

Borne the Battle

Episode # 137

John Buckley — Military Relations Manager, Koch Industries, Veteran Advocate, Wichita Kansas
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(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Let's get it. March 27, 2019. *Borne the Battle* brought to you in part by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran, Tanner Iskra. Hope you all had a good week outside of podcast land, I know I did. I- Uh- I signed off on my first home build. So, me and the wife are building a house out here in D.C. We are gonna use the VA Home Loan system. If you want, I can share my journey through that here on the podcast. If you are interested in using the VA Home Loan system, they have information out there in the innerwebs at www.va.gov/ - it's a forward slash, I checked it, I googled it, [housing-assistance/home-loans](http://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans). That's www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans [Link to VA Home Loan's website]. Got a little nugget dropped in my lap a couple weeks ago. Forgot to mention it last week on the podcast. I have a very rare interview. It hasn't been shared anywhere in the world, it's an interview conducted by Adrian Cronauer, yes. The same gentleman who inspired the movie –

[00:01:35] Audio Recording:

Robin Williams (RW): Good Morning, Vietnam!

[00:01:39] Opening Monologue, Continued:

(TI): He conducted an interview with legendary filmmaker, actor, comedian, composer, Mel Brooks. The Mel Brooks. And it- it's hilarious. They talked about Mel Brooks' service, uh, his time with the USO. Lots of good things. Uh- I have that interview, currently in my lap. And I will share this content on one condition. If we can get to a hundred reviews on iTunes, I'll

release this interview. I'll release the content. Yes, you might say that I am holding it hostage, and, rightfully so. It's that good. So, after this episode, go on iTunes, leave a review, help us get noticed in podcast land, and after a hundred reviews, I will release this interview. It's hilarious, it's great content, and I can't wait for you to hear it after the uh- the uh- after the hundred reviews. Alright, what's next? We got a--we got a lot of content today. Lot of content to get through. Uh – next is news releases.

[00:02:45] Music

[00:02:48] News Releases:

(TI):

News release. Just trying to make the boring entertaining, folks. Trying something new. So, uh, today's- today I've got two news releases. One, on VA 3D printing. And it says, "For immediate release. VA 3D printing proves more useful for shoulder surgery planning than current visualization methods. In keeping with the VA's efforts to improve healthcare services for Veterans, Baltimore VA Medical Center doctors recently demonstrated how 3D printing at VA is more useful for orthopedic surgeons in planning shoulder replacement surgery than previous approaches. And that article published in the *Journal of Digital Imaging* on February 28th, Baltimore VA Medical Center doctors, Eliot Siegel and Kenneth Wang, described how CT Scan images were used to create 3D printed models of the shoulder." It goes on and it says, "Shoulder replacement surgery is commonly performed to treat arthritis, which is a widespread condition among Veterans and the general population. However, the small amount of bone at the socket side of the shoulder joint is a major challenge to the long-term durability of shoulder replacements. By allowing surgeons to better appreciate the details of each patient's anatomy, 3D printed models of the shoulder provide an additional tool for surgeons to use in presurgical planning. Ultimately leading- ultimately leading to longer lasting shoulder replacements." There's more in the press release, but, you know, for more information from the VA Maryland Health Care System, go to www.maryland.va.gov/locations/baltimore_va_medical_center.asp [Link to Maryland VA Health Care system website]. They also have a Facebook at VA Maryland Health Care System [Link to VA Maryland Healthcare's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MDVAHCS/>]. And they are also on Twitter @mdvagov, that's their handle [Link to VA Maryland Health Care's Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/mdvagov?lang=en>]. And our last news release is on changes within the GI Bill Housing Payment Implementation. Or, in other words, the VA's, uh, imple- how they're

