As Memorial Day draws near, the thought of warm weather, beach days and BBQs often comes to mind. And when you’re reminded to remember the real meaning of the holiday, your first instinct may be to tell the nearest veteran, “Thank you for your service.” While your intentions may be kind-hearted, Memorial Day is not the day to give gratitude to a living veteran. Rather than being a day to thank living veterans for their service, Memorial Day is a day to remember veterans who are no longer with us, whether they died in combat or not.

DiversityInc caught up with a couple of veterans who shed some light on how best to approach Memorial Day and clarified the common misconceptions surrounding the holiday.
David Casey: ‘A Day for Remembering and Honoring’

David Casey, VP, Workforce Strategies & Chief Diversity Officer, CVS Health
Casey is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and served in Operation Desert Storm.

For many Americans, Memorial Day is one of the most cherished holidays we observe. For some, it marks the beginning of the summer with family gatherings and cookouts. For me, it’s a time to reflect back on my eight years of service as a U.S. Marine. The honor, sense of duty and commitment to country that served as the foundation for my service were born out of unwavering gratitude and respect for those who made the ultimate sacrifice in their service to country. While it’s perfectly okay to celebrate what many people mark as the start of warmth and sunshine, I hope you will also take the time to reflect on the true meaning of the day.

It’s not uncommon for those who know me to thank me for my service on Memorial Day. While I doubt any veteran would be angry at such a gracious statement of appreciation any day of the year, we often take advantage of that opportunity to reiterate what Memorial Day represents and why it’s more appropriate to express gratitude for the living on Veterans Day instead. Memorial Day is a day for remembering and honoring military service members who died in the service of their country, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle. While those who died are also remembered, Veterans Day is the day set aside to thank and honor ALL those who served honorably in the military - in wartime or peacetime. In fact, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank LIVING veterans for their service, to acknowledge that their contributions to our national security are appreciated, and to underscore the fact that all those who served - not only those who died - have sacrificed and done their duty.

As you take time to celebrate this Memorial Day, please also take time to remember.

Anthony L. Winns: ‘May We Never Forget Them’

Anthony L. Winns, Fortune 100 Company Executive, Retired Navy Admiral

This Memorial Day we remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. As a retired Navy Admiral, Memorial Day has special meaning to me. During my 32 years of service to our great nation I saw first-hand men and women who bravely answered the call of service to our country. This Memorial Day we reflect and honor those who have made the greatest sacrifice in service for our country to give us the freedoms that we now enjoy. May we never forget them, and may we seek to live lives worthy of their sacrifices.