



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 161: JD DUE – TRANSITIONING FROM THE MILITARY

Ken White

From William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that help make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host, Ken White. Thanks for listening. Every year, over 200,000 U.S. Military personnel separate from active duty. Transitioning servicemen and women site a number of reasons and motivations for their departures. For example, they may be retirement eligible. Others have completed their service agreements. Some are seeking a career change. For others, the move is related to family. Whatever the reason, transitioning from the military to the civilian world is challenging. According to militarytransition.org, about half of all veterans say their transition was more difficult than expected. Not surprising when you consider their entire world, in essence, changed. JD Due is the Executive Director of the Center for Military Transition at William & Mary. The center is located in the William & Mary School of Business and was created to help active duty and veterans students at the University successfully navigate their transitions. He joins us today to discuss military transitions, the importance of networking, and how a successful transition includes patience and a plan. Here's our conversation with JD Due.

Ken White

JD, thanks very much for sharing your time. Great to see you in person. Thanks very much for being here.

JD Due

Absolutely. It's interesting. One of the I guess positive upsides what is a catastrophe, and the pandemic is that you find out that people are ready to be together, right? To be a part of a community. You find out who's maybe not normally a hugger, and they might be a little bit more of a hugger. And again, keeping all those things in mind. But it is wonderful to be here in person. So thank you for having me.

Ken White

No, our pleasure. So as the Executive Director of the Center for Military Transition, what an interesting job. How did you even get into the field? Where did that start?

JD Due

Well, I've always been a fan and a friend of serendipity, right. In some cases, I literally stumbled into the field of myself, and it starts out biographically. Whenever I was at the culmination of my 20 years in the Army, I was actually granted an extraordinary opportunity. I was working at the Pentagon. I had been there for just a little bit over a year, but the US Chamber of Commerce had a what they described as a corporate fellowship program. And really, within my last six months of active duty, I got to spend twelve weeks with one of their corporate partnerships, and I was in a program manager role, and I worked in that civilian firm while the Army still took care of pay and housing and all of the wonderful things that the Army can take care of. But I was a program manager for four days out of the week, and then on the fifth day, the Chamber of Commerce would organize different transition skill-building events. And so there were about 25 of us going through this program at the same time. So we were able to share experiences, good and bad. And then we went to these different host companies. And the HR element of Deloitte gave us a rundown of what resumes should look like. If you're interested to go into consulting. Amazon gave us a rundown of if you want to go through an intensive interview process. Here are different sort of skills to refine. And in the midst of that process, about two weeks in, I realized I was in a role I did not want to be in beyond that fellowship. But what I discovered is this desire of what I really wanted to do is run a program to assist veterans in transitioning broadly. And that's sort of how I came into this place as well as then simultaneously and again; this is where serendipity comes in. A colleague whom I had never met but had been closely associated with on LinkedIn shared an opportunity that was the Pat Tillman Foundation. I saw the job description. I shared it with my wife. She looked at me. She's like, hey, don't mess this up. This seems like a great opportunity. And it was. And that's how I got into this business of providing resources, conceived broadly to assist veterans transition into a new chapter of service.

Ken White

Fantastic story. And I know just in the short time you've been here, how the active-duty military and the student body just love to talk with you and interact with you. The transition is a big deal for everybody, but especially for people in the military. Why is that?

JD Due

Well, for one, I think the military is a huge and complex organization, right? I mean, one of the joys in the national treasures that the all-volunteer force is. Is it has an opportunity to bring people from many different parts of the country and many different backgrounds together. And so, even students that are in the military on active duty now, part of the

reason why the Army or the Navy or the Coast Guard send them here is actually broaden their experience. So they're going through a transition themselves, of moving from maybe a tactical focus in the Army to then helping out the institutional level of how does the army conduct marketing for these broad institutional pieces? So that's one of it. But then, over the past, really 40 years of the all-volunteer force, each of these services have a very strong culture process, right. When you go into the Army, you'll spend six, sometimes up to twelve or 18 weeks in any one of the services learning your job. And just the first thing isn't even learn your job in the military is to learn how to be a soldier or a sailor or a Marine. And then when you leave, you don't have that benefit of time always, right. That was the key thing that fellowship program I was a part of. It gave me additional time to ask really big questions of how does my identity fit in a new culture? And those are really important first-order questions to try and address. And that's, I think, a key element of the challenge that's there. And it applies to any human being, but particularly in the military, right.

