Voices of PVA — E04 — Leadership and Entrepreneurship After SCI, with Derek Herrera

[0:00] AL KOVACH JR.:
Welcome to Voices of PVA. I'm your host Al Kovach along with my co host Chad Stewart.

[0:06] CHAD STEWART:
Thanks, Al. On this episode, we're joined by Marine Corps veteran, entrepreneur and innovator, Derek Herrera. He's a leader whose life of service didn't end on the battlefield, it evolved.

[0:17] AL KOVACH JR.:
Derek served as a Marine Raider leading special operations forces in Afghanistan where he was critically wounded during the combat operations. That moment changed the course of his life, but not his mission. After his injury, he turned his focus towards solving some of the challenges he and others in the spinal cord injury community face every day. He is the founder of several medical technology companies working to improve quality of life through innovation. He is with us today to talk about leadership, resilience and what it takes to build something meaningful after life takes an unexpected turn. Derek, welcome to the show.

[0:53] DEREK HERRERA:
Thanks Al. It's a pleasure to be here.

[0:55] AL KOVACH JR.:
You have led a life of service from leading Marines in combat to now leading companies. So can you describe that journey for our listeners?

[1:03] DEREK HERRERA:
Definitely. So my, my journey began when I was young. The military was essentially the family business. My grandfathers both were enlisted in the Air Force. My father was an officer in the Air Force and gone to the Air Force Academy. And then around the time I think I was maybe 14, saw the movie Navy SEALS with Charlie Sheen and decided that that was something I'd be interested in doing. And so kind of just got more obsessed with joining the military and learned more about it. That led me to the Naval Academy. And while I was there I graduated in 2006, unfortunately not get selected to become a SEAL officer, but was selected to become a Marine officer. And then I served in the infantry for about four years and during that time found just tremendous joy and fulfillment and passion leading teams and accomplishing missions that were important and impactful for causes that we cared about and decided to continue to try to stay in the Marine Corps and pursue the special operations selection process and was fortunate to go through that and become a Marine Raider. And so I did that for another four years. But during that time on my third deployment when I went to Afghanistan, I was unfortunately injured and sustained a spinal cord injury, which changes trajectory from that point forward.

[2:16] AL KOVACH JR.:

So that was interesting. I learned something new every time I talked with you, Derek. So you got the short end of the stick and had to become a Marine. I understand. So how did your experience in the military, especially as a leader in the high stakes environments, shape your, your approach to building a business?

[2:31] DEREK HERRERA:
A lot of the skills that I learned are, I believe, directly applicable and Transferable to success in the business world and corporate world, especially in small companies and startups and as an entrepreneur. And so I find myself now at the company I'm leading now. When we're interviewing people, a lot of times what we're doing is looking for foundational traits and attributes, what we call the intangibles. Can you show up, can you communicate? Do you work hard? Are you passionate, enthusiastic about the work you're doing, Are you a quick learner? All those sorts of things are really just the foundation for, for anyone we want to bring in this organization. And with that we're able to leverage, or I believe that, that our team has been able to leverage very similar concepts in the military where we're a mission driven organization. We can create a culture for aligning all of the efforts of the team and driving towards a goal or a vision we're all fully aligned on and, and working to get behind. And so there's so many aspects of what I learned in the military, both as a young infantry officer and as a Marine Raider team commander, that, that I use on a day to day basis despite it not seeming obvious that those skills would transfer.

[3:44] AL KOVACH JR.:
Got it, Got it. So after your injury in Afghanistan, you know, you know, when were you thinking about building a business? Were you still in the hospital bed or was it something you decided to do after you got out and you got bored? What happened there?

[3:56] DEREK HERRERA:
The journey for me, when I, when I first started thinking about this, it was not immediately after I was injured. So once I got injured, I think I had an experience which is probably similar to what most people have now, which is the doctors will tell you you have a very serious injury, you're paralyzed, you can't feel anything below your chest. But we don't know if you're going to recover or not. So sometimes doctors will tell you definitively and they'll be very blunt and say you're never going to walk again or you're never going to do this or anything else. But, but the data shows that in the acute phases, some people do recover some level of function. And so what they told me was just that it's uncertain. You have a very serious injury. Clearly, you know, you can't feel anything below your chest, you paralyzed at the T6 level, you know, down. But if there's anything that's going to happen, recovery wise, you may recover some function. And typically the evidence would show that it will happen in the first two years. And so what that created for me the mindset that that enabled was I Was all in on just doing everything I could as a patient to recover. And so I wasn't focused on starting a business. I wasn't focused on doing anything other than just trying to focus fully on my own recovery as an individual. And as a part of that. I didn't really know anything about spinal cord injury. I was never exposed to wheelchair users when I was younger. So I tried to make myself an expert in everything overnight, from a technology perspective. And through that experience, I learned about a lot of new innovation