going to implement, uh, making sure Veterans are going to get their BAH on time for when they use the GI Bill. So, “For immediate release. Today, the VA announced that the selection of Accenture Federal Services LLC to assist with implementation of benefit payment changes required by the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit payments under the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017.” Ugh, mouthful. The Forever GI Bill. “Effective March 21, Accenture will act as the systems integrator, coordinating planning, developing and integrating testing of all systems associated with implementation.” This is to help the backlog of all of the, uh, GI Bill payments. “With Secretary Wilkie and Dr. Lawrence, the Under Secretary for VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) are the responsible and accountable officials overseeing implementation. Accenture was awarded the contract to actually enact the implementation. For more information regarding Education benefits, please visit https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/post911_gibill.asp [Link to GI Bill Benefits website]. Alright, we got the news releases out of the way, we got, uh, we got the Cronauer information out of the way. So, today’s guest. You know, Veterans are sometimes miscast as, uh, broken heroes. And, by and large, I think that’s a flawed stigma. That’s why I love finding Veterans who are out there working to bridge that military-civilian divide. And, this week’s guest does just that. Actually, he does that for the second largest privately held company in the United States. He is Koch Industries Military Relations Manager. Our guest was the Commander of Infantry soldiers in combat and peacekeeping operations. He directed two of the Army’s top schools. He commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Reserves at the age of 19. He then served in the Kansas Army National Guard, where- eventually earning himself a Regular Army Commission. He also has two master’s in Military Arts and Sciences. Today, he teaches transition courses, gives presentations, writes about the military career tran- transition, and continues to mentor current and former military service members. He is also involved in the local Wichita, Kansas community as the co-chair of the Community Veteran Engagement Board, and he’s a board member of the local Veteran Advocacy Board, and a non-profit called Passageways, and I’m going to let him talk about their mission in his interview. It’s really great stuff. So, without further ado, I give to you, John Buckley II.

[00:07:30] Music

[00:07:37] Interview:

(TI): Uh, your bio talked about leading infantry soldiers in both combat and peacekeeping missions. Uh, what- what did that entail?

John Buckley (JB): Well, I was in the Infantry, in the Army Infantry, and when I was a Company Commander in the 101st Airborne Division, we deployed to Iraq back in the nineties.

(TI): Okay.

(JB): And, so we were one of the first units to deploy into theater.

(TI): Desert Storm I.

(JB): That's correct.

(TI): Gotcha.

(JB): Yep. And then, uhm, on multiple tours into Bosnia, into the theater. The first time was more as a operational planner, the second time was a task force executive officer into the southern portion of Bosnia Herzegovina.

(TI): Okay.

(JB): So, we were there for- I was involved in the I4 campaign, and then S4, of course the implementation force and the stabilization forces.

(TI): Okay, so- so that was in the mid-nineties, when, uh, there was uh- there was Serbia, Bosnia, and all that was going on?

(JB): Absolutely, that's correct.

(TI): Gotcha.

(JB): And then there was subsequent tour back into Iraq, and then there were a couple of deployments under, uh, wearing a NATO hat. Um, mostly in- in and around the Mediterranean area.

(TI): Roger. You, um, you spoke about, uh, when we talked earlier, you spoke about a pretty funny story about a soldier sleeping in the back of a- of a- uh- out there in Bosnia?

(JB): Right. So, we were the first combat unit to deploy into Bosnia that was based in the United States. Let me rephrase that, the first combat unit based in the United States that would deploy into and through, um, the

inter- the uh, intermediate staging base down into Bosnia. And, so, we had to organize all of our equipment, and- and it was uncommon for folks to do the cross-attachment and- and such in the ISB. And so, as we were putting all of our combat vehicles, M1 tanks, M2 Bradleys, onto the HETs to carry them through Croatia—

(TI): Uh-huh.

(JB): we lost count of a soldier. We couldn't find him. And—

(TI): Oh my god.

(JB): low and behold we used the, uh, the civilian police in Croatia to wave down a convoy and we found our soldier. He was sleeping on the back of a Bradley and got locked on the inside.

(TI): [Laughter] I'm sure he got a pretty good talking to over that [Laughter].

(JB): He did, he did. Uh, his non-commissioned officers made sure that, uh—

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): they set him straight. That's correct.

(TI): Di- discipline was maintained after that [Laughter].

(JB): That's correct.

(TI): What, um, prompted you to serve?

(JB): Well, I was- I was in high school, I was a baseball player, I had a couple of pro-baseball tryouts.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JB): I- I due to some various reasons and challenges, I was never recruited, uh, from a- from a college perspective, and my goal was to go and play at college and get a degree, I didn't want to go straight into the pros, so—

(TI): Did you have an offer from the pros?

(JB): I did not have an offer from the pros.

(TI): Okay.

(JB): But I actually ended up with three— three tryouts at summer, but the second two came after I had already signed up to go to basic training.

(TI): Right.

(JB): And so, I'd- I'd already enlisted and joined the Army, and while I was there, at basic training, I was given an opportunity to choose an ROTC- two year ROTC program where I would go off to New Mexico Military Institute, I got an associate's degree and got my commission. So, I was a commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Reserves at the age of 19.