Ken White

Right.

JD Due

The military helps you choose what to wear when you go to work, right. We can joke and chuckle about that. But there's so much of that regimentation and framework that's there that sometimes it can be very challenging when you're entering a realm that doesn't have that same framework.

Ken White

You and I were talking earlier before we started to record, and you said for many transitioning military personnel, it's not what do I want to be is who do I want to be in that transition? How do you figure that out when you're trying to transition?

JD Due

Well, I think one of the best ways to sort of figure that out. And it is probably I think it is the question. It is the first-order question to figure out. I think you figure it out in the context of a community. You figure out in terms of introspective questions. If you're asking yourself, what does light my fire, what are my interests, what are my strengths? But then, if you're able to do that in a community where you have allies, where you have other people within that network, mentors this case here professors to be able to ask those questions of and get feedback. I think that's a really, really important mechanism because by communicating those pieces, it helps you really refine not only what your experiences mean, and it helps translate that, which is great on a resume. But that's not the first-order question. It really helps you understand, hey, what are different areas that I can move to, that I can still serve, that I can still be a leader, but doing so in a new context.

Ken White

When you look overall at the types of folks who have served our country, male, female, older, younger, a long amount of service, a shorter amount of service. What are some of the similarities they face in their transition? What are some of the differences among all those various different groups?

JD Due

Well, I think some of the similarities that they face is the fact that they will have unique experiences that also occurred in the unique context. So similarities are the challenge of taking those experiences and translating them to new context, right. That is, I think, one of the key challenges, and it is generally universal across the veteran community to be able to clearly articulate. This is how I can be an asset to assist any organization, be it one that wears uniforms or one that does not. Solve problems and do so in a creative manner. And I think in a lot of ways. And although it might not be at the forefront of their tongues, they actually have a lot of creativity that the military has so much regimentation and framework it's because it's designed to operate in the realm of chaos and uncertainty.

Ken White

Right.

JD Due

This was as true for the Greeks as it was for the Persians as it is for us. It is just madness and chaos, and being able to take some of those unique experiences and put it into new context actually is both the challenge and an opportunity that's there. Now the difference is that just like anyone else, the members of the military are unique. The way that they process the experiences that are there are going to occur in wildly different manners. So the stereotypes that might exist really, really don't necessarily apply. And one of the challenges that the Department of Defense has been doing a lot of good work really over the past six or seven years to refine their transition assistance programs. But the Department of Defense is a big, big Bureau. It is a big organization, and some of those processes tend to be a bit generic. So if you're able to look at an experience that then has very personalized transition plans and to have centers and programs help an individual piece those different things together. That's where some of those differences occur.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with JD Due in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the William & Mary School of Business. Today's world requires new skills and new approaches. Well, those skills and approaches are taught in the William & Mary MBA program. We offer four different MBA formats, including the full-time, the part-time, the

online, and the executive, all taught by our top-ranked MBA faculty. The William & Mary MBA will prepare you to succeed and lead in our new world. Check out the MBA program at William & Mary by visiting wm.edu. Now back to our conversation with JD Due, Executive Director of William and Mary's Center for Military Transition.

Ken White

When you're talking to someone who's serving, and they know at some point there will be a transition. When should they start thinking and doing? When do you start acting on your transition? How many months? How many years?

JD Due

Yeah. The thinking probably starts now, right at any point in time. And it's really interesting. Here one of the wonderful joys, and it's really a gift that William & Mary is able to bring. It's collaboration with the Army and the Major General James Wright fellowship. So these are fellows that come from a highly selective process in the Army, and they're at the midpoint of their army career. So they probably have at least ten, sometimes 15 years of additional service. But it's also an important transition and an inflection point in their career. They will be moving from doing direct leadership-type tasks to then be part of this broader institutional basis. And again, the Army, the Navy, the Coast Guard. These services are large institutions as they exist. And as they make that transition, it also gives an opportunity for them to really build and diversify all the resources and the human resources that they have contact with, right. They look within the Marine Corps or the Air Force. They're going to have a long list of folks that they can count on as allies and mentors. Well, a trip here as that broadening assignment as the military will often call it. Helps them to broaden that network. And it does so in a way that's actually transformational and not transactional. And so by starting to think about, hey, how can I maintain relationships that could benefit my service, could benefit and augment my service to my country? How can that also then establish a relationship that creates future opportunities whenever that time comes? And it always does come regardless of the rank that you depart. Where it's time to unlace the boots and hang up the uniform, and then probably within about 24 months, that's when serious series planning should really be initiated. To answer the more specific questions of what industry do I want to go into? Is that industry more important to where I want to live and to do that in a systematic manner? Just to be able to reduce some of the variables and a really, really complex equation that they're going to have to deal with.