and technologies. And one of those was exoskeleton technology. And so there was a company called ReWalk Robotics at that time. And about two years after I got injured, they had received FDA clearance for their technology. And I was one of the first people to. To own one of those devices and use that. And that story, that example, what that meant for me was a very clear demonstration of previously, and even to this day, I'm unable to stand and walk. I'm completely paralyzed. But with this innovation and this new technology, I can use that device and it can aid me and allow me to do things I couldn't, like stand and walk. And so when I met the guy who had invented this technology, he was a quadriplegic, and he had just started tinkering away in his garage. And what that did for me was it kind of made me. Made it relatable for me. And that light bulb went off where it was, hey, here's a guy. He just had an idea. He was very passionate about trying to solve a problem. And through a lot of hard work and effort and dedication and time and sweat, he now has created something that has fundamentally changed medicine and care for people with spinal cord injury. They can now do this, which they were unable to do previously. And when I saw this guy, I was like, he's not that different than me. So what better thing for me to use my time and my energy with going forward now that, you know, this was a year or two after I got injured, and I had no functional recovery to that point, and I could no longer stay in the military? What. What better use of my time than to try to go forward and solve problems and create change for people during their time of need? And, you know, I have an understanding, a little bit of technology. I was just finishing in a MBA program where I'd learned a little bit about entrepreneurship and business. And what I found was the gap of. It's very hard to do that successfully, and there's not many people that are willing to take the risk and try to become entrepreneurs in the medical technology or medical device industry, where they're bringing a product to market successfully and creating lasting and sustainable change for patients in need. And that's what led me to pursue this path, this new profession, you know,

[7:31] AL KOVACH JR.:
like, what better person to try to fix this stuff than someone who's actually experiencing it, you know? And I know that you're not just a patient. You're somebody who everyone listens to when you're explaining your. Your businesses. So you talked a little bit about the exoskeleton. Was that really the first thing you wanted to address? I mean, you've got a couple of companies that you've started. Was there a reason why? Was it accidental that you went to the exoskeleton first? Or was there. Was. Was there really a need that had priority over the exoskeleton that was waiting in the. In the wings of Derek's creative mind?

[8:04] DEREK HERRERA:
Yeah. So the. The exoskeleton company, I did not work for. I was just a patient and a user and a brand ambassador. And so I deserve zero credit. All I did was try to help advocate for the technology. And so that was not anything that I've done as an entrepreneur. I was just a patient. But like you mentioned, what I asked myself at that time was I'm very fortunate to have opportunities to go forward and work, and I work hard to accomplish things. But I asked myself, is there something that I'm uniquely qualified to do? Or, like, of all the things in the world, there's something only I can do? And that was the realization I had where it was. I suffer from a lot of challenges and problems associated with living in a wheelchair and having a spinal cord injury. And I have a background where I can try to develop solutions and get those to market to help

people. So the exoskeleton technology was not something that I pursued at all because other people had already done it. What I did pursue and how I ended up working in the field that I've worked in for the past 11 years now in urology was out of necessity and out of personal need, which was focused around the challenge with bladder management. And so the mobility issue for me had been pretty. Pretty well resolved because I didn't realize this as I was newly injured. But within the next few years, I'd already gone all over the world. I was on the Great Wall in China to safari in Africa. Like, you can get around the world in a wheelchair. It's not as easy as, you know, if you're not or you're able bodied, but like, mobility turned out to not be the biggest challenge that I personally faced. The challenge that I personally faced was, was bladder management and catheter use and infections and all the complications associated with that. And so, and so at that time had another moment where I was like using catheters every day. This is terrible. Like, there's gotta be a better way. And I talked to a couple of doctors as I was having these complications and they're like, no, no, the catheters are fine. Like, that's easy for you to say. I'm, I'm 28 years old and I'm like sticking this thing in my body 10 times a day and I want to live a long time. Like, this is kind of terrible. Yeah. And then that, that, that, that was that initial moment where I became obsessed with trying to solve this problem, which was, you know, the, the foundation for the first product that, that I tried to develop and, and start a business around after, after school.

