



Memorial Day:

What it Means, Why It's Not 'Veterans Day' & How to Approach Your Veterans

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On Memorial Day, many well-intentioned people take time to tell the veterans in their lives, “Thank you for your service.”

This common misconception, that Memorial Day is a time to thank veterans, is not in fact what the holiday is intended for.

“Memorial Day is essentially the one day that we should remember all veterans that are no longer with us, whether that is from combat, everyday accidents or just the natural course of life with people dying of old age,” said Chris Wilson, VP of major accounts at DiversityInc. “You ‘memorialize’ those that decided to sign a contract to be a part of something that would help the American people by joining the American military.”

For many Americans, Memorial Day is “the unofficial start of summer,” a day off of work and the perfect day for a barbeque. But for some veterans, Chris explained, Memorial Day could in fact be a very difficult day. Rather than being a day to thank living veterans for their service, Memorial Day is a day to remember veterans who are no long with us, whether they died in combat or not.

Chris served active duty in the United States Marine Corps from 2007 to 2012 as an Infantry Officer, serving deployments to Afghanistan in 2009 and 2011. He did lose friends in combat. And for veterans, Memorial Day could be similar to the first holiday you celebrate after

losing a loved one.

“We often hear that when people pass, the first ‘holiday’ season is very hard because they are not at the dinner table or opening presents,” Chris said. “The first couple of Memorial Days out of active duty service can be the same.”

This is not to say that all veterans will have a difficult day. Some veterans will be fine that weekend, perhaps if they were not traumatized by combat or did not experience death firsthand.

But for others, Memorial Day could bring a flood of painful memories.

“Companies need to recognize that other veterans may have memories of combat, almost dying, buddies dying, killing people, and so many other things can erupt during this weekend of emotions,” Chris said.

For some years, Memorial Day was more difficult than others, Chris recalled.

2014 was particularly difficult. That was one of the years Chris decided to visit Arlington National Cemetery, where Marines who Chris lost during combat are buried.

“I made the trip to Arlington over Memorial Day but at this point I had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So my emotions were taking over how I could act around others,” Chris said. “The day before I went to Arlington, my father-in-law asked me if I was going to see the families. A wave of emotion hit me, and I couldn’t talk, but only cry. Then on the trip down there, I had an anxiety attack.”

That year, Chris sought therapy for his PTSD — a decision that made a world of a difference.

“Memorial Day in 2015 and those afterward have been totally fine — only because I went to therapy,” Chris said.

Rather than approaching your veterans and saying, “Thank you for your service,” “Is this a difficult weekend for you?” or “How many friends did you lose on your deployments?”

Chris suggests saying something along the lines of:

1. “Enjoy your weekend, but I want you to know that I will be remembering what this holiday is about.”

2. “Enjoy your weekend, and I will be thinking about those that are no longer with us.”

3. “I will be taking a moment this weekend to honor those that served our nation and are no longer with us.”

If you are or know of a loved one who is struggling during this time or any other time, now is when to seek help.

“My door is always open for anyone that wants to talk about my experiences and how I was able to become 100% healthy from my PTSD. I want our client base to understand.” - Chris Wilson



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