How the Memory of His Fallen Brothers Powers Dakota Meyer's Passion

May 26, 2017 6 min read

This story originally ran April 5, 2016.

Growing up on a farm in Greensburg, Ky., Dakota Meyer had a big problem with authority. During his senior year of high school, a visiting Marine recruiter asked what he planned to do after graduating. Dakota replied, "probably play football." The recruiter replied, "That's good, because there's no way you could be a Marine."

Not one to back down from a challenge, Dakota shot back: "Get the papers ready. I'll sign them today." He was just 17 and his parents needed to co-sign his contract. After training as a Marine Corps sniper, he completed one tour in Iraq and signed up to head to Afghanistan because he "wanted to fight."

While serving in Afghanistan, Meyer's combat team was caught in a deadly ambush. Disobeying direct orders to stay out of harm's way, Meyer raced into the fight. During the ensuing six-hour battle, Meyer saved the lives of several Marines and soldiers and recovered the bodies of four of his fallen brothers. For those selfless actions, President Barack Obama presented him with the Congressional Medal of Honor in 2011.

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Upon his discharge, Meyer's life took a turn he wasn't expecting. Previous to these events, if you asked him what

he'd be doing for a living, he told *Entrepreneur*, "I grew up on a farm, and I think I would have come back and done something like that. It's an honest way of life, a conservative way of life, simple way of life. Definitely the exact opposite of what I am doing now."

What he is doing now is by no means simple: he has toured as a motivational speaker, advocates for veteran employment, formed partnerships with businesses such as Toyota, became a regular guest on Fox News Channel and has taken a full dive into the world of entrepreneurship. He currently runs two companies: Dakota Meyer Enterprises (construction and general contractor) and DM Tactical LLC (training for the federal government.) Both are small businesses, and both have grown substantially over the past 18 months.

Entrepreneur spoke with Meyer, and gleaned valuable life lessons from the self-described regular guy who leads anything but a regular life.

How did the months and years following your Medal of Honor ceremony change your mindset?

This medal is something I wish I never received. It represents the worst day of my life, but the attention that it got me made me want to do great things to honor the lives of my fallen brothers. After the ceremony, I experienced different parts of the world, experienced different types of people – it lit a fire in me to give me more confidence in myself and it showed me to make the most of every moment.

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You've met U.S. presidents, business leaders, appeared on major network shows including David Letterman, what did experiences like that teach you?

You look at these names and you think, I could never be that.

But the more that I met these people, the more that I realized with the right frame of mind and the right amount of passion, I could be them.

Is there any crossover between what you experienced in the military and what you've since experienced in business?

Being in the Marine Corps and doing the job I did, there is a lot of risk involved. It made me comfortable with risk. Being an entrepreneur is all about risk. Being an entrepreneur is like going to Vegas every day and shoving all of your chips into the middle of the table every single day.

It doesn't matter how big of a company you have, I always tell people that you are one job away from being broke. And if you don't live that way, you'll *be* broke. I think that what got me to where I am as an entrepreneur is that I got comfortable with the unknown and I got comfortable with risk. If you are not comfortable with either one of those, then you're not going to be a successful entrepreneur.

What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in business up to this point?

Business is just like sports: if you're the best in the group that you run in, you're never going to get any better. It's the same thing in business. I surround myself with people who are smarter than me and have more experience than me, and I have gotten a lot of great advice. Mark Gross, CEO and founder of Oak Grove Technologies, which specializes in tactical training and intelligence services, has been an amazing help. He gives me straight scoop, and that's what you need. He tells me this will work, this won't, and that advice is amazing.

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You've advocated for veteran employment. What should business owners know about these men and women looking to join the civilian workforce?

Over the next year, there's going to be 250,000 veterans getting out of the military. I think it's crazy that people look at it like, "Oh, we need to give these men and women jobs." That's crazy! As a business owner, I look at it like, "There's only 250,000, if I don't hurry up and hire as many of these people as I can get, I lose out."

What qualities do they bring to the table?

There's not one company out there that is not looking for a quality person, a selfless person, a person with a whatever-it-takes attitude. You take someone who has spent four years in college and left with a degree vs. someone who has spent four years in the military and left with an honorable discharge…I'll take the veteran all day long. A veteran is a person who has proven themselves in an uncontrolled, unstable environment. That's the kind of person I want on my team.

And the biggest lesson you've learned?

At the end of the day, no one is going to care about your company as much as you do. That is a motto that you will live or die by. And if you don't believe that, just take your eye off the ball for a day and watch what happens. The only business owners that fail are the ones who gave up. You are going to be tested every day, every hour, every minute. You need to be up for that and you need to welcome that. And if you do, you will succeed.

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