

FINDING
**MEANING AFTER
THE MILITARY**

BYRON RODGERS

A combat and survival manual for every veteran
facing the new battlefield of the 1st civilian division

A Note from the Author

A man fires a rifle for many years. And he goes to war. And afterwards he comes home, and he sees that whatever else he may do with his life—build a house, love a woman, change his son's diaper—he will always remain a jarhead. And all the jarheads killing and dying, they will always be me. We are still in the desert.

-Anthony "Swoff" Swofford, Jarhead
For what we've gone through, are we better or worse off now that we're home?

Is it possible to bring excitement, flavor, and vibrancy back to life after living on the edge?

How can we move past such intense past events, which are causing future anxieties within our minds, effectively in order to be who we need to be and who our loved ones need us to be in the first civilian division?

What is the meaning of your life, and why have you been allowed to go through what you've gone through up until this point?



These are just a few of the questions that this book will effectively give you answers for. As a grunt in the US Marine Corps, I had to figure out the answers to these questions myself upon my transition into the first civilian division. I thought I had it all figured out when I left 31L Company weapons platoon squad bay for the last time because of what I had gone through during training and combat while I was in. Little did I know that I was about to engage in the most difficult fight for my life that I would ever know.

By using a number of tools of the mind designed to effectively help me navigate and even engage the enemies of the psychological combat that combat vets find themselves emerged in after leaving the fight, not only was I able to bring life back to life, make over six figures within my first year, travel to well over sixty countries worldwide, and achieve happiness, but most importantly, I also found my purpose and learned how to deliberately change my world. Now I live for a purpose, and it is this very purpose that saved my identity and my life and has positioned me to pay it forward. Make no mistake, fellow service members. We are still in combat because that's our reality until we create something else, and even then . . .

After coming back from the fight, you may feel like a Lamborghini that is forced to drive twenty-five miles per hour in a school zone. You may feel like someone who has loved a juicy steak his entire life but is now forced to be a vegetarian. You may feel like all of a sudden, you're an adult being forced to watch cartoons for the rest of your life because the events of your past were so intense and extreme that the civilian reality seems disenchanting and mundane at best.

This book will show you how to rediscover life's vibrancy, leverage your already-honed soft combat and military skills to your advantage, and most importantly, show you how to find meaning in life after your time in the military.

If you are a vet, then I'm speaking your language, and this is a must-read! If you know or have a loved one who has served and is now looking for purpose, meaning, or even simply some direction, then it is your duty to give them this book. Friends, loved ones, brothers- and sisters-in-arms, America, we are in this together. I will see you on the first page!



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Preface

Do you ever feel that your life is supposed to be different, that there are two versions of you—one that is and one that should have been?

Byron Rodgers can show you how to transition from what is to what should be for you and your life's path. You already inherently know that your life can be different. Byron Rodgers helps you pull that inner knowing to the surface to create the future you absolutely want.

Called an empowerment strategist by many, Byron Rodgers specializes in empowerment strategies that help you make the transition from living an unfulfilling life ("Is this really all there is?") to living a truly fulfilling life of purpose, passion, and destiny.

Through his *Meaning after the Military* Process, weekly video lessons, and live speaking events, Byron Rodgers raises people's level of presence, consciousness, and awareness so they can begin deliberately constructing their own paths of life success.

Born in the Bahamas and raised as a US citizen, Byron volunteered as a young man for four years in the United States Marine Corps. During his enlistment, Byron experienced two tours of duty in Iraq. It was here, surrounded in combative and life-threatening situations, that Byron first forged many of the intellectual constructs, techniques, and tactics that not only provided emotional and mental durability but also helped him step above it all to create the life of his dreams, even in the barren landscape of Iraq.

After his time in the Marines, Byron embarked upon a new life and spent five years in executive-protection services, this time traveling to more than sixty countries and partaking in the ways, views, and general lifestyles of many different cultures. From the desolate deserts of combat to some of the richest and most beautiful places on the planet, Byron Rodgers further forged his life experiences and lessons into a concise strategy of empowerment and self-creation that the world now benefits from.

First publishing the book and educational series *Meaning after the Military*, Byron Rodgers provided a formula to help service-connected veterans and military personnel—no matter what their story or history—transmute their life situation from drudgery or mundane existence to a purposeful experience of daily amazing unfolding.

