to you before you get on the road. And that's ensuring that you're going to be safe. And that's making sure that everybody that's on the road with you is protected and safe as well. Safety is a huge priority for truck drivers, for professional drivers. And that transitioned from the military and helped me, and I know it helps a lot of veterans that I work with, in our industry as truck drivers.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** That was a really good segue into trucking, you know, from the transition, a conversation. So, so thanks for that. Saying that though, right? I mean, one of the things that we used to always say in our units was, “Every person is a safety expert,” right? Every Marine is a safety expert. Every Marine can say “stop operations” if they feel that there's a safety violation going on. And I know there's quite a few Marines out there that served with me who actually had a pretty good stern conversation from me. And in many cases, when we were making sure that everybody was safe, right? And so, I think you hit on it perfectly. That's something that is instilled in us. Anybody that wears the uniform, safety is a priority in everything we do. And so, it's good to hear that, you know, you carry that over into your current industry, right? But what I want to do before we continue this conversation, because this is obviously a good part of what we really want to talk about, but I think it's a really great story. So, could you tell us, for those who don't know, tell us how did you get into trucking in the first place?

**JESUS DAVILA:** I was about to finish my degree. And I really didn't have that, I guess, motivation. I didn't have that rah rah that we had getting up in the Marine Corps every day, but me and the wife were driving, and we passed a feature commercial driver's license billboard. And I looked at my wife, and this is a true story, I looked at my wife and

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I said, you know, like, “Babe, I'm going to, I'm going to be a truck driver.” And she laughed, and thought I was joking. And I was like, “No, seriously, you know, my dad was a was a truck driver. My uncle's a truck driver. I'm just going to be a truck driver. Like, I really don't like this college thing anymore, I'm not happy with it.” She said, “Whatever makes you happy, let's do it.” That following Monday, I was enrolled at a commercial driver's license school getting my CDL. And three weeks later, after testing out, I got my commercial driver's license and was looking for a company. I found a place and a family to be a part of with my company, Werner Enterprises. And from day one to now, they have been really blessed with everything that they've provided for me to be successful in this industry, with the equipment, the training, the leadership positions that they have in place to help you as a new driver into the industry. You know, it's just like, leaving boot camp, going to your MOS school and then going to the fleet marine force, you're learning the basics, and then you're going to get your training at your trade school, your MOS school. But then you really don't enter that real world until you get to the fleet marine force, or the actual unit that you're serving with. That's how it was with the trucking industry. I noticed that immediately in commercial driver's license school, you're basically going through boot camp, learning what it is to be a basic truck driver. And then you go and choose a company to work with, in my case, Werner Enterprises, and you get training, and that's your MOS school. And then you get your own truck, the company assigns you a truck, and now you're at a unit working and providing a great service to this country. So ever since I've joined Werner Enterprises, I've performed very well, safe driving. It's just things that were instilled in me, being in the military. I joined the Werner Enterprises' Road Team as a captain in 2021, and was given the opportunity and nominated to be an American Trucking Association's America's Road Team captain. Went through the selection process, it was kind of like a promotion board, you know, standing in front of a panel, talking about yourself, going through an interview, you know, giving a speech and basically seeing if you were able to hold that position as one of the top drivers in the country, and represent the industry on many different levels, and give educational classes to teach the general motoring public, all about safety and what it is, as professional drivers that we do to keep not just ourselves safe, but everybody else on highway safe as well. And [I] was selected this year, and, you know, I'm just, I'm just happy that the opportunity that I've been given by my company, and opportunity to serve on the American Trucking Association's team. And I just, I'm very blessed to give the story that I've had in my life to other veterans and let them know that, hey, there is another life for you outside of the military, don't be scared, it may take some time to find it. But there is something out there that's going to find you that's going to make you happy. You know, for me, and a lot of vets that are out there, it's the trucking industry, it's a similar lifestyle. And I just hope to get that message to as many people as I can.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, and I can tell you, that's much appreciated. And I know, I've congratulated you before, when you received your award, but I want to congratulate you again, because that's a tremendous achievement. And on top of that, you know, you



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mentioned a little bit about the benefits. One of the things we were talking about earlier about, you're guided, right, during your military career, and you're instructed on what to do with respect to you know, how do you enroll in benefits, things that you need to do for health care, dental care, family care, things like that. But when you get out of the military, oftentimes, those benefits are nonexistent if you go into specific industries, right? In this industry, you know, especially with your growing family, you know, what do you think has really kind of opened your eyes to being in this type of industry?