[10:21] AL KOVACH JR.:
It's, it's kind of sad that it's the, sometimes the people that we rely on, our, our clinicians, our doctors, our nurses are the ones that are dictating to us what our expectations should be. And I wish they would maybe learn more or listen more to the path, what we really want. You get on the Internet and you think that the first thing everybody wants to do when you're paralyzed is to walk again. But really it's more, I would say it's more about the quality of life and like what you're talking about, let's fix the bladder, not necessarily walk again. So going back to where we're talking about business now, as a Marine, you lived a very structured life, but then again, you were in special ops, which requires, I mean, that's where all the engineers and the problem solvers tend to dwell. And I'm just wondering what was that transition like being in a very structured military culture to trying to figure out the uncertainty of a startup company?

[11:12] DEREK HERRERA:
This is a great question. And, and what I would propose or claim based on my experience is there, there's some structure in the Marine Corps and the military and, and that is true. But the reality that I know to be true is there's not a group, there's not a group of people more adamant about not being told what to do and gaining independence and authority than the Marines. Like no one wants to be ordered around and told what to do all the time. And that's built into the culture at every rank. Like, so one of the things that's really cool about the Marine Corps is, yes, there's structure and hierarchy and norms, but there's also an expectation. And the entire philosophy for maneuver warfare and everything the Marine Corps doctrinally is built on is empowering people at the point of friction to make decisions and solve problems. And so both. And even in the infantry, like down to the lowest level PFC or lance corporal, if they see something that I don't, they're better equipped to solve the problem. And they may not have time to ask me for permission or ask what I think. And so in that moment, we're training people

constantly to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. And so that's not. That was my experience in the infantry and the further elevated, you know, in the special operations community, where you just have more latitude and more freedom and more capacity to solve problems and create change. But the entire special operations screening process was focused more on psychological screening to find people that are comfortable operating in gray environments where there's not a black or white answer or they don't shut down, or they're not asking for permission all the time to be able to finish a task. It's just being independent and operators and the Marine Corps, like, I feel like it's pretty entrepreneurial, and it's probably gotten better over time, especially out of necessity. But we have a foundation, we have a shared culture, we have shared norms. But I would propose that, like, we all enjoyed, like, and fought and worked hard to try to earn freedom from your commanders telling you what to do all the time. And so transferring that into the entrepreneurial space is directly applicable, I think, where we're critical thinkers, we're problem solvers, you have to have situational awareness about what's going on. You have to have self awareness. And then you just have to devise plans to take action and solve problems. And so those are all, I believe, directly transferable.

[13:30] AL KOVACH JR.:
So with that being said, for veterans who are listening to the show and are considering starting up a new business, what's something you'd wish you knew when you started?

[13:41] DEREK HERRERA:
The thing I wish I knew when I started was I think how lonely entrepreneurship can be. And so I just talked about how similar things are. But one thing that's very different is, and I learned when I, over the past, you know, decade of working this environment is from day one in the military, you're never alone. You know, you go to the bathroom in training and they're like, take a buddy. Where's your swim buddy, Al? Where's your battle buddy, Derek? You know, like, you're never alone, ever. And then when you leave the military, it's very different. Especially if you start your own business and you're on your own. It can be really stressful, intimidating, and. And going through those things alone is more challenging and harder to deal with. And so one thing that I would suggest for anybody who may be interested in this is the way around that is, even if you're just starting a small business or operating on your own for some period of time, is to set up the. The network and the infrastructure where you have other people who can help advise you or counsel you or, you know, point you in the right direction. Right. The one thing that's really important, and I would say just like, sorry to bounce around, but the thing that is probably the most important, which I totally underrated, and I think most people in the military don't know, and we actually have, like, programs. I'm part of nonprofits that help educate transitioning service members about this is the value of your network and the people that are there to support you. And so the military, a little bit of networking and everything else, but it's a relatively meritocratic environment, and you get promoted and get your jobs assigned based on how well you do. There's not the same thing in the private sector and outside of the corporate world. In the corporate world and the private sector. And as an entrepreneur, you need to have people that you can trust and rely upon and know to vouch for you to help advise you and do all those things. And that. That often can help expedite your path to success as opposed to trying to go it

alone. So my takeaway is just don't go it alone. Have a strong network, and that'll help you advance.

