



Emerging from PTSD with new purpose

After Lieutenant-Colonel (Retired) Chris Linford returned from a tour in Rwanda, he began suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He knew the illness was taking a toll on him, but believed it to be more of an invisible, internal problem. It wasn't until 2011, when he finally sought help after his deployment to Afghanistan, that he discovered how significantly his illness had impacted his children and his relationship with his wife, Kathryn. Once he understood, he took action.

Chris opened up about his illness and, while awaiting medical release, published a book, *Warrior Rising: A Soldier's Journey to PTSD and Back* in 2013 about his experience in the military and with PTSD. He and his wife wanted to do a speaking tour to reach out to other families affected by PTSD, to promote the book and to raise awareness. That's when he learned about POE's entrepreneurial boot camp.

"At the time, I had a lot of self-doubt. I was still struggling, and boot camp was a huge boost for me," said Chris. "I felt so fortunate to be there, to have my ideas taken seriously." At boot camp, he connected with like-minded veterans who saw promise and positivity in the future. "There was no cynicism. No negativity. It was really energizing to be working with such a great group."

"One of the best things I took away was the idea that I didn't have to be an expert in everything." For Chris, the legal, financial and social media elements of running a business were his weaker areas. Rather than become overwhelmed by them, he learned to "focus on strengths and hire on your weaknesses." He found that if he concentrated more on what he was good at, and got help on the rest, he enjoyed it more.

Name:
Chris Linford

Military Branch:
Canadian Army

Rank:
Lieutenant-Colonel

Release Date:
2014

Business Owner:
C.O.P.E. (Couples Overcoming
PTSD Everyday)

Author:
*Warrior Rising: A Soldier's
Journey to PTSD and Back*

Attending boot camp helped him prepare for his new journey as a public speaker, he and Kathryn completing a six-month, cross-country tour during 2013/4. On tour, at over 50 locations, they spoke to a number of other couples struggling with PTSD. Their own marriage had survived his illness, but these conversations got them to thinking about why, when divorce and separation are so prevalent where PTSD is involved. So, working with psychologists, Chris and Kathryn created a support model and in early 2015, and began to pilot a program called COPE (Couples Overcoming PTSD Everyday) to help fill the services gap.

COPE received funding in its trial year by Wounded Warriors Canada, which was doubled in 2016 due to demand and the program's demonstrated success. They've branched out to include a retreat in 2016 for first responders, and in 2017, its first French-language retreat will be offered. Now with a waiting list for the program, Kathryn and Chris find themselves busier than ever, and are now focused on expansion and establishing a sustainable funding model.

After his medical release, Chris could have retired comfortably on his pension. But he wanted to continue to serve in some way, so he and Kathryn took the gamble on entrepreneurship, and so far, it's been a great run.

"It's been hard work, but when you're passionate about something, it doesn't really feel like it."

His two best pieces of advice to would-be entrepreneurs? Be passionate about what you're doing and others will pick up on your enthusiasm. And surround yourself with smart people and recognize how much those relationships help make you successful.

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