**JESUS DAVILA:** The cost of insurance. You know, when you go like with for my company, for Werner Enterprises, when you go and enter this, this family, this team, you go to an orientation, and then that orientation you're given, it's just like we talked about earlier, it's a massive amount of information, that you have to take in and sort through and figure out everything. But that information overload, there's things that are coming at you like 401k, stock option purchase, the health, dental, vision plans, they're all benefits in joining this industry. Having a 401k plan and seeing money being put away for the future is, again, something I wish I would have learned and been taught a long time ago because that savings plan that I was like, "I don't need TSP I don't need the thrift savings plan, I don't need to put money away, I'll be good." That I wish I could go back and start again, you know, and do it over. But having that that growth in life and hearing the benefits that are offered to us in this industry, by my company and other companies out there, you go and you grab it and you learn, and it's setting you up not just for today, but for the future, which is very important as professional drivers is looking ahead.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, great points. I think that's one of the things that we talk about often is that when we talk to veterans when they're looking to transition out or veterans who have transitioned out or active-duty service members, is looking for your next career, not necessarily just a job, right? Something that's sustainable, that gives you the ability to earn a good, strong living wage, and allows you to build a career in specific industries. And so, what you just explained is exactly what we tried to advocate for, as part, of course, our TAP program, but even in other conversations with veterans alone. And so, I'm glad you were able to highlight a little bit of one, the challenges, but two, about the ability to gather the right information when you're making a decision to transition out of military or look for your next career if you're a veteran. So, really good insight there. One of the things that I wanted to also talk about as part of this is, you and I've had this conversation before, about how naturally veterans gravitate to other veterans, regardless of industry, right? What have you seen in your industry, with regards to veterans and how they've worked closely together?

**JESUS DAVILA:** You know, there was a term that we always threw out, especially the boat company, it was, "If it ain't raining, we ain't training, but misery loves company." You hear those terms and, you know, especially guys that you served in different



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operations with, you have that automatic connection to. You know, I'm good friends, in my company, there's four of us actually, that are on the phone for four hours a day, while we're unloading; Army, Air Force, and Marines. We may never have crossed paths while in the military, but we've been great friends for over three years now. It's a bond that you can't break. It's a friendship, even though you didn't know each other then, it's a friendship that automatically just happens, and veterans stick together. And it's that camaraderie that you're looking for when you get out. And it's there. You know, for our industry, as professional drivers. They're out there, it's, you know, you make friends with each other, just immediately, whether that's just passing by or hearing "Semper Fi" at a truck stop, you know, they see the Marine Corps sticker on my truck and, hey, "Semper Fi Devil Dog" and it's, hey, "Semper Fi, Ra." And that's it, you know, you never even known each other, he may have served in Vietnam and, you know, or Desert Storm, or any other during any other era, and that's just the automatic connection. And you start talking. It's a bond that will never leave you.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I mean, I'll tell you, I am still in close contact with Marines that I served with in the very first Persian Gulf War. And for those who don't know, that was 1990, 1991. And I'm actually closer with some of those Marines that I am even some family members. And so, we still stay in constant contact. But at the same time, we're constantly building new friendships and relationships with recently separated young men and women from the military. So, I mean, that's even in our industry here at Department of Labor VETS, where we have, a lot of our teammates are veterans themselves and served in all the branches, you know, men and women who've really done great work on active duty. And now they're serving their fellow veterans, again, in this capacity. And then other folks who are just part of the team because they believe in the mission, whether they served or not. And so, we've got a great group of folks all across the entire country and overseas who really want to continue to support our veterans. And so, with that, right, if you have somebody that is considering, you just motivated them, right? You just motivated them and they're considering joining the trucking industry, they want to get a CDL. What kind of advice would you give them? Because oftentimes, we hear some service members who say, "I drive these type of vehicles in the military, whether it's a Humvee or another larger vehicle, and I have these licenses in the military," they don't necessarily translate into the CDL realm, right? What kind of advice would you give to those folks?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Every situation is different, you know, and if I'm speaking to a service member that's about to transition, every situation is different. Every military vehicle that you drove is different. You've driven it in different conditions, in different countries. Driving a tractor trailer combination is a whole new experience. Everything that you're going to learn coming into this industry, you know, take down notes, ask questions, be involved in every aspect, from the moment that you get up to the moment that you lay down in the sleeper, or lay down in your bed. Be involved in every aspect of that truck