[15:38] AL KOVACH JR.:
Yeah. We used to have a term in the military. We call it reconning the dance floor. Gotta figure out who's dancing with who. Who's got the power, who's got the authority, who's calling the shots, who can help me the most? You just keep your back up against the wall and just watch for a little while to figure stuff out. When I was first paralyzed, it was really hard for me to get used to, you know, what is an LVN? What is an RN? What is a physician's assistant, a nurse practitioner. I got to figure all that stuff out, and I didn't. Because when I had a problem, I want to know who to talk to and who's going to help me get to where I want to go. So can you take me back to when you were first thinking about Building a business. What. What did those early days look like when you're taking your great idea and now how do you make a business out of it?

[16:19] DEREK HERRERA:
When I first started, what I had was just a lot of enthusiasm and passion. And I was like, using catheters is terrible. I'm going to develop a new way that's going to be better and really just had a drawing and then went through this process and I was learning this process while I was at school and learned how to file patents and then learned what was required to raise money from investors and get grants from the government and fund the venture and build the business plan and do the clinical research and all of these things that are required for success in medical device industry. But when it started, it was really just a basic idea. And at the, at the root, even today, in the early stages, the things you need to know is, is not overly complex, and this is something which is important for everybody. I try to share is business does not have to be that complex. At the end of the day, there's only two things you have to do. One, you have to build something, and then two is you have to sell it and that's it. Like, there's a lot of other stuff people say is important. If it doesn't directly tie to building a good product and selling it and people paying you for it, it's probably not that important, right? You may not want to do it. And so the fundamentals, if you have those two things, all the other stuff you can kind of figure out for the most part, but that's the kind of stuff that you do at the early stages of business planning is I have to have confidence that if I haven't already built this product, which in medical device companies most times you haven't, you have a lot of work to do to build a product and you have to raise the money to be able to build the product. And then in order to convince people to do that, you want to know, once I build it, I'm going to be able to have a sustainable business and make money and people are going to buy it. And so that's really the way it looks in the early stages is just like, what can I do to create conviction around the reality that if I build this device, people are going to pay for it, and here's how many people are going to pay for it. And so that's how I can provide you a return on your investment.

[18:15] CHAD STEWART:
I want to know a little bit more about what he's built and who's buying it.

[18:18] AL KOVACH JR.:

Exactly. That was my next question. We talked about. You built a business now. What's your product?

[18:23] CHAD STEWART:
Exactly. Yeah. Thank you.

[18:25] DEREK HERRERA:
Yeah. So my first company that I started, we were building basically a catheter that could go fully internal to the male anatomy. So it was a extended use catheter. So it would last for anywhere between seven to 30 days. It'd stay inside the body, but then you could basically remotely control it. So you could push a button and it'll allow you to empty your bladder. And so instead of having to use 200 catheters a month, you'd have this one just inside your body, and then you could just urinate more normally. That device, unfortunately, after, you know, a lot of all the effort and hard work to get up to where we wanted to go, we ended up, you know, unfortunately not succeeding and getting that through at the FDA stage, where we were trying to work with the FDA to get it approved and get it on the market so that that company was not successful. But after that, I transitioned into this company, now called Bright Uro, where I've been for the past five years. And we have been successful in getting devices and software approved by the FDA. And the device that we're building is a better way to perform what they call urodynamic testing. And urodynamic testing is a very advanced diagnostic tool that urologists and gynecologists will often perform in order to make sure that they can understand what's happening in your bladder. And so the current way that they do, it's really terrible. And I can talk more about that. We're bringing that test into the 21st century with modern technology and making it better, not just for the physicians and the clinicians that are performing it, but also any patients that are undergoing the test. And so the short way to talk about the technology is basically, we've made a miniature computer that can go inside the bladder and record this type of data for a period of time and then come out. And we can now download that data and provide a much better data for the doctors to finally know what's going on and how to treat you.

[20:16] AL KOVACH JR.:
Derek, could you explain to our listeners what exactly the problem is that you're trying to solve? What role do the insurance companies have in this? And you mentioned it's the technology or the protocols are using are like 25 years old. What need are you trying to address? And can you explain a little bit about the neurogenic bladder in people with spinal cord injury?