(TI): That is- and that's not normal at all, correct? That's pretty- pretty rare.

(JB): That's right. Back in the day, I think there were- there were five different institutions that offered that two-year program across the country.

(TI): Wow.

(JB): I think they're down to four now, maybe even three. While I was at, um, at New Mexico military institute, they had actually cancelled their college baseball program, and I had played soccer in high school, so I joined the soccer club there, and when I graduated with my associate's degree and my commission at 19 years old, a college in Kansas recruited me and offered me a soccer scholarship. So—

(TI): Nice.

(JB): I went off to Kansas, and several weeks in, I got injured and instead of trying to recover and get back on the field, I decided that I needed money anyway-

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): So, I joined the Kansas Army National Guard. And, uh, got about three full years in the Kansas National Guard before I graduated, and then used my experience to go on active duty, and served as an infantryman for 30 years after that.

(TI): Rest is history. Um—

(JB): That's right.

(TI): so, while you were in, uh, who was your best friend, or your greatest mentor while you were in?

(JB): Well, it happens to be the same individual, quite frankly.

(TI): That's great. I love how that works out sometimes.

(JB): Yeah, and it was- it was actually while I was in the Kansas Army National Guard. So, it happened that my Company Commander at the time, he was relatively new as a Company Commander, he had previously been in the Marine Corps, and had two combat tours in Vietnam as a foreign observer, so—

(TI): Wow.

(JB): he knew a thing or two about fighting in combat, and—

(TI): Yeah.

(JB): He gave me probably my best leadership lessons, ever. And he continues to do that. Matter of fact, I spent the weekend with him just last weekend, went out hunting with him, and shootin' our pistols and doing a few other things just to have some fun. But, uh

(TI): Nice.

(JB): he still considers- I'm still- I still look to him as a- as a mentor, a brother, and- and more importantly, um, a great teacher. Now, I do have to admit, though, there were several others, along the way.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And – and- but- but, almost always, they were my non-commissioned officer. The- when I was a platoon leader, it was my Platoon Sergeant. I- I had fantastic NCOs throughout my entire career. And, my Battalion Command, um, my Battalion Command Sergeant Major was- was fantastic, and we were both mentors to one another, as well as, uh, terrific friends. So, I- I can't forget about them.

(TI): Of course, of course. So, uh, your- your mentor, you know, what was his name? Your gentleman's name?

(JB): Gary, Gary.

(TI): Gary. Okay. Now, two questions about Gary. One, did you guys, uh, get anything on your recent hunting trip? And two, what- what are some of the- what's a- like give me an example of, uh, something that he taught you?

(JB): Uh, the first question is no. [Laughter] I think we- we, uh, we were doing a little too much talking, and we- I think we stopped in the woods in his field, he owns a farm in, uh, central Kansas, so, uh, no. Matter of fact, I think we didn't even really shoot anything.

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): But, uh- or shoot at anything, I should say. Uhm—

(TI): Understand [Laughter].

(JB): Well, I tell you, probably, the best lesson he ever taught me, was when I was a young Lieutenant, and- and we had an- a training incident where

we had two soldiers overheated to the point where they- they were really suffering badly from- from heat exhaustion.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JB): And, my Platoon Sergeant and the squad leaders were doing the right things, but I diverted my attention to those two soldiers. We were in the middle of an evaluation, we were in the middle of- middle of, you know, accomplishing a specific task, and he came up, um, he was not directly involved in the- in the exercise, he was sort of, uh, coaching and mentoring. So, it was a platoon evaluation. And, he pulled me aside, and he said, "Hey, you've - you've got, uh, you know, 33 other men out here that are waiting for your leadership. You can't put a hundred percent of your focus on these two folks, all the- everything is going on", and, um, so, I think from there, that- that was probably the best lesson, early on, in the sense of, you've- as a leader, you've got to be able to focus on the mission and focus on the task at hand. Yes—

(TI): Okay.

(JB): it's important to be concerned and be involved in any injuries, but you can't let that divert your- the team's success.

(TI): Mission is paramount, troop welfare is important, but- but, mission is paramount. So, he taught you that.

(JB): Yep, yep. I think- I think probably the second-best lesson, and I think I mentioned this the last time we talked, was, you know, don't take- don't take no from a piss hand.

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): And, um-

(TI): And- and you explained that to me, but I didn't really get what that was. So, for the listeners, what is take no from a piss hand actually mean?