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and trailer, and learn as much as you can. When you're joining this industry, there's a lot of fear, a lot of questions, am I going to be on the road, from movies and just the old days of old truckers on the road, you know, being gone so long and never going home. The industry is evolving to meet the demands of the professional driver. My company, you know, I can speak for my company, my company offers 250 different accounts that have different home packages, home time packages, whether that's home daily, home weekly, or you want to be two weeks, three weeks, four weeks out on the road. So, home time is a big, I've come to realize, a lot of questions have been asked from service members and people that I've met, doing visits at schools and job fairs, that "When am I going to be home?" Well, I did four deployments, I'm tired of being away from the family, I want to know how many times am I going to be home. Hey, you know, every company is different, but my company and other companies out there, they're offering different home packages, home time packages for you to meet your needs. And all you have to do is find that right division, account, line to be on to meet those demands, meet those needs that you need for your family. So, when you're getting your CDL, and you're getting your license, and you're transitioning, you're thinking about what you want to do next, figure out what you want to do, and then search for that company to look for. And like I've said, I've been blessed to be with such a great company that helps a lot of veterans, Werner Enterprises, that they are a military-friendly employer, and will help guide you through that process. Because there's just a whole lot of things happening at once. So, take your time and learn as you're going.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** That's really great information. Because as you mentioned, oftentimes, you know, the perception is you see the commercials and you see trucks going down the road and you're doing cross-country routes. And people often think that that's the only way to be a truck driver, right? So, you actually really shed a good light on, you know, how you have the ability to be at home, if you choose specific, as you mentioned, specific, I'll say "missions," right, so you can be at home, be with the family, you know. Speaking of which, oftentimes service members when they get out of the military, they want to be independent, they don't want to work for anybody anymore. Right? You know, you and I probably had conversations with so many service members who said, "I don't want to work for anybody, I don't want to be told what to do anymore, I want to be my own boss," right? And so, in this case, if you had somebody who was coming out of the military, they wanted to get in trucking. You know, what information would you provide to somebody who says, "I want to be an independent?" And I want to know if I'm going to use this phrase right. But an "independent license holder, I want to be my own business," per se, versus working with a company like Werner that you're talking about? What are some pieces of advice that you would give to folks who are considering that route?

**JESUS DAVILA:** You know, every person I meet is different. There's some drivers that asked this question, new drivers that asked this question to me. And I tell them, "It's an

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industry that's learning. It has a lot of different parts to it.” When I spoke to a recent student at one of the schools and he was asking this exact same question, I told him, “Learn the industry.” Before you make that decision to purchase a very expensive vehicle and run on your own authority as an owner operator, try to learn the system first. Learn what it takes to be an owner operator on the road. You know, it's a big commitment to own your own truck. And a lot of people want to jump into it immediately. And, you know, I always tell them like, “Hey, learn the ins and outs, learn the cost of the truck, your insurance payments, your fuel costs, fuel tax, highway tax, learn everything that is about the truck before making that decision. You don't want to jump the gun and make a decision too quickly and then regret it.” When I talk to veterans about this, I tell them, you know, when you came back from that, that deployment, and everybody had their first weekend of liberty back in the states before going on 30-days leave, that parking lot would be full of brand-new motorcycles, sports cars, huge trucks, guys just spending lots of money that was saved from deployment. And then it not being there anymore, and not making a smart decision to invest into something, or put it into savings and store that away for future. It's one of those things I tell guys, just take your time and think about what you're going to do. It's just like buying a house, you want to make sure, before you sign and go under contract, you want to make sure that everything is what you want. And it's going to meet your needs. And you can handle that kind of purchase after everything is said and done. Being an owner operator, which I have no experience doing, because I've been a company driver my entire time as a professional driver. And being a company driver, there are two different things. But like I said, I've been blessed to be with a great company. So, I have never had that thought to own my own truck. But I do advise guys, like just new drivers just, “Hey, you know, learn what it takes to be an owner operator, talk to owner operators before you make that decision.”