Ken White

And there are opportunities and programs for those serving that they can experience to kind of get them moving on their transition?

JD Due

Absolutely. Again, one of the current ones and it grew out of the program that I was able to participate in back in 2018. It's called SkillBridge, the Department of Defense SkillBridge program, and it is oriented to a wide array of military personnel. Some that have been enlisted personnel. And sometimes, that might mean that they are then transitioning to get a bachelor's degree. Officers commissioned officers s have to have a bachelors degree already, but then it allows them to be in a position to get a professional degree, a Masters or even higher degree, to again add aspects of specificity to their skill set, to be able to again address those challenges and opportunities of what comes next.

Ken White

Many of our listeners are professionals, leaders and managers, business owners. What can companies and organizations do in terms of the transition to help to get involved, to bring veterans on board?

JD Due

Well, I think one of the key aspects is A recognizing that the service members are actually an integral part of their community, and they always have been, right. One of the huge benefits is the G.I. Bill. So when we think about 1944, in terms of military history, massive things are going on. There's an invasion of Normandy. There's the Battle of the Bulge. The tide is turning against the Nazi regime. But at the same time, we're passing the G.I. Bill, and that's really significant. So at the height of combat in World War II, Congress actually has the foresight to establish this program that allows the reintegration of a very, very huge army compared to what the size of the military is today back into the civilian world. We still have elements of that going on right now. The post 911 GI bill is a wonderful benefit that is really, really geared towards, you know, MBA programs. Towards law degree programs in terms of the amount of time and benefits that folks have. And so for companies to be able to look at those opportunities as well as even inside their own companies, they're going to find, oh, wow. I didn't realize that this leader that she was a Marine Corps veteran.

Ken White

Right.

JD Due

And yet those human beings are going to be there listening to them in terms of their own stories as well as listening to our students and clearly communicating, I think, is the answer of how folks can help best.

Ken White

So tell us about the Center for Military Transition. This is new at William & Mary. We've always had a I call it a love affair between the military and William & Mary. It's been going on forever. But we've got a good number of servicemen and women here in our school, undergrad, and graduate programs. But this is a big deal. Tell us about the Center for Military Transition.

JD Due

It is and Bob Merkle who's the Special Assistant to the University President on Military Affairs. He talks about William & Mary that we have an abundance of riches. And he's absolutely true. Dean Pulley talks about that. Active duty and service members have always been this integral part of the Mason School and this broader community. And it's really this element on opportunity for the Center of Military Transition to integrate all of these things that the Mason School does so well, right. You know, when we look at professional business education, when we look at leadership development, this development of skills, mentorship programs is what the executive partners are able to provide for life. Those are all the key contributors of a really world-class transition program. And that's what makes this opportunity so exciting. All the necessary factors are here. And then, the center can help to integrate those and again right-size them to a personalized experience. That's really the huge opportunity that we have. And I think it will be differential. It'll make a huge difference in the lives of the student veterans that are here. It will help inform students that are coming through the Mason School that have no or very little exposure to the military as well. And that is the wonderful aspect of this ecosystem that can really make a big difference.

Ken White

And working with those who will be transitioning soon and maybe not so soon.

JD Due

Exactly. And again, you can almost think of it as a timeline. And for those that are coming out of the military, they are used to some very regimented timelines. They know hey within X number of months at some point in time at 42 months, I was going to receive a promotion, right? Why it was 42 months and not 48. I'm not quite sure. But how can we then create similar timelines that might not be as regimented because they don't need to be mindful and to take advantage of the plethora of opportunities that are out there? But what are different steps that someone can do? How can they take something that might come out of a course that they take in the first two months here and then the center can help extend some of the tools that they're building with their professors and then link those in with potential employers and where a student wants to go. Again I think that's what's really, really exciting as we both develop individuals and then empower them to

really be able to serve and to lead and to be the assets that they have the potential to be in a wide variety of companies.

Ken White

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