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SUMMER 2025

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FEATURE

Veteran Spotlight: Larry Broughton

By Larry Broughton

"Choose the hard right over the easy wrong" is a common refrain throughout the Army and has been my guiding principle for much of my life. It's a reminder that integrity, courage and perseverance are not just ideals but daily practices. Like most folks, my journey hasn't been easy, but every challenge has shaped who I am today. Besides the public awards and accolades, most importantly, I'm a father, friend and mentor. Life has a way of testing us. The choices we make define our character. Some choose the easy road, avoiding struggle and discomfort. Others take the difficult path, pushing forward through uncertainty, loss and sacrifice.

The Early Years and the Drive to Serve

Growing up in rural western New York, I was captivated by the idea of leadership. Whether earning my Boy Scout Eagle Award, playing sports or working in restaurants as a teen, I saw how leadership—or its absence—impacts success.

I grew up in a large working-class family with strong influences that shaped my sense of discipline and purpose. My father was a Marine who served on Iwo Jima, instilling in me the values of hard work, honor and resilience.

Although I was quite introverted and shy, I seemed to thrive in challenging environments, looking for ways to test my endurance and mental fortitude. After high school, I dove headlong into martial arts while working as a Shift Manager at a local McDonald's. That drive for adventure and challenges, in



concert with a need to escape the safety of my hometown, led me to enlist in the U.S. Army, specifically with the option of trying out for the Green Berets.

I thrived in the demanding environment, passing every course and requirement to earn my place among the elite. Earning the Green Beret remains one of the proudest moments of my life. Sure, the training was rigorous and sometimes brutal. Long nights, grueling exercises and mental challenges pushed me beyond what I thought possible. But I learned that limits exist only in the mind.

The Power of Small Teams

My tenure in Special Forces shaped my mindset. It taught me how to thrive under pressure, adapt quickly and never back down from a challenge. That small, determined teams with a clear mission can outperform a larger, better-funded force, and tenacity separates winners from losers.

Elite military teams operate with a trust that is unshakable. We knew that each person had a role to play, and we counted on each other to execute with excellence. There were few acceptable excuses, no passing the buck—only accountability and mission success. I



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARRY BROUGHTON

carried this lesson into my business career. I have seen firsthand that an aligned, mission-driven team will always outperform a group that lacks vision and cohesion. In any team environment or arena, success comes from trust, responsibility and commitment to the bigger goal.

Leaders often get this wrong. Some think leadership is about barking orders or micromanaging. That's not leadership—it's control. Real leadership is about trust. When you build a team of people who believe in what they're doing, you don't have to force them to work hard. They show up with purpose. They take ownership. They push beyond expectations because they feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Leadership Lessons from the Military

Leadership is about action. It's about showing up, setting the tone and doing what needs to be done. I saw firsthand that great leaders don't demand respect. They earn it by being willing to do the hard things first. They make decisions, take responsibility and inspire confidence even in the most chaotic situations.

As a teenager, I wrestled, played soccer and earned my black belt in karate, learning the power of perseverance and self-control. The military then drove discipline, problem-solving and resilience into every nook and cranny of my core. These qualities would later help me build businesses, overcome personal struggles and mentor others on their journeys.

I've learned that working with team members' strengths is essential. In Special Forces, we didn't expect one person to do everything. We identified the unique skills of each individual and leveraged them to their full potential. This principle applies in business and life. When we empower people to operate in their strengths, we create high-performing teams that are not just effective but unstoppable.

The Heart Power of Leadership

True leadership is not about horsepower—it's about **heart power**. A leader's effectiveness is not determined by brute force or technical skill alone but by their ability to connect with and inspire those they lead.

People follow leaders who care. If you want a team that is fully engaged, you must connect on a deeper level. Leadership is a responsibility, not a privilege. It is about being the person who steps forward when no one else will. It's about sharing a compelling vision, balancing work and family, and remembering to celebrate victories along the way.



A drum circle with the Raven Drum Foundation.

Business and Entrepreneurship

Transitioning from the military into business wasn't easy. I went from working in an elite environment of Type-A, hard chargers, where excellence was the standard, and a sense of mission trumped personal ambition, to working as a night auditor at a run-down, "no-tell-motel" in San Francisco where mediocrity was the benchmark for "success." It was killing me inside, but it paid the rent while attending college.

When I left active duty, I had aspirations of working in the State Department or running for political office, so I pursued a degree in political science, first attending a local junior college and then transferring to a large university.

The motel was eventually purchased by an investment group and transformed into one of the country's first boutique hotels. I watched the transformation unfold and found myself drawn to the hospitality industry. Leadership, branding, operations and business strategy all converged in this space. I quickly moved up the ranks, eventually becoming a partner in the company. Over 14 years, we expanded the portfolio to 14 properties.