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah. Again, great advice. And I, we talked about this before, but to your point earlier about, I wish I would have known more information back then when I was trying to make the decision. And then what I do now, to your point about you know, savings and investment, things like that. If you recall, prior to our deployment, I brought in a financial advisor, because I knew we were going to have Marines who were going to re-enlist and get bonuses to stay in the Marine Corps or other incentives. And then many of them are going to be tax-free, because if you're in a combat zone, for those who don't know, you get tax-free bonuses, right? So, if you're getting \$60,000, it's \$60,000. And in many cases, we were getting young Marines who were 21, 22 years old, getting \$60,000 bonuses. One story we talked about before, stands out to me constantly. So, I had a young Marine who said, you know, he got a \$60,000 bonus, I said, “What are you going to do with that money when we get back?” And he said, “Well, I'm going to pay \$20,000 to an investment. I'm going to save \$20,, and I'm going to spend another \$20,000 in Vegas.” You know, I said, “Well, at least one, I know you paid attention to the financial advisor class. And then two, at least you're honest, right?” But now if you fast forward, I bet you that young Marine wish he wouldn't have went to

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Vegas and spent that \$20,000. Unless, you know, he made a lot more money. In my case, I wouldn't have made more money. So, I think those conversations are important, right? Especially when somebody is trying to figure out what they're going to do after transitioning out of the military. And they're not going to have a lot of that senior leadership guidance that they're accustomed to while they're in uniform. This is why it's important to have a good network, right? It's important to have, you know, people that have experienced it like yourself, and that they can lean on and that when they have questions and be able to tap into that network, right? So, we talked about networking, in this industry, how does that really serve you?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Networking and the same stuff applies. And I always find those similarities from the military in this trucking industry. The similarities from networking, going to school, sergeants course, career course. It's the same thing in the trucking industry. You network and meet people and you have a question that comes up that you can pull out a business card and make that phone call as an America's Road Team captain, networking with safety and different Department of Transportation states out there, states' Department of Transportation. You get to meet a lot of different people that if you have a question or a comment or something that comes up, you can always reach out to that individual and ask the question and get a good, solid answer. Networking in the trucking industry is so great because you just meet people every day on the road, whether at a truck stop or at a shipper receiver or at a store somewhere. You meet that other driver and it's just like in the military, as veterans, you have that connection. It's the same thing as professional drivers. You have that connection because you're professional drivers and you know the lifestyle and you're living it, and that bond is there as well. So, networking plays in both, you know, it transfers over from the military. And it's well alive in the trucking industry as well.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Gotcha. Now, one thing that you mentioned earlier, I want to go back to this, you're talking about you were in college, right? But instead, you wanted, after realizing this is something that you didn't want to do, you wanted to actually take this career on? Well, oftentimes, you know, we strongly advocate for service members to use their GI Bill, get out and go to college, find the right career for them, that fits their needs. But in many cases, we have the opportunity to get veterans or transitioning service members into apprenticeship programs. I mean, the teamsters does a great job with working with the Army currently, right now, out of, we'll say Fort Collins, where I've had the good fortune of speaking at their graduation. So, while they're on active duty, the soldiers can go and take this apprenticeship program, get training, get their CDL, and then get offered positions upon graduation. Is that something that you would recommend?

