

The Unspoken Struggle

Transcript: U.S. Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar

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Presenter:

Sergeant Major Justin Shad, Director of Emergency Services Sergeant Major

Lytaria Walker: [00:05](#) Welcome to the Army Resilience Directorate Outreach Webinar for May. At this time, all participants are in listen-only mode. However, you may ask questions at any time by placing them in the Q&A box. There will be several opportunities for questions throughout the webinar, and we should have some time at the end as well. Please note the views of ARD outreach webinar presenters are their very own and are not endorsed by the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense. This month, our guest is Sergeant Major Justin Shad. Sergeant Major Shad has served in various leadership positions including team leader, squad leader, senior correctional crisis counselor, Army Recruiter, Station Commander, Platoon Sergeant, Company Operation Sergeant, Joint Midwest Regional Correctional Facility Watch Commander, United States Disciplinary Barracks Watch Commander, Detainee Operations NCOIC, Brigade Operations Sergeant, Company 1SG BNS-3 Operations Sergeant Major, Facility Sergeant Major, Director of Operations Sergeant Major USDB, Battalion CSM, and Brigade CSM. He is now the Director of Emergency Services Sergeant Major at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and has completed all levels of P&E. Sergeant Major Shad has been married to his beautiful wife and best buddy, Erica for 25 years. They have two adult children, Chelsea and Taylor, as well as four four-legged boys, Trooper, Chief, Archie, and Ozzy and are grandparents to one grand-dog, Maverick. Sergeant Major Shad, thank you so much for joining us this morning, sir. Take it away.

Sergeant Major ...: [02:11](#) Thank you, Ms. Walker. Thank you very much. First and foremost, I want to thank everybody at the Resilience Directorate, Ms. Walker and the whole crew for putting this together. I appreciate it. There's a lot of folks who have their hands on this behind the scenes, and I want to thank those individuals. We've got folks from all over. It's awesome. Puerto Rico, I think that's the farthest I've seen from Leavenworth. I appreciate everybody taking the time to be here. I hope everybody gets something out of this. I'll be the first to tell you I'm a little nervous. I'm not a nervous public speaker, but for some reason this one has me a little nervous. So like Ms. Walker

said, I'm Major Shad. And what I'll tell you is I'm a recovering alcoholic, and I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic.

Sergeant Major ...: [03:06](#)

Today actually marks 16 months of sobriety for me going through this process. And what I want to do is share my story and my journey. And you're going to probably hear me repeat a few things, and I'll probably jump around. We got some slides, and quite honestly, I'll probably touch a little bit on the slides, but what I really want this to be is more of a discussion. And then, like Ms. Walker said at the end, give everybody a chance to ask questions. And don't be afraid to ask questions. There is no question that's a bad question when it comes to alcoholism. The unspoken struggle is what I call it. I have one more disclaimer before I really jump into this. This is my story. I'm not a professional or a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

Sergeant Major ...: [04:06](#)

This is just one guy's story. When I talk about things it's from my point of view, my perspective, and what's worked for me and what hasn't worked for me. So take from it what you will. And I share the story to help individuals that are out there still suffering because that is the case. "The unspoken struggle." I thought of that. We do a lot of good getting after a lot of the corrosives in the Army and a lot of the issues that we face. But I still think we have a lot of work when it comes to alcoholism. And I think we've come a long way, but I still think that it's something that we sometimes just push to the side, to the left or to the right and talk over it or around it.

Sergeant Major ...: [05:04](#)

I'm going to share with you this morning my journey and what got me to where I currently am. I'm not going to sit here and tell you drunken stories or war stories or anything like that. I'm going to sum it up for the sake of time. And I'm going to tell you this, that for anybody out there listening who thinks they have a problem as well, there are a couple things to think about. It really doesn't matter how much you drink. Think of it through this lens. It matters really what happens. What are the results of your drinking? What happens when you drink? That's the first question. The second thing to think about is what are others around you: family, friends, loved ones, et cetera, what are they telling you about your drinking?

Sergeant Major ...: [05:57](#)

So just a couple things to think about. I came in the Army in 1996, a couple days ago. And to start this story, I was a regular kid, good kid, good family. In fact, my mom's on here this morning. I just saw her jump on, so now I'm really nervous. She's the only one out here that can't ask questions. And my wife's on, so that's awesome. But I was a regular kid with a great family upbringing. I drank a little bit in high school, and I'll

tell you one thing, I could drink a lot more. And at the time I thought I could tolerate alcohol and handle my alcohol differently than my friends. I knew from an early point in my life that (and back then, I would probably brag about it) but I was able, for whatever reason, to drink large amounts of alcohol, and still act like a fool. But I was turned onto it at a younger age to join the Army. Now, you have to remember, this is 1996. So this was 27 years ago. It was a different Army and a different society. Things were different. And I do have to say that I do not blame the United States Army for my alcoholism. I've never been in my 27 years in the Army. I've never been given a direct order to drink. I'll probably say that again. So I joined the Army, and I found myself like most doing the Army thing. And my drinking continued. What I mean by that is it went from six beers hanging out in the barracks. I always found myself associating with those folks that drank. Somehow, some way I found that crowd or that crowd found me.

