

New Ad Tells Vets They're Not Alone, Offers Social Networking



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By David Botti

Sometimes one needs to restate the obvious to point out what's right in front of us. That's what New York Times columnist Bob Herbert did recently when he wrote these words:

With so much attention understandably focused on the economy and the incoming administration, the struggles being faced by G.I.'s coming home from combat overseas are receding even further from the public's consciousness.

If you're in your late teens or early 20s and your energies have been directed for a year or more toward dodging roadside bombs and ambushes, caring for horribly wounded comrades and, in general, killing before being killed, it can be difficult to readjust to a world of shopping malls, speed limits and polite conversation.

Herbert was discussing the launch of a major new ad campaign by the advocacy group, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, that aims to send a message to returning vets: you are not alone. The ad touts an online social networking Website called communityofveterans.org which not only provides useful information (such as how to navigate the VA), but also gives vets a chance to correspond with each other. Because the site was designed by veterans, attention is paid to aspects of veteran life the general public may not be aware of, such as an excellent portion that deals with homecoming. Put simply, the site got it absolutely right:

It's good to be home. Or is it?

Advertisement

That day you dreamed about the past few months – it's finally here. Sure, it's great to be back, but after a while something sinks in. "It's not as sweet as you think it is," one vet recalls of his return.

After riding high those first few days or weeks, the honeymoon period can end abruptly. It doesn't take long before everything that used to be familiar feels unfamiliar. You might feel like a stranger in your own town. You may feel you've changed, but nothing else has.

On top of that, after living on alert for so long, life at home can feel like living "with the volume turned down," in one Iraq vet's words. Disappointment and disorientation can mount early.

It helps to find an outlet, something you're passionate about. "Everybody needs something to focus their energy on other than what's going on," one vet says. "You need something to get your mind off everything else."

The new ad campaign (below) features a young vet returning to a desolate New York City, where only the handshake from another veteran makes the scene come alive again. Herbert talked with the returning veteran in the video ad, Bryan Adams, and relayed his experiences:

Bryan, now 24, was an Army sniper in Iraq from February 2004 to February 2005. At an age when many youngsters go to college or line up that first significant job, he and his squad-mates were prowling Tikrit with high-powered weapons, looking for bad guys.

He was shot in the leg and hand during a firefight, and he saw and did things that he was less than anxious to talk about when he came home.

"I wanted to go to college," he told me. "I had all these plans, but I couldn't seem to make them happen. I couldn't focus. I would get, like, depressive thoughts."

He said that he would party a lot. "Party" was a euphemism for drinking.

The drinking made him more depressed, and then he would get angry that he was "partying but not having a good time."

Bryan said he would "flip out," and friends began to shun him. "I just didn't care what I did or who I affected with my actions. I would break stuff. I'd break, like appliances. It was bad."



Writing on Veterans Day, Paul Rieckhoff founder of IAVA, explained the intentions behind this Public Service Announcement (PSA) [via Talking Points Memo]. The title of the piece was aptly named *Veterans Day 2.0*.

These PSAs, which will soon be running nationwide, were created in partnership with the Ad Council. You might not know the organization, but you definitely know their campaigns - these are the folks responsible for "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk" and "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste." This new campaign will be just as iconic and just as effective.

Sure, it's a powerful ad. But what is this PSA going to do to help vets?

It will bring them together and connect them with the veteran's hall of the future. Veterans coming home have told us again and again, the thing they need most of all is to reconnect with other vets. So this innovative campaign links veterans to a new private social network, exclusively for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans...

Vets can sign up for the Website here.