(JB): So, it's don't take no from a piss hand. And I actually teach my kids that, and basically, the idea is- and it's still, I think, still prevalent today, and it happens even in the VA. And that is that, uh, the folks who work and try to work very hard at doing what they have to do are really have their hands tied due to policy and they don't interpret policy, they follow it to the T, and—

(TI): Yeah.

(JB): and so, when you go to get something done, invariably, you're gonna get a no. And so, the idea is, don't ever get- don't ever get satisfied with that,

it's not being disrespectful, but, sort of along the lines of where there's a will, there's a way. So- so now, you've gotta figure out how to work towards yes—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): and that may be, you work with that same individual, or you, you know, very politely go over their heads and go to somebody who- who can apply common sense to the principle.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): So, don't get tied down with bureaucracy and- and you know, if you know it's right, and it needs to be done, it's not a selfish thing. But if it's right and it needs to be done, there is a way to get it done, and don't just take no from a piss hand.

(TI): Noted. Um, in your bio it also talked about, um, you directed two of the Army's most prestigious schools. What were they?

(JB): The first school that I directed was Command and General Staff College, and- and for those who are not Army, that's the one-year school that every single Major needs to go through. Some go through it at Fort Leavenworth, some do it in a distributed learning kind of a format or classroom, or a mixture thereof.

(TI): Gotcha.

(JB): So, it- it really takes those young, or I should say, senior Captains, brand new Majors, and helps them- prepare them for the next phases of their military career where they're going from direct leadership to organizational leadership, for example. Working on general staff, officers' staff and those kind of things. And then the second school was the School of Advanced Leadership and Tactics, and so that, uh, that element provides the common, core tactical instructions to every single course that is taught for the Captains. So, we call them career courses in the Army. So, as you're getting your specialty training in artillery, or infantry, or whatever it might be, mixed in and amongst that are several hours of common tactical instructions, and we help develop that and then train the leaders to instruct.

(TI): Gotcha. So, that's more like, uh, training the Captain to be like a Company Commander or a future Company Commander.

(JB): Absolutely.

(TI): Correct, or no?

(JB): That's correct, no, that's exactly right.

(TI): Okay. Got you. So, you served over 30 years, or, uh, 30 years. Um, so, I guess is it- it's obvious to say, what prompted your exit to service was, uh, was the max time that you could- you could serve?

(JB): That's correct. I had thought about getting out on several occasions, and we decided, uh, 30 years would be a good target, and, so yeah, I was driven by—

(TI): Maxed—

(JB): my retirement was driven by, you know, completing those 30 years.

(TI): Now, you and I talked about your transition a little bit. Uhm, you know, for someone that you think that made Colonel, and- and had a career as esteemed as yours, it- it didn't go as smoothly as one would think.

(JB): To try to put that into perspective, though I had those combat deployments that you talked about, uh, I was a direct sup- I guess, advisor, if you will, to the Chief of Staff Army, as well as to the Secretary of the Army, two years each.

(TI): Wow.

(JB): You know, got two master's degrees, I mean all those things that are really difficult and good accomplishments, nothing—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): absolutely nothing in my entire military career was as difficult as transition. Now, mine was slightly more complicated than most, in that I had a final deployment to Iraq thrust into the middle of my timeline. But, trying—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): to work on my resume and interviewing skills in the middle of Iraq just isn't the preferred or recommended way to do this.

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): But nonetheless, it- it was very, very complicated and- and it is a foreign environment for all of us, and it presents numerous challenges.

(TI): Absolutely. What- So, you know, including Iraq, what were some of the challenges- how much time did you have, uh, to leave active service upon your return- your last deployment- when you got back from your last deployment?

(JB): I had from about- just under 11 months, if I remember correctly, as to when I returned from Iraq to when I actually started working.

(TI): Okay. So, so you did 30 years, you, um, you- you transitioned out. What was your next step once you- once you got out?

(JB): Well, I- I was really fortunate in, um, in that I landed a fantastic job with Koch Industries. Due to some changes in the law and policies associated with, um, VEVRAA, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act, I mean, it drove a lot of companies, to include Koch Industries, which is a government contractor, to- to certain, you know, to aspiring to hiring veterans and a certain amount of those. So, they created this role, and I was the first one to fill it.

(TI): What was the role?

(JB): So—

(TI): What- what role?