Sergeant Major ...: [08:10](#)

But I was finding that crowd. My drinking progressed through my career, and for years and years and years, it was just what I did. To be quite honest, it was just part of my life. The other thing I want to say before I forget is I don't blame any leader throughout my career for my drinking or for my alcoholism is what I'll say. So I just continued drinking. And my drinking grew, my drinking career, as you will grew. And what started out as casual drinking turned into full-blown alcoholism. Now we're in the Army, so we have to break some things down. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines alcoholism as "a disease that affects the brain, making you unable to control your alcohol, your alcohol use, despite negative consequences on your health work or social life."

Sergeant Major ...: [09:28](#)

I do believe that alcoholism is a disease. Some folks believe what they will, but again, this is my story, so we're going to believe in that today. I have a disease called alcoholism. Now, as my career and my drinking progressed, if you would've asked me or told me 10 years ago, "Hey, you have a drinking problem," or, "Hey, you're an alcoholic" because I drank every day, I would've told you, "No, I'm not." And there are a few reasons why: I had a job, I have a family, I have a house, I have a car. You see, to me, the stigma of being an alcoholic was what you see in movies you see on TV shows, what society portrays a lot of times as the drunk person under the bridge, drinking out of a paper bag. And that's absolutely the farthest thing from the truth. And what I soon found myself in was the last five years plus of my drinking. I drank, like I said, every day. The longest I would go typically maybe was two to three days, and that was far and few in between. I was a full-blown alcoholic. And in the

last five to seven years it really progressed, and in fact, I was drinking liquor and a lot of it.

Sergeant Major ...: [11:06](#)

But I didn't realize this until I got sober that I was drinking more or less to because my body needed it. I didn't have a choice, is what I'm saying, because my body was so dependent on alcohol that I couldn't function without it. Now, I never drank at work. I never got up in the morning and drank before I went in, I was an at-home drinker that would get agitated late in the afternoon, usually between three and four o'clock until I got my alcohol, and that's what I did. I was a blackout drinker, and I drank to the point of blacking out on a daily basis for years.

Sergeant Major ...: [12:03](#)

And I got to a point where it was totally consuming my life. My day, from the time I woke up in the morning to the time I passed out, revolved around how and how soon I could drink and what I needed to do that day to get to that first drink. That's when you might have a problem. Quite frankly, I got to a point in my life where I needed to change. I was a Brigade Sergeant Major at the time. Like I said, today marks 16 months of sobriety, so it was January 2022. I'm doing public math, which is a bad thing to do. I checked into a rehab center here in Kansas City, and I say that I was sitting Brigade Sergeant Major. Not to sound egotistical or any of that. I say that, and I want to talk about this more, like many other things. I say that to say that if I could take myself out of the fight to go get treatment, that anybody can do it. So there I was going into a 28-day treatment center.

Sergeant Major ...: [13:39](#)

Frankly, when I got there, I didn't know what I was getting myself into. And what I mean by that is I wasn't really sure if it was going to work, or even if I really wanted to quit drinking. I had other concerns as well, but those were probably the biggest two. But I'll tell you one thing, when I walked in there with my wife, and I admitted to the counselor at the time that I was an alcoholic, I could feel the way the world come off my shoulders. Now, I don't know if that was a higher power. I don't know what that was, but when those words came out of my mouth, I could feel a sense of relief.

Sergeant Major ...: [14:28](#)

So I go into the treatment center. It's a 28-day treatment center, and it got me sober. I saw somebody pop up a question, and I will hit that one really quick about withdrawals. So when I checked into the treatment center, they did their assessment. They told me, based on the amount of alcohol that you drink, and for the amount of time that you've been drinking, you're more than likely going to have seizures and this, that, and the other. And I'm sitting there thinking, "Seizures? Come on." I got

a little concerned. I was very fortunate, and I'm going to get into that. When it clicked for me again, was about a week in the rehab, sitting down with the doctor. They run you through a panel of test blood work, et cetera, and the doctor looked at me and said, "Hey, I've been doing this for about 30 years, and based on the amount of alcohol you drank for the amount of time you drank, you have two options." At this point in the rehab center, I wasn't really sure because this was still new. I didn't know if it was going to work. I didn't know a lot of things.

