

◆ A FIELD GUIDE

WHEN THE UNIFORM COMES OFF

*For rebuilding identity, purpose, and connection
after the military.*

01 IDENTITY	02 PURPOSE	03 STRUCTURE	04 VALUE	05 CONNECTION
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Nick Watters
IN SERVICE, ON PURPOSE

THE ARC

THREE PHASES

PHASE I • RECOGNIZE
RECOGNIZE

PHASE II • REBUILD
REBUILD

PHASE III • RECONNECT
RECONNECT

YOUR SEPARATION CHECKLIST

- ☒ SEPARATION DATE ☒ BENEFITS ☒ RESUME ☒ NEXT JOB
☐ BUILD YOUR SAFETY PLAN (THE CHECKUP)



WHO AM I WHEN THE UNIFORM COMES OFF?

It's the transition nobody puts on your checklist. This guide won't help you figure out your entire life in 90 days. It will help you build a foundation for the next chapter.

Not "find yourself." Start rebuilding yourself — on purpose.



WHY I BUILT THIS

I served in the Navy from 2003 to 2011. When I got out, nobody warned me about the second separation — the one that happens after the paperwork is done. I spent years finding my footing, and in 2021 I hit a wall and had to rebuild from scratch. Now I'm a counselor, and I built the guide I wish someone had handed me on my way out.

988

If you're in crisis right now, call or text 988.

This guide is for rebuilding. It's not for emergencies. The Checkup is the tool for right now: <https://thecheckup.netlify.app>

— BRIEFING

FIVE AREAS. THREE MISSIONS.

01	IDENTITY	<i>Who am I now?</i>
02	PURPOSE	<i>What am I living for now?</i>
03	STRUCTURE	<i>Who sets my day now?</i>
04	VALUE	<i>What do I bring with me?</i>
05	CONNECTION	<i>Where do I belong now?</i>

MISSION 1

THINK

One question. One idea.
Read it slowly.

MISSION 2

DO THE WORK

A field tool. Write by hand,
with room to think.

MISSION 3

ACT ON IT

One field test in the real
world. Then debrief.

Work one module a week. The field tests run longer — fourteen days, thirty days — let them run in the background while you move to the next module. The three phases are the arc: first you recognize, then you rebuild, then you reconnect. No day-by-day schedule. Just steady work, in order.

A pencil, a quiet table, about thirty minutes.

BASELINE

 / ALL AREAS

MY STARTING POINT

Circle where you honestly are today. No one grades this. Come back in 90 days and rate again — the gap is your progress.

TODAY • DATE

90 DAYS FROM NOW • DATE

DRIFTING

SOLID

DRIFTING

SOLID

IDENTITY

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

ONE WORD WHY

PURPOSE

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

ONE WORD WHY

STRUCTURE

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

ONE WORD WHY

VALUE

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

ONE WORD WHY

CONNECTION

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

ONE WORD WHY

— MODULE 01 • IDENTITY

WHO AM I NOW?

01

The military doesn't just give you a job. It gives you an architecture for who you are. Then one day, most of it goes away at once.

RANK → YOUR NAME

WHAT GOES WITH IT: ◆ MISSION ◆ RESPONSIBILITY ◆ COMMUNITY ◆ BELONGING

REALITY CHECK

You didn't lose your identity. You lost the environment that reinforced it.

FIELD TOOL 01 / IDENTITY

DAY ____ / 90

THE IDENTITY INVENTORY

"You didn't lose yourself. You lost the environment that reinforced you."

WHY THIS MATTERS

Before you build what's next, take stock of what you're carrying. Start with who you were, then who's still here without the uniform.

WHO I WAS PAST	WHO I AM PRESENT
My role was...	Outside the military, what matters to me...
People depended on me for...	A part of me that got buried...

WHO I'M BECOMING

NEXT

The person I want to become...

What I'm carrying forward from the uniform...

FIELD TEST 01 • IDENTITY

WINDOW • THIS WEEK

DO ONE THING THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR MILITARY IDENTITY.

— *and everything to do with your personal identity.*

LOG

WHAT I DID _____ DATE _____ ☐ COMPLETE

DEBRIEF

What did it feel like to just be me?

What surprised me?

— MODULE 02 • PURPOSE

WHAT AM I LIVING FOR NOW?

02

The military gives you a mission. Civilian life gives you choices. Those are not the same thing.

☒ A JOB ☒ MONEY ☒ A HOUSE ☒ BENEFITS

...and still wake up asking, "What's the point?"

REALITY CHECK

*You don't need to find your forever purpose.
You need a next mission.*

FIELD TOOL 02 / PURPOSE

DAY ____ / 90

YOUR NEXT MISSION

"Not your forever purpose. Your next mission."

WHY THIS MATTERS

Purpose shows up where who you serve, what you care about, and what you're good at overlap. Answer top to bottom, then narrow it to one sentence.

01 • SERVE

WHO DO I WANT TO SERVE?



02 • CARE

WHAT PROBLEMS MATTER TO ME?



03 • STRENGTH

WHAT DO I KNOW HOW TO DO WELL?



MY NEXT MISSION IS:

FIELD TEST 02 • PURPOSE

WINDOW • 30 DAYS

TEST ONE POSSIBLE MISSION FOR 30 DAYS.

Volunteer. Take the class. Shadow someone. Don't marry the idea — test it.

LOG

MISSION I'M TESTING

START REVIEW ON

DEBRIEF • DAY 30

What gave me energy? What drained it?

My call:

☐ KEEP ☐ ADJUST ☐ DROP

BECAUSE

— MODULE 03 • STRUCTURE

WHO SETS MY DAY NOW?

03

The military gave you external structure. Civilian life gives you freedom. It sounds like the reward — until freedom without structure quietly becomes drift.

