

## Things NOT to Say to Veterans

Joining the Army after college was a no-brainer for Ryan Kules. The Arizona native always knew he wanted to serve his country, and in 2002, he got his chance. In February 2005, he was deployed to Iraq. Nine months later, Kules wound up in Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

"I was wounded by an improvised explosive device, which caused the loss of my left leg and right arm as well as the two service members who were in the vehicle with me. I don't remember being wounded; I remember the day before. But I woke up, two weeks later, in the hospital," says Kules.

Kules spent 18 months at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where he adjusted to his new condition and prepared himself for the flood of questions and comments that were sure to come.

Far too often, people assume a level of familiarity with former military that not only breeches proper office conduct but also invades one's "personal space," says Kules, who today is Alumni Director for the Wounded Warrior Project, an organization dedicated to helping severely injured veterans transition back into civilian life.

### What are nine things you should never say to a veteran?

#### 1 "Thank you for your service, but I don't think we should have been there in the first place."

Everyone has an opinion about the war but not everyone wants to hear it, says Kules, who explains that people often use him as a sounding board for their take on the war.

"People should recognize their opinion is a personal view and not necessarily an appropriate thing to share with someone who has obvious physical injuries from a conflict," says Kules. This is especially true in the workplace.

#### 2 "Why did you join? The military is a job for men."

This is extremely antiquated thinking, says Barbara Dorazio, an 18-year Army veteran who is now an Administrative Assistant at CVS Health and a member of VALOR, its veterans resource group.

"Women are capable of doing most if not all jobs in the military, just like in the civilian workplace," she says. "Everyone is entitled to their opinions, but it is best to keep them to yourself in the workplace."



# Have you ever killed anyone?

## 3 “You’re too rigid to deal with sudden changes.”

Because service members are forced to adhere to a rigid schedule, many civilians assume they are unable to think outside the box or adapt quickly. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Many veterans are among the most adaptable employees around.

“Former military have a resourcefulness, an adaptability to change,” says David Casey, a former U.S. Marine who is now Vice President, Workforce Strategies and Chief Diversity Officer at CVS Health. And despite standard operating procedures set in the military, “things never go as planned, and you have to accomplish your mission in all kinds of environments. The ability to be able to adapt is very important, especially in today’s corporate environment,” Casey adds.

## 4 “You’re a mother/wife, how could you leave your family while you were deployed?”

Dorazio points out that fathers and husbands have just as difficult a time leaving their families. “Veterans want to focus on being home with their families, not relive the deployment,” she says.

## 5 “How did your husband/boyfriend feel about you being around all those men?”

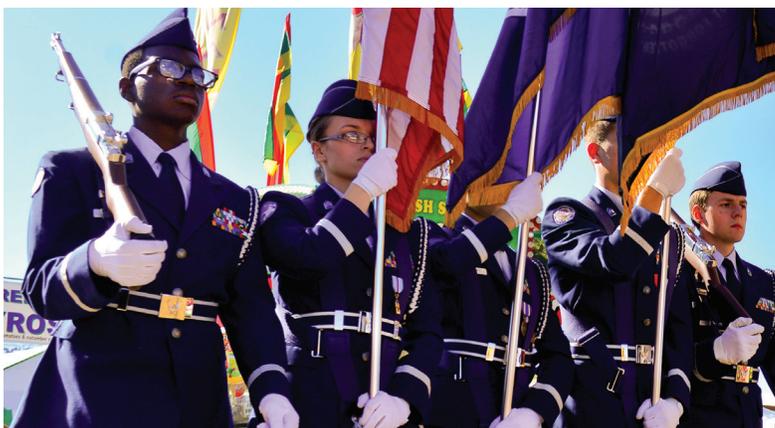
“A veteran’s relationship with a significant other is no one’s business but their own,” Dorazio says. “This holds true for civilians as well.”

## 6 “Do you have post-traumatic stress disorder?”

“If you are talking to someone about their injuries, then the best way to ask this is to let the veteran volunteer this information him or herself,” advises Kules.

## 7 “What’s the worst thing that happened to you over there?”

To non-veterans, this seems like a harmless question, but it’s inappropriate, especially in the workplace. “This is like asking someone, ‘What’s the worst day of your life? Tell me in detail’—no one wants to do that,” says Kules.



## 8 “Have you ever killed anyone?”

This question is extremely personal and may force a veteran to relive an episode that he or she prefers not to relive. “The person asking this question doesn’t have any idea how the veteran may feel about the situation,” says Kules.

## 9 “Were you raped?”

This question may seem pertinent given the rise in reported military sexual assaults, but just as with a civilian, this is an extremely sensitive matter. “While there is a spotlight on rape in the military right now, as there should be, this question invades a veteran’s privacy and it may force them to relive painful memories,” Dorazio says.