(JB): The role- the title of the role is called Military Relations Manager. And so, in simple terms, I, really am like an in-house consultant to all the various Koch companies on their military Veteran recruiting and retention programs.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JB): And on the flip side, I also coach, teach, and mentor, and build products to enable other military people to transition into the private sector.

(TI): Gotcha. What is the difference between recruitment and retention? Because you always mention both in your job title.

(JB): I mean, from a business perspective, you know, recruitment is a little bit of attracting someone's attention to your company, and to the opportunities. And then going through the steps of, uh, applying, interviewing, and getting an offer, negotiating, and being hired. That- that to me is a broad definition, you know, and maybe the result of recruiting.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): But then the retention piece is after you've- bring some- you've brought somebody on board, how do you keep them in your company? And it's—

(TI): Okay.

(JB): more than just tying them down to a desk and saying, "You're gonna do this for the next 20 years." You know, there's- there's a lot to it. It's all

about enabling their self-actualization. It's- it's about helping them, uh, identify, more or less, their career path, and then- and then helping them get there, to get that self-actualization. So, uhm, there's a lot that goes along with- with retention. But the challenges for the military Veteran, and their spouses, quite frankly, are unique, and they're different from practically any other professional that we have out here. So, there's gotta be some special attention, if you will, uh, enab- that is, you know, focused on those particular retention programs that are unique and tailored to the military Veteran.

(TI): Sure. So, basically, you're not only, uh, basically helping the company, you're also helping the Veteran, it's- it's a two-way street almost, you have to- as far as learning how- how to interact with a Veteran in a civilian sector.

(JB): Absolutely, because what- the way we- the way I guess you could say I analyze the situation using some of the strategic and operational planning that I did, I started out with trying to define the problem. And so, we identified seven barriers, if you will, to transition. And again, my definition of transition is the military to civilian transition, which encompasses more than just signing a contract and starting a job. It's actually getting into a career and being successful, so, it's a broader definition. And so, our programs focused on that. One of the biggest barriers to transition, I've defined as the communication cultural gap. And quite frankly, it's an abyss.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And so- so it- it- the way we've approached it, here at Koch is to attack that gap from both ends. Which means, providing tools, providing assistance, coaching, teaching, and mentoring the Veteran job seeker. But on the other side, it's also educating business leaders, talent directors, HR leaders, recruiters, and others to, you know, confront those barriers, and- and create some unique measures to help the Veteran overcome those barriers. But then, there's a third component, and that is, how do we leverage, quite frankly, the Veteran employees that we have? I rely heavily on a quote that was made by R. Lee Ermey, many years ago, the famous actor.

(TI): Oh, yeah.

(JB): And you should remember him, he's a Marine, so—

(TI): May he rest in peace.

(JB): Yes. Um, and so, in an interview, he mentioned that too many Americans think that the VA takes care of our Veterans. But in reality, it's Veterans who take care of Veterans.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And so, I have not walked the hallways around Koch Industries, or really anywhere that I've been where I don't run into a Veteran who says, "Well how can I help?" And they mean that sincerely. And so, within the capacities that- that they have, uh, based on their own employment, you know, requirements and responsibilities, they contribute in some way shape or form. So how do we—

(TI): That's great.

(JB): educate them to do that?

(TI): Sure. You were talking about the communication back- gap, a little bit. You know I was, uh, I think I shared this story with you, but I'll share it with the listeners. That, uh, after my first week at, uh, my first job outside of the military, I had my boss come to me, and he goes, "Heard you curse a lot. Heard you curse a lot." [Laughter] And he goes, "You know, I told them I hired a Marine, but you know," and I was like, "Yeah, I got it, I got it." [Laughter] it's kind of-

(JB): Yeah, I guess you could say that's a good analogy, but it's deeper than that, quite frankly.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): But it does, it is, part of it is the language, and it's sometimes simple, it's sometimes humorous, um, our word choices is a little bit different, and culturally, when we say something it's a little bit different. So—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): but- but it is deeper than that. It's- it's adjusting to the leadership function—

(TI): Absolutely, absolutely.

(JB): and architecture that's out here. It's different, it's not hierarchical in nature. Um, it's- it's all about the tribe and the perimeter. I usually call it and refer to it as a perimeter, so in the military, you- you often worked from or out of a perimeter. And the perimeter was a group of people, in some cases you couldn't even see or hear or communicate with them, in any way. But you trusted them, and you relied on them—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): it's always about the success and survival of the team, not any individual. But in the private sector, it is more individual, more independent. It's not better or it's not wrong, it's not right. But it's different, and how do you adjust to that? How do you, um, interpret and- and perceive the, um, the mission focus, if you will, of some other folks. It's- it's a different attitude, so, we really have to understand it to be able to adapt to it.