[20:35] DEREK HERRERA:
Definitely. So urodynamic testing is an umbrella term, but in particular, the test that we're talking about is called cystometry and pressure flow studies. And all that means is what the doctors are looking at. It's a functional test of your bladder to see how well it is storing urine and emptying urine. And the bladder's a really simple organ. All it has to do is make sure you can store it. And then when you want it to empty, you want it to contract. It's a muscle. You want it to contract and empty that urine out of your bladder. And so what the doctors are doing with urodynamic testing and cystometry in particular is they're trying to quantify and understand the relationship of how much fluid can your bladder hold and then what are the pressures that are generated in

the bladder? So looking at pressure and volume or pressure and flow, the way that they do that now is they require this big machine that you're tethered to, and they stick a catheter in your bladder and another one in the rectum or the vagina, and then they artificially fill you to feel like you're going to explode. And then they ask you to pee around the catheters in front of them. And they're looking at all these squiggly lines on a laptop. And that's the way that the technology's been for probably 30 or 40 years. And so what that can tell them is, you know, this patient, you know, their bladder starts freaking out when just a little bit of volume's going in there. And that may be overactive bladder, which is also similar to, you know, neurogenic bladder. And so neurogenic bladder is the term, or, you know, neurogenic dysfunction is a term for the bladder that is encountering issues or symptoms as a result of any sort of neurological injury, whether it's spinal cord injury, MS, ALS or other neurological injuries. For most people with spinal cord injury, what will happen is there will be some, like, change to the way their bladder performs. Some of them, some people with spinal cord injury still maintain bladder function. Most of them, I believe the evidence shows, do not. They have altered bladder behaviors after that. And so a lot of people, they'll have issues where their bladder can't hold urine. And so their bladder will start freaking out and the muscle will start contracting. That's overactivity. That also may be accompanied by leakage or incontinence, where when that happens or even when it doesn't happen, you know, the bladder's leaking and you're having accidents and those sorts of things. And so those are some of the common problems associated with it. But the only way that they can quantify and really understand what's happening is to do this test. And the test is really terrible. And we've got a better way to do it with, you know, instead of tying you to this machine, putting the device into your bladder, and then allowing it to stay there for a longer period of time while you go about, you know, about the clinic and, and you know, let your bladder fill naturally as opposed to someone just force filling your bladder in about 10 minutes until you feel like you're gonna explode. So, so that's a little bit of the, the how, the mechanics of like urodynamic testing and what we're doing.

[23:27] AL KOVACH JR.:
So what's interesting, or maybe I'm just a nerd about history, but, you know, the very first doctor that was in the VA healthcare system that really tried to address the needs of those with spinal cord injuries was Dr. Bors. And he's a urologist. And he recognized that the urological challenges of someone with a spinal cord injury was like, that was paramount. That's what he wanted to solve first. And here we are 85 years later, and we're still talking about it. But it seems like you've taken a huge step forward in the right direction. Derek and I, I wish you luck in the business. Let me ask just a little bit more questions about your resilience and leadership. You've developed resilience in the Marine Corps and again during your recovery. How have those experiences shaped the way you handle setbacks today? Whether it's a product development challenge or maybe something else that's business related, in

[24:15] DEREK HERRERA:
the startup environment, as an entrepreneur, you face some really significant challenges. And I think the way that you handle them oftentimes is similar, but like, they're just as intense or they feel that way a lot of times. And this one kind of surprised me a little bit. And so I love telling this story. My wife loves it when I tell this story. And so it's about stress and to your point, about