Byron's formula has quickly traveled and expanded to bigger coaching and speaking platforms. People around the globe continue to shift and transform their lives on a daily basis because of Byron's influence and energetic teaching methods.

I help people find purpose so that they may enjoy more fulfillment in life.

Byron Rodgers



www.byronroddersmotivation.com

The Transition

With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing.

Wayne W. Dyer

Identity, purpose, fulfillment, sustainment—these words were all quite obscure to me at the beginning of my journey. Quite frankly, they meant almost nothing to me at all. All I knew was that I had been training to fight in the war that was taking place in a country called Iraq. To be entirely honest, I didn't care who was right or who was wrong by the time I made it through training. All I wanted to do was my job, and the job was simply to kill the enemies of America. That was all that mattered to me as a young marine. That was all I trained for, and that was all I ate, slept, sweat, and bled right up until—well, until I left the Marine Corps.

Things were so simple back then. It was kill or be killed. Your physical and intellectual abilities were directly related to your survivability, as well as to the survivability of those whom you loved. The stronger and smarter you got, the higher your chances were of coming back alive. Obviously, there were unforeseeable variables that could take you out of the equation, but *in the end, it came down to you wanting* to be your best so you could shine when it counted.

At all times, I reminded myself that my enemy, the man who might kill me in combat, might very well be training. So I trained more than I needed to and harder than I needed to. I imagined that wherever he was and whatever he was doing, he was almost definitely determined to kill me. While most of my platoon was sleeping, I was at the gym.

Then finally, in 2005, I was deployed to Iraq with 3/1 Lima Company around Al Anbar Province for the first time. I was an 0351 antitank assaultman. For those readers who have never been in the Marine Corps, this means that I was in the infantry. However, rather than being a basic rifleman, I dealt with demolitions and portable rocket and missile systems. I was the little plastic army piece that had the bazooka or the satchel of C-4.

Combat was combat—amazing, terrible, unpredictable, beautiful, enlightening, mortifying, painful, liberating, empowering, degrading, intense, boring, and unforgettable yet hard to remember. It was the richest time of experience within my life span so far.

When I came back from Iraq, I was not the same—and there is nothing wrong with that. As we experience, grow, change, and evolve through life's various situations, none of us remain the same. The part that was painful and detrimental was this gigantic void I felt within my heart. I found myself back at home in rooms full of people who loved me, yet I felt all alone. The truth was that no one understood me anymore, at least not the people from my old world and old life. Only my brothers who truly knew me then understood me now, because only my brothers truly knew what I went through with them out there. No one else had any idea how painful it was, how crazy it was, or how absolutely unexplainable the things that we experienced were. The best of my friends simply said that they could never understand the things I went through. I love them for simply accepting and realizing that truth, but it didn't change the greater truth that I felt every day—the truth that reminded me that I was in a world that didn't understand me, could not relate to me, and might or might not actually value me on my most sacred levels. My loved ones loved me, but they could not know me any longer, at least not for now.

In 2007, I went back for my second deployment. This one was the Thirty-First Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), which means that I and my fellow soldiers hopped on a battleship and floated over to Iraq while visiting a number of fun locations. We spent only three months in Iraq at this time, but quite honestly, we saw more combat in the three months we were there than we had in the seven months I was there previously.

I was directly hit by a total of four different IEDs (improvised explosive devices) during my deployment. At one of those times, I got

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hit directly by sixty-two pounds of homemade explosives and had a brief out-of-body experience while lying unconscious after the blast, but that story is for another time. You can read all about it in one of my other books, called *Is God with You on the Battlefield?* Snipers shot and missed me two times. I watched my life flash before my eyes again and again and again, just like every other infantry marine and service member who participated in the same combat did. I am only here by the grace of God. My experiences are not special or confined to me, but they are organic to the experiences of those serving overseas and participating in wars everywhere.

I got blown up four good times that were worth remembering. I was in other blasts, but I don't remember them. I was a squad leader and a corporal of marines when I got out. I had a squad that usually stayed at or around ten marines. I did the work, I got the scars, I got the tattoos, and most importantly, I built an identity. Through all my experiences, I developed a myriad of mental reference moments designed specifically around who I was and who I was acting as when I was being a squad leader.