(TI): Just a different culture, you know? Uh, you were talking about what R. Lee Erney said, uh, what was that, again? Um-

(JB): Many- many Americans believe that—

(TI): Oh!

(JB): the VA takes care of—

(TI): Yep.

(JB): Veterans, but in fact, Veterans take care of Veterans, and I'm paraphrasing, those are not his exact words.

(TI): Sure. And I- I think as a Veteran I can agree with that. I think the best way the VA can be as a bridge from Veteran to Veteran, you know? For Veterans to help Veterans, I think that's the best way, sometimes, the VA can be effective and help in the community.

(JB): Yeah, and it's not meant to be that the VA is not, you know, worth its weight in gold, because it is. It provides a tremendous service. But, it's- it's, for example, and the reason I use that, is in the workspace, we try to assign a Veteran as a mentor, you know? You talked about Gary-

(TI): Sure.

(JB): as being my mentor and friend. And so, it doesn't have to be somebody who is your professional mentor, somebody helping you through your career field. But it can be just another mentor in the space that you work in that can help you understand things. Something—

(TI): Makes sense.

(JB): as simple as making, you know, coordination to reserve a conference room, you know? [Laughter].

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): You know, trying to coach somebody from always saying, "Yes sir, yes sir, no sir," um, and actually call people by their first name, and you know,

those little things that may help you assimilate into- into the private sector.

(TI): Makes sense. What is something that you've learned- what is something that you learned in your time in that you apply to what you do today?

(JB): Well, I still live by my motto of don't take no from a piss hand.

(TI): [Laughter].

(JB): But I don't have too many piss hands, at least not in Koch Industries, and I haven't really seen a lot in the private sector, they don't necessarily have the same bureaucratic challenges. But, I think, uhm, there's- there's quite a few, I think, that I rely on. But- but a lot of 'em come down to the soft skills. Um, I was in between my infantry command, and- and stints as I got older, of course the Army always moves you to and from staffs. So, you're working on somebody's staff. And you're not the decision maker.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And so, how do you present options, how do you present bad news, how do you present, you know, conclusions and facts? So, the ability to- to speak concisely, directly, um, is a strength. I think the ability to analyze and see cause and effect relationships. So, they're the soft skills. And- and quite frankly, I think far too many Veterans don't put emphasis on that. They- they try to look at their hard skills, you know, I turned a wrench here, I fixed that there. I- I was an engineer, or whatever. And those are important, but- but quite frankly, what gets you noticed is your ability to do and to apply those soft skills. I'll- I'll tell you one story if I have the time.

(TI): Sure, absolutely.

(JB): So, I believe I was here at Koch Industries for less than a month, and I was asked by my immediate boss to do something, I forget exactly what it was. And so, about five days later I come back in and I tell him I'm ready to present, uh, you know, sort of the plan to him. And he says, "Okay, great." We're five minutes in, and I laid out some things to him, bottom line up front, just like we're always taught.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And immediately he interrupted me, and said, "Okay, wait, wait. Before we go forward, what we gotta do is we've gotta take this and present this to the lawyers and-" I've already got that done. I've already got their chop on it, you know, military terms, he didn't know what chops meant—

(TI): Yep [Laughter].

(JB): and everything. And then he says, “Okay, great. Okay, now we gotta make sure we got it to compli-” I’ve already got it to compliance. “Okay, what about mark-” I’ve already got marketing. So, I understood, at least from what I’d learned as a Staff Officer, that you’ve gotta get it fully coordinated and staffed before you present it to the boss for execution.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JB): And- and a lot of folks, in- at least in the private sector, don’t necessarily do it, it’s more of a collaborative, in the process, and- and discovery. Again, not bad, not wrong. Just different. But, the soft skills—

(TI): Gotcha.

(JB): that I demonstrate on a near daily basis is what most people notice, and I’m telling ya, from a Veteran who’s looking to get into the private sector, if you can amplify and demonstrate those soft skills in your interviews or anything after you’ve worked or got- got hired, you will stand out amongst your peers.

(TI): Absolutely, absolutely. Um, so, in addition to what you’re doing with, uh, Koch Industries, uh, you spend a lot of time servicing Veterans, uh, in your local community, correct?