resilience, in the military, you're trained to do something, you know, oftentimes, you know the risks when you're getting involved and all those sorts of things. And so when I had gotten shot on the battlefield and was paralyzed in the chest down and came back, that was not a big surprise. We were getting shot at all the time. Right. Like, I went there knowing that I was going to combat and this was a potential outcome. What happens a lot of time with stress and resilience that I see is when you have an unanticipated outcome that's a surprise. Oftentimes it's a little bit more jarring or harder to deal with. And so for me, I did my recovery process. And then when I started my first business and had had our first few employees, one of them had a wife and three kids and a mortgage. And it was up to me to continue raising money to fund the company. And if not, all I could think about was like, oh man, this guy could be working somewhere else. He's quit his job, he's working for me, and he's depending on me and his family's depending on me. So I felt a lot of stress. That also happened to coincide with the birth of my twin boys. And so I ended up getting a migraine for about three or four days on the left side of my head. And it was really weird. So I finally went to the doctor and the doctor's like, hey, you know, are you under a little bit of stress? I'm like, yeah, I guess. He's like, well, you have stress induced shingles and that would be normal if you're 65 or older, but you're 33. And so, you know, here's the plan and everything else. And so the, the takeaway my wife loves telling this is she's like, you went to battle, you got shot, paralyzed, almost killed. That didn't really stress you out having twins and the financial stress of running a business that put you in the hospital literally with shingles, right? Like, I had to go to the hospital to go talk to this doctor. And the takeaway is just dealing with stress. Especially for any veterans who are like, considering this physiologic stress, like survival stress oftentimes is no different than financial stress or, you know, emotional stress. Other things like the neurochemical pathways and the way that manifests itself in your body, it's still stressful, you know, so a lot of people like to compare, like, oh, that must have been so hard, going to battle and getting shot and like, well, yeah, but that didn't give me shingles. You know, having a business and having twins like, really stressed me out a lot. And so I was, I was not expecting that at all. And so resilience, I would say, is actually just essential in any. Even in the corporate environment. It's for startups and big companies. No matter what, no matter what type of business you're in, it's never smooth sailing. There's always problems, there's always setbacks, there's always adversity. And the better equipped you are to deal with those and move forward and get back on track, the more successful you'll be. And so what I've tried to do at Bright Uro and the culture we've tried to instill is it's okay to make mistakes. We have to understand and identify and resolve them as quickly as possible. And the faster we do that, that organizational agility, the more successful we'll be. And so we've optimized everything around like move quickly, solve problems quickly, like make decisions, because that's the best way for our company to grow and thrive.

[27:50] AL KOVACH JR.:
Thank you, Derek. Chad, you had some questions about community impact or something?

[27:53] CHAD STEWART:
I sure did. I mean you talked about this a little bit throughout the course of the interview, but how can the veteran community better support and foster entrepreneurship among its. So yeah, just, just kind of like growing entrepreneurship among that group. What, what can we do?

[28:09] DEREK HERRERA:
There's a ton of different programs out there that I'm aware of that can help provide the, the, the tools I think. But one thing which is important I, I, I think is, is probably the, one of the most important things and why, you know, I'm excited to be here with you guys today is just making it relatable and tangible for people. And so a lot of times if you don't know anybody who's ever done something like this, you think it's impossible. And so I think back to like after I got injured and I was like, oh, I'm going to go to apply to business school. And somebody's like, you should apply to Harvard Business School. And I'm like, I'll never get in there. And they were like. But then I thought back and found out one of my roommates from college had gotten in and he was, you know, I think back to him when he was a, we were sophomores and sharing a room together in college. I was like, oh, if they took that guy, like I'm a shooing right? Like, you know, but until that happened, it wasn't relatable for me. And so things that are like foreign to you just like you just assume that it's impossible but really all that, it absolutely is possible. Entrepreneurship is a great way for veterans to find meaning and purpose and provide for their families after service. Whether it's a venture backed startup or even just a, you know, dog grooming business, it's a phenomenal opportunity. All of those are great opportunities. And the one most impactful thing is just telling more stories and making it tangible in case studies of so and so did this or Derek did this. So, like, why shouldn't I try to do that? Right?

[29:37] CHAD STEWART:
Yeah, absolutely. I mean, yeah, not everybody has to start up a medical device company. Like you said, something that's local and fills a gap is, you know, good enough for a lot of folks. What advice would you give to a newly injured veteran who's trying not to maybe start a business, but trying to find purpose and direction?

[29:53] DEREK HERRERA:
That one's, for me, I think, one of the toughest things to solve, and it's different for everybody. And you have varying stages of interest or acceptance for a lot of these. But the one thing which I kind of go back to, and whether it's someone who has a spinal cord injury or not, just anyone dealing with challenges or adversity or setbacks, is we kind of have this saying from the military, which I think transfers over really well to this. And it's a patrolling term. And we say, when in doubt, focus out. And what that means is when you're on patrol, you should constantly be looking for something to do. And if you don't have something to do, you focus outboard, you look and you provide security and, you know, you do something. But what I, what I transfer that to in these situations is like, if I'm lacking in purpose or vision or feeling sorry for myself or, oh, this, this is terrible, I can't believe this just happened to me. Those are natural feelings and sometimes they can be hard to break out of that cycle of feeling bad for yourself or self pity. One of the things which is most effective I've found, or I would recommend, is focusing out on someone else, meaning how can I help someone else that's going through a tough time, or how can I volunteer or do something to help somebody else? And that's very common, I think, especially for veterans and military members, is you join, you serve because you want to help other people, not because you're getting a paycheck or making tons of money or anything like that. Right. Like, you're service oriented. And so if you've transitioned now and you don't have a

service component, a lot of times it can leave you unfulfilled. And a lot of times when you're focusing on yourself, that's not. It's a very foreign and challenging position to be in. So find someone else you can help and give back to. And then usually that can help you kind of get back on the path.

