

often say, if you re-enlist in any branch of the military, it really speaks to you adapting and accepting that culture completely, otherwise you get out after first term. No one—and I do mean no one—that knows me personally walks away not knowing that I served in the Corps. It shows up in my demeanor and my strength as a business owner.

USVM: What advice would you give someone transitioning from the military into becoming a business owner?

LS: Make sure you start your homework early when you know your end date. There is so much to offer us when we get out of the military, and finally this country is beginning to recognize this fact. Our discipline, leadership, resilience and determination set us apart from anyone else who never served. So, with running anything ... you've been trained while you wore the uniform; trained to operate in high integrity; and trained to leave no man behind. All three of these lead to you being a strong leader willing to take full responsibility for your actions. Help others be successful as you become successful.

Do take advantage of all the training being offered by the SBA in your State, affiliates of the SBA, and programs offered to veterans of the military. Get yourself affiliated with associations and advocacy groups that focus on the type of work you want to do as a business owner.

Lastly, network, network and network some more to find people that you can engage with. And get yourself some mentors! Each one will add different values and you can call on them as needed.



A little about Black Box Safety, Inc.

Black Box Safety, Inc. specializes in the prevention of serious injury in the workplace by supplying safety equipment for government agencies and organizations. Dalton is a Board-Certified Safety Professional (CSP) and holds a Master's degree (MPH) in public health—only 17 percent of CSPs hold both (Board of Certified Safety Professionals, 2017)—as well as a Bachelor's degree in business administration.

USVM: Tell us about your transition from military life to one as a business owner.

Jackson Dalton (JD): I was injured while serving in the Marine Corps. As a direct result of the injuries I sustained, I went through 3 leg surgeries and was not able to walk for a year. While serving, I was hurt at work—essentially an occupational injury. From this experience, I have made it my mission in life to ensure that others aren't hurt at work, so that they can continue to do the things that they love to do. As a direct result of my Marine Corps experience, I transitioned from the military into a career in occupational health and safety. I pursued a Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in Public Health, and spent over 10 years working as a Safety Engineer. Three years ago, it was my desire to help more people in a more meaningful way so I left my job at 3M and started my company, Black Box Safety, Inc., which is a supplier of safety products and safety training to government agencies and organizations that are looking for ways to reduce risk and help their employees stay safe and healthy.

USVM: How did your experience in the military influence your skillset as a business owner?

JD: My experience in the Marine Corps instilled

two traits: Grit and bearing. Grit is the ability or decision to persevere in the face of extreme hardship and danger. Bearing is the ability to maintain a calm and confident demeanor in the face of adversity and uncertainty. I learned that the most contagious thing in the world is not infectious disease—it's human emotion. As a leader, if I lose my bearing and communicate emotions of fear and stress, those emotions will be transferred to those I'm leading. I served as a squad leader in the Marine Corps and today I serve as President of Black Box Safety, Inc., where I am responsible for the health and welfare of 2 full-time employees and 4 part-time employees.

USVM: What advice would you give someone transitioning from the military into becoming a business owner?

JD: This is the advice that I would give to someone transitioning from the military to entrepreneurship:

1. Take advantage of every educational opportunity available including but not limited to: Post-

“A good plan executed today is better than a perfect plan executed tomorrow”

—Jackson Dalton

secondary education funded through the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Dept. of VA Vocational Rehabilitation Ch.31; free business start-up courses offered through the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) [SBA offers free business courses online at SBA.gov]; apply for a free SCORE mentor; podcasts featuring business start-up advice; and finally an often-overlooked resource that proved to be of great value and benefit to me, *Shark Tank* and YouTube.

2. Join an incubator that is composed of at least partially of active-duty and veteran business owners. I benefited greatly from the camaraderie I found by applying to a veteran incubator called Tactical Launch. I went through this incubator 2 years ago, and I am still close friends with many of the members of the cohort and many of us continue to be successful in business. The camaraderie is necessary when starting a business, especially if you are the sole founder. It's actually the number one thing that servicemen and women miss the most when transitioning out of the military.
3. If you are able to do so, start your business now. Many business startups require very little in the way of capital and expense. Most can be started out of your home with a phone, a laptop and a lot of determination. The biggest mistake I see in other founders is the desire to have everything ready prior to launch. A good plan executed today is better than a perfect plan executed tomorrow.