(JB): That’s correct, So- so, Koch Industries is really, uh, big on employers making a difference in the communities in which they live and work. And so, I took that to heart, and I joined a group of Veteran, mostly volunteers who were looking to solve some problems, and- and we sort of formed a relationship similar to the CVEBs that the VA pushes and encourages-

(TI): Okay.

(JB): and sponsors. So, it’s- we call it the Veteran Advocacy Board. And—

(TI): Gotcha.

(JB): so I ended up becoming the co-chair for this Veterans Advocacy Board here in Wichita, and from that, we created two sub-communities, or sub-sub-committees I should say. And the first one focuses on Veteran employment. And so—

(TI): Okay.

(JB): I- with the Marine friend that I made at work- works at the workforce center, Chris and I have put together this- this sub-committee, and we’ve gathered a lot of other local businesses and companies, and the VA and a few others to try—

(TI): This is completely voluntary on your end and- and other Veterans in the community, correct?

(JB): Absolutely, absolutely.

(TI): Wow.

(JB): We presented it to the Wichita Chamber of Commerce and the county was involved, and so they've asked us to lead this effort, and so, they're also driving companies to us, in a sense. And so—

(TI): Wow.

(JB): with our Veteran, um, focus and- and my experience in this employment space, we've been able to contribute to other companies hiring and retaining Veterans. And on the flip side, the second committee we formed had to do with the homeless Veteran. And so—

(TI): Wow.

(JB): I was introduced to an organization called Passageways. And Passageways, uh, owns a private home out in west Wichita, and we can take in nine Veterans. And, we, it's- it's religiously based, and we make them sign a contract, a personal contract—

(TI): Sure.

(JB): which basically says, you're gonna get better, whatever it is that caused them to go homeless. Whether it was because their- of an addiction, maybe because it was because uh—

(TI): Education.

(JB): financial. Any, any occasion that it is, we bring 'em in and we try to keep 'em there until they get their feet on the ground. Then we help them get settled into a new government, you know, enabled program where they can get an apartment or whatnot. We've graduated 74 people from this- this home. And not a single one has returned to, uh, to being homeless.

(TI): Oh, that's great.

(JB): Yeah. Now- now passageways is focused on building a community, we're- we're working on buying land in southern Wichita, we've got 30 single homes that are already promised to us. Uh-

(TI): Wow.

(JB): with some local businesses. And so, we're hoping that within a year to 18 months, we'll have a tiny village. But the difference, in our approach, I

think, different in most small villages across the country, is, we're- we're looking to make some of these homes permanent homes to address the female homeless Veteran population. Because many of them have family members, they have children.

(TI): Uh-huh.

(JB): And, they can't turn to most homeless facilities because they can't take their children with them. So, and—

(TI): Oh, gotcha.

(JB): To be completely honest, some turn to some questionable career opportunities that- that helps them at least keep their family together and put money on the table, or food on the table.

(TI): Uh-huh, understood.

(JB): So, we've had several female Veterans who are turning to us to help them, and with the single home, we can't do it as long as we have at least one male in the- in the home. So, that's why we're really driven to get this- this small community off the ground.

(TI): That's amazing. Is it close to uh- uh like a VA facility as well? Um- is it—

(JB): Well if we- yeah, if we get the land that we've- we've made an offer on, I think it's- it's roughly five or six miles away from the VA. And so—

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JB): I think I mentioned to you before, two additional programs that we're looking- our Veterans Advocacy Board is looking to tackle, one of them would be public transportation for the Veteran. So, um, we're looking at how we can improve, or compliment the VA transportation programs that we have through the public transportation systems, and with the community.

(TI): That's amazing. That's- you know, it's funny, the next question I had for you was, what is one thing, uh, what is- what is a company or a nonprofit that you're excited about. But I think you already [Laughter] you just answered that. That's pretty amazing.

(JB): Right.

(TI): You guys are doing out in Passageways. Uh, how'd that get started? Is that like a Veteran, or, how did all that get started?

