

## Combat Veteran's Guidebook | 5 |

### Coping with Those Who Don't Understand

People annoy you. And they're going to keep annoying you until you figure out how to change your perspective about them. Civilians do things differently. Have different values.

They're not wrong, weak, or inferior to you.

They're civilians. The people you signed up to protect. That makes them, in a way, yours.

So stop hating on them. And start shifting your mindset so you can live peaceably among them.

Notice that I did not say you will become a civilian.

Don't even try. Be you, but be like a visitor to a new land. Look for the new customs, observe the differences. Study their ways of being. Stop judging, stop condemning, stop belittling them. Show some humility.

You don't have to like them. You don't have to become them.

You do have to live among them.

So, make peace with the differences between you.

And then consider how you can still be of service.

No, you don't have to consider them worthy. It's not about their worth.

This is about you and your worth.

You are a person of service. (Not a doormat, there is a difference, by the way.) You thrive when you are engaged in doing something with your life that matters. That makes a difference.

Assuming you're not going to war again, your task is to find new ways to make your life count.

Stop bitching. Stop whining. Stop playing a victim role by thinking civilians owe you. Man up and put your life to good use.

There's a lot of good to be done. You can start right now by changing your attitude.

Even with a good attitude, you are going to have to deal with people who don't understand you. They will never understand you and it's **NOT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO UNDERSTAND YOU.**

Your desire to feel understood and connected is natural and normal. It's painful to have those who are closest to you, your family, be unable to understand what you've been through.

But there is a difference between people not understanding you, and you not being able to communicate your feelings.

Don't be so quick to assume they can't understand. How well have you expressed yourself?

If you share your experiences through stories that talk about how you felt or feel, people will understand.

They don't have to know all the technical details. Or even all the details of what happened. But give those who love you a chance to hear what you felt, and they will be able to relate to the feelings.

All people can understand pain, grief, loss, heartache, frustration, horror, fear, anger, confusion.

That's the meeting place. The common ground.

Your story and your pain is different from their story and their pain, but the emotions you both feel are human and understandable to people with caring hearts.

The burden to be understood is on you.

Now, you don't want to share your personal private pain with assholes. And don't share it with someone who will not keep it sacred. Use discretion and trust your gut. But don't claim that no one can understand you if you've never used a language they can understand.

If you have a loving parent or partner, here's an example of words you can use to start a discussion: *Mom, I'd like to tell you a story about something I experienced in the war. You don't have to fix anything or do anything about it. I just feel like talking. Is now a good time?*

Explore these questions:

1. In what ways am I judging civilians?
2. When people don't understand me, have I really tried to express myself in a way they can understand?
3. Who can I reach out to (beyond my brothers) that will not judge me? (pastor, friend, neighbor, grief counselor at the local hospital?)
4. My stories are sacred, but they are not more sacred than any other human being's stories. How can I find ways to find common ground in the emotions of what we go through? (art, music, acting, photography, poetry, community storytelling?)
5. When civilians annoy me, how I can adjust my attitude to remember we are different, but neither one of us is superior to the other?

If you find yourself triggered, remove yourself from the premises if you can. Walk away, cool off, pretend you need to make a phone call, don't judge, don't blame. Remember, the best way to deal with other people, is to let them be other people.

Let's talk a bit about being different.

Being a warfighter is a spiritual calling. One I believe you sign up for long before you come to this earth for this lifetime. That calling makes you different. Not better than others, just different.

And it comes with responsibilities to carry knowledge, insight, wisdom, and experiences that very few people sign up to carry. Your spiritual responsibility to be a person of honor, respect, duty, service does not end when you exit the military. It's a lifelong calling and a lifelong responsibility.

You may be retired, but your work is far from done.

No, it's not an easy burden to carry. It will always set you apart from civilians. But you have a responsibility to carry it with humility and pride. You have a responsibility to hold that sacred knowledge of the darkest side of humanity, of destruction, of killing and death and conflict and to use this knowledge to teach peace and the value of life.

You teach peace by being peaceful. You teach the value of life by showing others their value.

You become the warrior in the garden, capable of exacting death, choosing to nurture life.

You take your knowledge of death and the fragility of life and you show others how to live a life of meaning.

You don't have to be unscarred, unwounded, fixed or trained to do this.

It's in you.

Start by making peace within your Self.

But what if you miss war? What if you miss killing? Many warfighters do. And why wouldn't a warrior miss doing what he is good at? What he was trained and designed to do? It's natural to miss it.

There are some warfighters who should return to war, if possible. But the majority do not have that option. Does that mean you put your fighting spirit away? Not at all.

Find another cause to put that energy into. Fight for something that matters to you. Add life back to this world. Add justice. Fight FOR something, not against.

The world needs your presence, so get yourself into a position where you can contribute.

You don't have to do something big or public. Impact ONE life at a time. Look around you. There are plenty of people who could use your maturity, wisdom and kindness. Your strength and presence.

Show up for your life.