These mental reference points are very important because they are what a person builds his or her self-concept upon. When I came back from Iraq, both times, I drank a fifth of Absolut Vodka every single night for at least one month straight.

I remember it just like it was yesterday, sitting there in the squad bay, in my own little quarantined-off area all alone, with a fifth of warm, crystal-clear Absolut Vodka. My fellow marines and I would go about our business during the day, during which I felt perfectly fine. But at nighttime, after we got done working and my mind had time to slow down, usually right after it got dark outside, I would become angry—for no real specific reason at all. I just remember feeling extreme, intense, deep feelings of anger. So I drank every night to ease the pain.

The only thing that could get me to stop drinking was the realization that I was damaging my body. I experienced kidney and liver pain at inopportune times when we would go on runs. At that point, I was able to limit my drinking only to the weekends simply because I had no wish to die early. Also, I didn't want my subordinates to witness my dishonoring of myself.

Even though I stopped drinking frequently after these postdeployment, one-month benders, my life still manifested many symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, hypervigilance, and all the other things organic to being a combat veteran that few people like to talk about. By the grace of God, I made it through that period of my life without becoming dependent on anything or hurting anyone, including myself, too much. There were definitely a few guys in my platoon who had stories that said different, but in the end no one was seriously hurt by our restlessness and cries for help. The one real dangerous thing about all these problematic coping techniques I was using is how much it looked like I had everything dialed in and squared away during my time of torment.

If you're reading this and you spent time in combat, then you know that what I'm describing is actually quite normal. We're the strongmen of our society. It's never been okay to be weak and vulnerable during training or even in our day job, so why will people expect us to think it is okay to be vulnerable now that we're back?

One thing that must be understood, something that has helped me quite a bit, is that life is all combat. Once your consciousness has been stretched to a new level or in another direction, that's just the way it is for you now. You can't unsee what you have seen. You can't unrealize what you have already realized, my friend. You can't unlearn what you already know. You can only build upon it, learn from your new reality, and thereby cause your understanding to evolve. By injecting new meanings to already-fortified pillars of your belief structures and paradigms, you can turn painful, disempowering understandings into empowering ones that will propel you on the road to your own greater destiny, purpose, and future, but the choice is yours. No one has the final say on the meanings of various components of your life but you!

Our values about vulnerability affect us in multiple different ways. On one hand, we understand that vulnerability on the battlefield is weakness, and we try to carry over that principle into our personal lives. This does not work that well because, in all actuality and reality, vulnerability concerning one's identity represents strength. Strong people have the ability to be vulnerable because they understand that imperfection does not mean destruction. Rather, being vulnerable is an opportunity for growth. Weak people, however, run from

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vulnerability, because they fear that upon admitting to or showing weakness, they will no longer be considered good enough and may lose love, or they fear they will somehow be unfit for acceptance through the judgment of other people and various other forms of alienation.

The truth is simply that regardless of how others react to your vulnerability, your ability to be vulnerable to others and to yourself will cause you to stay grounded in the truth. You will create a reality for yourself, one of harmony, serenity, authenticity, and progress. True vulnerability represents honesty and, thus, the reality of where you are presently and internally. There is no better foundation to build your life upon. Furthermore, to continue evolving your world from this place represents true strength. No matter what level you're on, whether individuals look up to or down on you, your having the strength to be honest and vulnerable will separate you from the masses, because they are all still running and hiding from their weaknesses.

You can only change the things in life that you can take responsibility for, and the only thing that you can take full responsibility for is yourself.

How Do We Fall?

Victory has defeated you, Batman.

Bane

We have a tendency to think that when we leave our respective branch of the military, the battle is going to be over. We have a tendency to think that we've made it to safety and that the worst parts of life are over. We have a tendency to think that because what we just went through was so hard, everything after that and outside that place must be easy. This sets us all up for an extreme disadvantage to succeed from day one, because in all actuality, what had just taken place within the military phase of our lives was just one battle in the war for our own personal destiny.

As soon as we begin to adopt the mind-set that we can relax and that things are going to get easier, we make our fatal mistakes during this process.

I've lost more friends to civilian life than I've ever lost in combat. How could that be?

Continue the journey and read on by purchasing the rest of the book at ByronRodgersmotivation.com