FREEDOM + NO RHYTHM = ~~DRIFT~~

FREEDOM + RHYTHM = DIRECTION

REALITY CHECK

Nobody is coming to call your next muster.

CIVILIAN BATTLE RHYTHM

"Rhythm isn't rigidity. It's the default you return to."

WHY THIS MATTERS Set your non-negotiables first. Then sketch a normal week around them.

MY NON-NEGOTIABLES

Wake _____

Sleep _____

Movement _____

Work / School _____

Family _____

Personal time _____

MY NORMAL WEEK

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
AM							
MID							
PM							

FIELD TEST 03 • STRUCTURE

WINDOW · 14 DAYS

HOLD THE SAME MORNING AND EVENING ROUTINE FOR 14 DAYS.

Not perfectly. Consistently.

LOG • CHECK EACH ONE YOU HELD

[illegible]

THEN, ONCE A MONTH: ☐ FINANCES ☐ GOAL REVIEW ☐ RELATIONSHIPS ☐ GROWTH

DEBRIEF • DAY 14

What changed when I stopped letting every day happen to me?

[illegible]

— MODULE 04 • VALUE

WHAT DO I BRING WITH ME?

04

Under the resume problem is a quieter question: *does what I did actually matter out here?* It does. You may just have to translate it.

DON'T ASK

"What military job can I get?"

ASK

"What problems do I know how to solve?"

REALITY CHECK

Your experience didn't lose value when the uniform came off. It lost its translator.

FIELD TOOL 04 / VALUE

DAY ____ / 90

TRANSLATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

"Civilians can't value what they can't understand."

WHY THIS MATTERS

Break one responsibility into what it demanded of you, then name it the way someone outside the military would. Study the example, then run three of your own.

WHAT I DID	WHAT IT REQUIRED	WHAT IT MEANS OUT HERE
EXAMPLE Led a 20-person maintenance team. → Leadership, accountability, scheduling, training, conflict resolution → Team leadership, operations management, staff development		

01

_____	→ _____	→ _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

FIELD TOOL 04 / TRANSLATE YOUR EXPERIENCE • CONTINUED

WHAT I DID	WHAT IT REQUIRED	WHAT IT MEANS OUT HERE
02		
	→	→

03		
	→	→

FIELD TEST 04 · VALUE

WINDOW · THIS WEEK

EXPLAIN WHAT YOU DID TO A CIVILIAN.

Someone who doesn't know your background. If they understand it, you've translated it.

LOG

WHO I TOLD

☐ THEY GOT IT

☐ NEEDS ANOTHER PASS

DEBRIEF

Which words landed?

What did I have to explain twice?

— MODULE 05 • CONNECTION

WHERE DO I BELONG NOW?

05

You're not just leaving a job. You may be leaving the people who understood you without explanation.

WHAT GOES WITH IT: ◆ YOUR PEOPLE ◆ ROUTINES ◆ SHARED LANGUAGE
◆ BELONGING

REALITY CHECK

You can't replace camaraderie by collecting friends. You build community around who you're becoming.

FIELD TOOL 05 / CONNECTION

DAY ____ / 90

YOUR NEW TRIBE MAP

"Community isn't found. It's built."

WHY THIS
MATTERS

Write names in each sector — people, groups, or organizations. Then look at the map honestly: the sector with the fewest names is where you build next.

SECTOR A • THEN

PEOPLE WHO KNEW ME THEN

SECTOR B • NOW

PEOPLE WHO KNOW ME NOW

SECTOR C • AHEAD

PEOPLE GOING WHERE I'M GOING

SECTOR D • SUPPORT

PEOPLE HELPING ME BECOME

CENTER

ME NOW

My thinnest sector — where I'll reach out first: _____

FIELD TEST 05 · CONNECTION

WINDOW · 4 WEEKS

REACH OUT TO ONE PERSON EVERY WEEK FOR FOUR WEEKS.

Not because you need something. Because you're building something.

LOG

☐	WEEK 1	_____	SECTOR _____
☐	WEEK 2	_____	SECTOR _____
☐	WEEK 3	_____	SECTOR _____
☐	WEEK 4	_____	SECTOR _____

DEBRIEF • WEEK 4

Who do I want in my life a year from now?

— THREE PHASES

THE PLAN.

RECOGNIZE

Who am I?

REBUILD

What does my new life look like?

RECONNECT

Who's coming with me?

TRACKER MY COMMITMENTS				CHECK IN AT 90 DAYS
AREA	MY GOAL	MY NEXT ACTION • I WILL...	✓	
IDENTITY			☐	
PURPOSE			☐	
STRUCTURE			☐	
VALUE			☐	
CONNECTION			☐	

Not "What am I going to do with my life?"

WHAT IS THE NEXT MISSION WORTH GIVING MYSELF TO?

I WANT TO BECOME

I WANT TO BUILD

I WANT TO CONTRIBUTE

I WANT TO PROTECT

I WANT TO EXPERIENCE

MY NEXT MISSION IS:

SIGNED

DATE

— THE UNIFORM COMES OFF

NOW BUILD WHAT COMES NEXT.

The person, the purpose, the structure, the value, and the people — on purpose.

U.S. NAVY VETERAN • RESIDENT IN COUNSELING • AUTHOR

Nick Walters helps people lead, love, and live with honesty — without losing their strength. If this guide opened something up, you don't have to walk the rest of it alone.

I'm putting together a small workshop built around this guide.

REAL WORK. REAL PEOPLE. TOGETHER.

→ JOIN THE NEXT COHORT

Or continue at <https://iamnickwalters.com>

IN CRISIS NOW? CALL OR TEXT 988. REBUILDING CAN WAIT. YOU CAN'T.