Despite my professional growth and success, I knew I was built to be a primary leader, not to stay in a secondary leadership role. I launched my own hotel company, broughtonHOTELS, in 2001, right before the dot-com crash and the economic downturn following 9/11. The struggle was real, but I

was determined to push forward. Through smart decisions, relentless effort and the right team, my company became known for turning around underperforming hotels.

In those early days, I did everything—from securing investors to hiring staff to managing operations. However, through hard work and a commitment to building strong teams, the portfolio eventually grew to nearly 20 hospitality projects throughout California and Chicago just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Along the way, we received dozens of prestigious awards, including Ernst & Young's "Entrepreneur of the Year" and Passkey Foundation's "National Business Leader of Integrity."





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Running a successful business was never the sole pursuit of profits. I focused on creating a positive workplace culture, emphasizing team building and leadership development. Business isn't just numbers—it's people. When we invest in our teams, success follows. That belief led me to mentor other entrepreneurs, leaders and high achievers, helping them overcome challenges and build businesses that create real impact.

The Power of Mentorship

Over the past two decades, I've mentored countless entrepreneurs and leaders through programs like VICTORY Mastermind & Mentoring. My goal is to help others find freedom and live lives of significance rather than chasing superficial success. As singer-songwriter Michael Peterson says in one of his songs, *"One step in the right direction's worth a wasted mile behind."* This quote reminds me that progress—no matter how small—is always meaningful.

The Greatest Battle

Every person is eventually touched by the dark hand of grief due to the death of loved ones. I'm no different. Throughout my life, I'd experienced the death of aunts and uncles, grandparents, siblings, best friends, military brothers and both parents (who unexpectedly died two days apart). Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, prepared me for the untimely death of my 17-year-old son three years ago. A freak car accident took his life, and my world shattered. He was driving on a

winding country road and lost control of the car. His mother and I had both been checking on his whereabouts via GPS phone apps. When I saw the location on my phone and noticed he had not moved in some time and he did not respond to calls or texts, I jumped in my car and sped to the GPS location.

I was the first one on the scene where his car had gone off the road. No parent should ever find their child in this condition. Paradoxically, in hindsight, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. As a father, I wouldn't want anyone but me to have found him. It was clear he had transitioned on impact, and there was no suffering. I said a quick prayer and went into mission mode. I made the obligatory calls to emergency services, his mom, family members and friends.

Hours later, after the CHP and Sheriff investigation was complete, I drove to the home of my former spouse (my son's mom) and her husband. Still stoic, I shared some of the needed details for the heartbroken group of family, friends and my precious daughter who had gathered there. The stoicism quickly melted when I arrived at my empty home.

The ambush of grief is an unforgiving force. It comes without warning. For months, while alone in my own house, I found myself cursing and screaming at God, questioning everything. The pain was unbearable, a deep wound that refused to heal.

During that time, I began intensive talk therapy and searched for ways to find meaning in the pain. It was that process that forced me to admit the Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) I'd experienced from my teen years was still haunting me and had been let loose to wreak havoc on my life. I was introduced to Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, which helped reduce the vividness and raw emotion associated with the shocking visuals of my son's crash site and other traumatic events in my life. Truly, had I not mustered the courage to fight on and seek both talk and EMDR therapy, I'm not sure where I'd be today.

About a year after my son's transition, my daughter (Emi) and I were invited to attend a healing drum circle led by Rock & Roll Hall of Fame drummer Rick Allen of Def Leppard (who I had met years before at a Wounded Warrior event) and his singer-songwriter wife, Lauren Monroe. The pair had founded Raven Drum Foundation two decades prior, to serve veterans and first responders dealing with trauma and PTS through complimentary alternative medicine. Emi and I found the drum circle experience to be transformational! My son was a passionate drummer, and this experience connected me to him in a way I



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Larry Broughton with his children.

never expected. I now serve on the board of directors for the [RavenDrumFoundation.org](https://www.RavenDrumFoundation.org) in hopes of honoring my son's memory and giving back to those who served me.

For many, serving others is the path to healing. This tragedy taught me that resilience isn't about avoiding pain—it's about finding meaning despite it. My mantra during tough times is simple: *"Tenacity eats talent for lunch."* This belief has carried me through personal heartbreak and professional challenges, including navigating grief, economic downturns and the pandemic.

Moving Forward

I've stopped chasing success for its own sake. Instead, I strive to live a life of significance by contributing meaningfully to my family, community and businesses. Success is merely the byproduct of a life of significance.

Every morning when my feet hit the floor, I remind myself: *I get to do this. I get to build, lead and serve. I get to make a difference.*

You have a choice. You can let challenges break you, or you can let them shape you into someone stronger. The journey is never easy, but the rewards of pushing forward are beyond measure.

The road ahead is yours to take. Choose the hard right over the easy wrong. It will always be worth it.