(JB): About four and a half years ago, a mother and her daughter were sitting in their respective homes and they both watched the same newscast,

which highlighted the discover of a Veteran under a bridge. They had found him, died because of the cold. And, so that moved them. And they- they did some research, they both quit their jobs, and they created this nonprofit. Um, I joined, along with a few other Veterans, maybe about a year after they'd gotten it off the ground, and they were renting this home. And so, with our help, and- and we created a board of directors, and I'd say we're about 60-40, 60 percent are Veterans, 40 percent are not. Um—

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JB): but we- we really work together with the community, and this is a real, uh, this community here in the Wichita area looks very favorably upon their Veterans and they really- they really do everything they can to help them. And so, um, they have been very gracious in their giving, and allowed us to buy that home. And- and now I think we're gonna try to rely on their- their willingness to give again to see if we can buy this land and build this tiny village.

(TI): Well I really hope that's- that- that happens. I real- that sounds like a really great, noble cause. Uhm, that's really cool. What is one thing that you think a Veteran should know about life after service? If you- if you were to pass off one thing?

(JB): So, I- I made this video a couple years ago to support the 22-pushup challenge.

(TI): Sure.

(JB): And it's- it's a message that's in there that I would say needs to resonate through the Veteran community. And it goes back to the analogy I gave you about the perimeter. And so, in the military you rely on those people, some people you don't even know, some people you can't see or communicate to, but you rely on them heavily to enable the purpose of the perimeter which is to allow people to go through and survive. Eat, clean their weapon, sleep. Whatever the case may be. And so, far too many Veterans when they take off the uniform, they completely forget those people. And it doesn't necessarily have to be those friends and colleagues that you worked with, or you fought alongside. In your community somewhere, there's another Veteran. And so, my- what I think that people need to know, is again, going back to R. Lee Ermey's quote, is- is reach out. Find other Veterans in your community. You'll be surprised at the activities that are going on that will help you acclimate and assimilate. And, or, you- you'll be surprised that you can help others. And together, in taking care of each other in that capacity, I think, really, would leave to removing some of the sti- you know, the challenges that-

that Veterans face that sometimes turn into suicide, or turn into the homeless situations. And so, to- to reach out, don't forget your military buddy or your battle buddy as we call it in the Army.

[00:39:20] Music

[00:39:28] PSA:

Man 1: I was a gunner's mate. Tonkin Gulf.

Woman 1: Logistics. Ramstein.

Woman 2: Medic. Kandahar.

Man 2: As a Veteran, it doesn't matter when or where you served.

Man 3: Infantry. Camp Pendleton.

Man 2: Or what you did. The VA has benefits that may be useful to you right now. See what VA can do for you. To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit www.va.gov, that's www.va.gov [Link to VA website].

[00:39:58] Music

[00:40:03] Closing Monologue:

(TI): I want to thank John for coming on the show and letting us know some of the great things that they're doing out there in Kansas for our Veterans. This week's *Born the Battle* Veteran of the Week is Navy Veteran Shannon Kent. Shannon served from 2003 to 2019, and made several combat deployments to the Middle East. Originally from Pine Plains, New York, Shannon came from a family of service. Her father was a New York State Police Commander, and her uncle a firefighter, who were both first responders during 9/11. Shannon graduated from- man, I hope I get this right, Stissing Mountain Junior/Senior High School in 2001, and later enlisted in the Navy in 2003. With the Navy, Shannon completed five overseas combat deployments. In 2007, she worked with the Joint Special Operations Command in Balad, Iraq. She did two more tours in Iraq before deploying in 2012 to Afghanistan. Shannon was recognized for her ability to speak a half a dozen Arabic dialects. As a crypto-technician, Shannon was an expert in cryptology, and experienced in the collection of human intelligence. She gathered intelligence and examined documents, hard drives, and other intelligence found during raids. While working in Syria, and in Iraq, Shannon would often work with travel leaders, merchants, or local government officials to help target leaders of the Islamic State. On January 16, 2019, a suicide bomber killed Shannon and three other Americans at a restaurant in northeastern Syria. She became

the first female service member to die in Syria since American forces arrived in 2014. At her memorial, Shannon was posthumously promoted to Senior Chief Petty Officer. Shannon's military awards include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal. She is survived by her husband, Joe Kent, a Green Beret, himself. The two met during intelligence targeting training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia and married on Christmas Even in 2014. Shannon and Joe have two children together. We honor her service.

That's it for this episode of Borne the Battle. You can find us on all social media. YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>],

Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page:

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Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>],

Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page:

https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca].

Department of Veterans Affairs. You can find us with that blue

checkmark. If you'd like to email the show, please do so at

podcast@va.gov. Let us know how we're doing. Love to hear from you.

Thank you again for listening, and see you next week.

[00:42:32] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)