**JESUS DAVILA:** I actually have a couple of buddies that did that. They were still active duty, but completing commercial driver's license courses. So, when they exited, or

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transitioned out of the military, they were full CDL holders with endorsements, hazmat endorsement, tanker endorsement, doubles endorsement. So, they were set up for when they got out to have everything that all the companies that are out there are looking for. That's a great program that I wish every base in America could provide. I know some bases are smaller than others. But I would hope that that could be pushed as a program that would be offered to every service member that's out there. The guy that that I know that I'm good friends with, he did that course, and I mean, he's been rocking and rolling ever since.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, that's awesome. You know, our partnership with the Department of Defense and their SkillBridge office, there, you know, they're the ones who have oversight responsibility for that program, but we partner with them from numerous standpoints, so we want to share that service members do have the opportunity to do that when it's available. And we're always looking to support them if they can expand that. But I think all the points you just mentioned is a good business case, if you will, for us to look to how to strengthen and expand that program. With that, I know we've been speaking for a while, and you've really provided a lot of great insight into this industry that I can tell you, I've been educated just in this conversation more about and I know a lot of folks who maybe had some questions, hopefully got a lot of good answers from you here. With that any questions from you about DOL VETS or things that we're doing to support our service members, transitioning vets, and military spouses?

**JESUS DAVILA:** I know a lot has changed in the military as a machine that's evolving every day. What is different from when we left the military, now, that's offered as assistance to members to set them up for success?

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** That's a great question. You know, the Transition Assistance Program is constantly evolving. And we have leaders on our team, who really are part of the TAP Executive Council, and basically working with our other colleagues at DoD, VA, Small Business Administration, folks like that, to really strengthen that program constantly. And so, we're always gathering feedback. And that's why these calls like this are important, because we're trying to gather feedback on how we can make the TAP process and the programs better. And so, they've evolved, I can tell you tremendously since I went through in 2008, I'm sure since you went through, they've continuously evolved. We have virtual opportunities for cases where someone can't get to, and in person, we want to really focus on getting them in person. But based off of certain situations, maybe they have to do a virtual one. We also are doing more for military spouses, as we talked about. Our Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses. We have nine courses that really, they can go in virtually, take the courses, and the course is also recorded when they have time, if they're raising families, or they have jobs also, but they're going to be transitioning out, they can go in and take that

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training to help them look for their next career as well. And I talked a little bit earlier on about our Employment Navigator & Partnership Pilot that we currently have, or they do that individualized approach to connect that individual service member with American Job Centers across the country. And we have over 2,800 American Job Centers all across the country where that service member can get connected to all those resources at the local level, at the state level to where they are transitioning to. And so that's one thing that is actually new. And then, of course, I've mentioned our Off-Base Transition Training pilot program. For veterans who have been out of the military, they can go back in, get a refresh on their resume, they can do some more networking, as we were talking about. And then they can find out what other careers are available, again, through our American Job Centers and our partnerships with the local community, other veteran service organizations that we connect with. So, there's a lot of things that are currently ongoing that did not exist just even a couple years ago.

**JESUS DAVILA:** That's good to know that service members now are just, you know, over time, the economy, just everything changes. And it's good to know that the programs are evolving as well to help the changing of this country itself. So, that's really good to know that service members are being helped as much as possible to be set up for their future once they leave the military.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree. I mean, case in point, right now, we're having a conversation about getting more veterans, service members into to the trucking industry, right? So, we're focusing on, again, building out a team of veterans who can go back in and, as you mentioned earlier, you know, doing the bidding of our nation's interests, again, out of uniform. And so, we know veterans will be key components of our success in building up the trucking industry again. So yeah, so there's things that we are currently doing at VETS to really help strengthen career opportunities post military service.

