What Does it Mean to be a Veteran?

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People join the military for all sorts of reasons. They join for occupational reasons like career opportunities, numerous benefits, and job security. However, nearly all veterans are connected by a sense of duty, compassion, bravery, and camaraderie. Without these characteristics, serving in the military would be exceedingly difficult.

When most people think of those in the military, they often believe they joined because of a sense of duty. Though 'duty' is defined as a moral obligation, veterans have adapted it to mean a desire to serve. By completing this 'duty', veterans are able to not only serve those around them, but their country as well. This can be seen as a 'thank you' for those who have served before them. If veterans from hundreds of years ago hadn't served, there is no telling what our country would be like today.

In the same way that people serve to protect others, they must be compassionate and care for the people in their country. Being a veterans is about having the motivation to be completely selfless, and put others first. President John F. Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy wanted people to step up, but he also wanted them to be proud of their country, so much that they would do anything to protect its people. The thing that sets veterans apart is that they are already willing to stand up for others.

Serving in the military can be absolutely terrifying. There is no telling if you will end up fighting in a war or at a desk job. That's why being a veteran is about bravery. Veterans must be brave, to know that they could lose everything they've known in the blink of an eye. This requires a keen sense of awareness and the ability to stay calm, even in challenging situations. Bravery is also about being fearless, and expecting the unexpected. Veterans are ready for any challenge, and that is only a small part of what makes them so crucial and important to society.

Combined, both of my parents served in the military for over 30 years. There is not a day that goes by that I can't recognize their desire to serve others, their compassion, and their bravery. Being a veterans is also about the connections and friendships one makes, and how serving in the military automatically gives you a network of people in which you have something in common. In both of their careers, my parents' coworkers are veterans as well, and my mom also works for veterans. Even though both of them may not have served as the same time as the people they work with, my parents and their coworkers have a mutual understanding and respect for one another, in part due to their service and the camaraderie that comes with being in the military. When my parents became veterans, they gained a near limitless community of people that can offer support and guidance, and that makes being a veterans distinctly special.

Being a veteran is more than serving in the military. It is about service, sacrifice, and courage. To be a veteran is to willingly put others before yourself, and to know that doing so actively protects the public. With veterans and their countless sacrifices, society has gained something truly invaluable.