[31:41] AL KOVACH JR.:
Yeah, I think I'll. I kind of want to follow up on what you just said, Derek, and maybe looking into the future. But on a personal level, what continues to drive you every day as far as what keeps that enterprising or innovative fire burning?

[31:56] DEREK HERRERA:
For me, the thing that keeps me going every day is the impact that we're trying to create and the people we're trying to help. And I think about when we're successful as a company in scaling this technology, all of the patients that are in their time of need that we can support. I wake up every day and even if I wasn't doing this, I would do something with some sort of purpose or mission driven organization that I can have an impact on others because I know that about myself and I wouldn't be fulfilled just doing something for money or otherwise. And so I continue to try to get up every day and go and live my life in a way that I can further that goal professionally and be a great husband and father to my children and good member of my community. And the thing, other things, personal experiences have helped me come to that place or keep me going every day through periods of tough times. A lot of the people that I served with, unfortunately were killed in action and remembering their legacy and understanding that, like, I face challenges every day, whether it's being a wheelchair user and being paralyzed, or as an entrepreneur confronting new challenges and stress and everything else. But we have a choice to make of how do I choose to live today. Do I choose to phone it in and feel sorry for myself or do. Am I grateful for all the opportunities that I have and the impact that I'm trying to create in the world? And so like, those sorts of things and those memories make it easy for me to get up every day and go forward and try to like, work hard to accomplish something that I'm passionate about and help the people that I care about. And that's what's continued to enable me to like keep doing this for 11 years now.

[33:35] AL KOVACH JR.:
I'd like to follow up with another follow up. How do you balance running a business, raising two kids, being a good husband and paying the bills? How do you make all that work?

[33:47] DEREK HERRERA:
So I'm very fortunate. My wife is amazing, so she does a ton of work and, you know, has been there for me for everything, through everything. And so I, you know, try to prioritize my relationship with my wife and kids and balance that as best I can with the professional goals that I have. But what I found as the experiences I've had, at the end of the day, whether my company succeeds or fail, my family will still be there for me. But we also have kind of A healthy balance or relationship where she knows some weeks I might be gone all week long and I'm going to be away from home because I have to be on the road. And that's what the company needs in order to succeed. And people are depending upon me to do that. And so there's no

one solution for anybody. But I think it's important to maintain whatever you choose, whether you're going to work 100 hours a week and just be like, non stop working or work 9 to 5 or whatever, find something that works with your goals and your. Your family and your. The priorities in your life. And so, so that's, that's how my wife and I have tried to. To maintain, you know, our relationships and balance. And, and I, I work a lot, but she also knows that that's what brings me joy. Right. And so we try to try to make sure that we do both without shortchanging either work or, you know, my family relationships and such.

[35:14] AL KOVACH JR.:
Excellent. I'll make sure your wife gets that. I think she needs to hear that, if you haven't told her already, but. Well, thank you, Derek. I really do appreciate your time. Hey, Chad. I really enjoyed that conversation.

[35:26] CHAD STEWART:
Yeah, me too. Derek's got quite a story, and I think what really stands out is how he took something that completely changed his life and. And found a way to turn it into something that could help other people.

[35:37] AL KOVACH JR.:
Exactly. And I think that one of the big takeaways here is that, you know, your path might change, but that doesn't really mean that your purpose has to. Thanks again to Derek for spending time with us. We really appreciate you sharing your story, and thanks to all of you for listening. We really do hope that you enjoyed the conversation as much as we did.

[35:56] CHAD STEWART:
We'll catch you on the next one. Don't forget to subscribe to Voices of PVA wherever you get your podcasts.

[36:03] AL KOVACH JR.:
And if you're enjoying the show, leave us a review. It really helps more people find these conversations.

[36:08] CHAD STEWART:
Until then, take care, everybody, and thanks

[36:11] AL KOVACH JR.:
for listening to Voices of PVA.