**JESUS DAVILA:** Yeah, I like to think of it as, you know, you're leaving from one service to your country to another service, servicing your country. As a professional driver, everything that you see inside of the stores, everything that you purchase at stores, is usually coming off of a truck, and that truck is being operated, more times than not, by a commercial driver's license holder, a CDL holder. So, the trucking industry is so important and vital to this country, to the economy, and the vitality of this nation. So, having more truck drivers, professional drivers come into the industry is a blessing in itself. And now more than ever, it's just as important to see the seats being filled by veterans, and I love seeing and talking to veterans that are professional drivers now, and hearing their stories of what they did when they were in the military. And now how they're driving a tractor trailer combo. That's, it's awesome, you know, and it's good to see veterans joining this industry.

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**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I agree. 100%. You know, I think there's so much value that they add just in the workforce completely. And overwhelmingly, the value that veterans add in the workforce cannot be overstated. And so, and in this industry, we know they're going to continue to excel. I mean, you're a perfect example of the ability to go into a new industry, and really excel at it based off of all of your military experience. And I know, for me, knowing you personally, it's not something that is unexpected, because of the type of Marine you are. Yeah, this is actually, I didn't realize what time, this has gone by pretty quickly. So, it's been a great conversation. But anything in general, I guess, as we kind of start looking to wrap up, what would be some really good parting advice for that service member, that is, you know, trying to make that decision? Do I stay? Or do I go? And, you know, what are some of the things that I can look at to help me make a more informed decision once I've made that transition out of the military? So, what's some personal and professional advice you would provide?

**JESUS DAVILA:** Oh, man, that's a good question now. So, for veterans that are transitioning from the military to the trucking industry, you're leaving one workforce to another. And safety, I always come back to safety. Safety is always on everyone's mind when they're operating a commercial vehicle. Safety was always on your mind, and as a priority, while you were in the military. If you're looking for something that has similarities and a same feel that you had while you were in the military, the trucking industry for me has been that exact same feel. I spoke earlier about the vitality and the need for more truck drivers, professional drivers on the road. You're leaving one service and you're joining another service and you have that sense of accomplishment. I have that sense of accomplishment knowing that I have provided a service to my country, still not wearing the uniform. But as a professional driver, I've serviced the country and getting the goods that are needed to the people of this nation. So, when you're transitioning, don't think you're no longer going to find something that's going to be of service to your country anymore. Because there's jobs out in the workforce, you know, especially for us as professional drivers, that are still continuing to serve the nation in need.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. I mean, in the military, we talk about the success of any organization is dependent on the success of its logistics, right? I think that's the same thing that happens across the country. So, the success of our country is going to continue to depend on the success of our logistical challenges being met. And so, you know, people like you who are leading the charge, and other veterans who joined the workplace, to really support what we want to do as a country coming out of the pandemic, is important. So, I'll leave it at that, unless you have any other questions?

**JESUS DAVILA:** I really appreciate you having me on. I think knowing that this is happening, you know, the opportunity that you have, that you've been given to help service members that are leaving the military, and the position that I've been able to fill

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now, not just with my company, but with the American Trucking Association, I think this is going to be really helpful for guys that are struggling to find that fire again. You know, the amount of guys that we've lost due to suicide, and not having that information of those tools, and the programs and the opportunities to be successful. We can help, you know, like you said earlier, man, just reaching one person makes a difference. And I think what you're doing and what I'm trying to do, and the word and the messages that we're trying to spread, I really am happy to be a part of that. And knowing that in the future, we're going to do as much as we can to help veterans and transitioning service members to be a part of this country that we fought so hard for, and enjoy it, you know. We're always forgetting to enjoy what we fought so hard for. And I think hearing everything that you're doing and knowing that these people are here to help you and push these programs forward. It makes me feel good, man. It really does. And I'm blessed, and I'm honored man, to really be a part of that with this and everything that I'm doing with my company. So, thank you for allowing me to be a part of this and helping me out.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** This is indeed my pleasure, my honor, my friend. So again, be safe out there, and I look forward to connecting with you and the family here in the future.

**JESUS DAVILA:** Yes, sir. Will do.

**JAMES RODRIGUEZ:** All right. Thank you!

**NARRATOR:** This podcast is brought to you by the National Veterans' Training Institute, whose mission is to further develop and enhance the professional skills of veterans' employment and training service providers throughout the United States. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment & Training Service, and administered by Management Concepts.

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