Sergeant Major ...: [15:50](#)

He said, "You have two options. You can either quit drinking, or you can leave or continue to drink, and you'll be dead within two to three years." And something clicked. I'm not the smartest guy, but something clicked. And he said, "You are the 5% of folks that come in here with your history that are still alive, that don't have severe damage to your liver, et cetera, and you're lucky for whatever reason." That was another aha moment for me, I guess is what you'll call it, where I realized, "Okay, this has to work. I have to make this work." And so the rehab center gave me some skills.

Sergeant Major ...: [16:48](#)

The rehab center, more than anything, kept me sober for 28 days. And looking back on it now, there's probably a, a slim chance that I would be able to achieve sobriety if I wouldn't have checked into the treatment center. And what I'll tell folks out there is that I made a phone call to the ASAP folks here on Fort Leavenworth, and I said, "Hey, I need to go into treatment." And again, this is what worked for me. I said, "Hey, I'm extreme. I drink, and I need to go inpatient, and I need to go now." And I'm asked that question from time to time. So to anybody out there that's struggling, you have to be honest. We're going to talk more about that.

Sergeant Major ...: [17:46](#)

So that's basically my journey to alcoholism. I want to talk about a few things, and I know I'm jumping around, but that's just how this is going to go. I want to tell you about what my life was like before I got sober to what it is now and share some of that experience, strength, and hope with you guys. My life for 27 years was I thought I was in control. I thought that everything was great; I thought that I was running the show, and my alcohol had little to no effect on things I did. We hear the people say he's a productive alcoholic. Well, how productive are you? I don't know. You would probably be a lot more productive if you weren't drinking. My life before sobriety was exactly what some people fail to want to admit where they're dealing with these addictions. And the addiction of alcoholism is that I was chained to the bottle.

- Sergeant Major ...: [18:56](#) Like I said, my body needed alcohol. What was I drinking over? It's different for everybody. I've learned going through different mental health providers and different programs that I take part in that you have to figure that out individually, but you don't have to be a doctor to know that you're drinking to mask something. You're drinking to suppress something or things, and it's usually more than one thing. Whether it be fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, resentments, or anger, the list goes on and on. But what's driving you to drink to the point of intoxication? Now, what I'll say too is there is such thing as a casual drinker. There are some folks that are not alcoholic. But if you have the alcoholic mind and the disease of alcoholism, you can't drink like a normal person.
- Sergeant Major ...: [20:10](#) It's a disease of more. One drink is not enough, and a hundred is not enough. It never ends. I drank to the point of intoxication, blackout drunk. There's a difference between a social drinker and someone who has the disease of alcoholism. Again, I don't blame the Army for alcoholism at all. In fact, I glamorized alcohol in my career. I contributed to some alcoholism because of my example as a senior NCO through the years. And that's one reason to share my story as well. I want to give back, and that's just part of it.
- Sergeant Major ...: [21:20](#) But one in seven Americans are alcoholics. So, bring it over to the Army side. If you have to platoon with 30-40 men and women, you got a few alcoholics in your formations. And we're products of society, as we all know, and that's the beauty of it. There are 140,000 deaths per year from alcoholism. And those are, you have to remember, only deaths that are marked down on death certificate is alcoholism. That's not the intoxicated individual that falls off a roof, and it's marked as an accident. In the Department of Defense, 32% of active-duty military, not just the Army, are binge drinkers. That's a high number. I'm not here to give you an alcohol ASAP class. I'm here to share my story. But like I said in the beginning, alcohol is still an issue that we face and always will.
- Sergeant Major ...: [22:50](#) But what blows my mind at times is we talk about 22 suicides a day. In veterans, in over 50% of those suicides, there's alcohol involved. In sexual assaults, 80% of the time or higher, alcohol is involved. Domestic indiscipline is what I'll call it, 78% of the time, alcohol is involved. But we seem, in my opinion, to talk around it. We don't talk about the alcohol, we talk about the sexual assault, which we should, but how are we getting after that? I don't have the answer, but I think getting after it personally is putting a face to the disease. That's what I'm trying to do. We can't tap dance around it. I've sat through many

sexual assault classes, and you might hear them say, throw a stat out there, "X" percent is alcohol related.

- Sergeant Major ...: [24:02](#) Where's the alcohol? Where's the training piece to that? I don't know. I've heard someone say, "Well, if the Army just didn't allow folks to drink, we wouldn't have any sexual assaults." I don't agree with that. There are the problem drinkers, alcoholics, and there are social drinkers. But at the end of the day, in groups of civilians, active duty, whatever your formation, directorate, et cetera, looks like, we have folks who are struggling with alcohol in our ranks. The thing about it is this. I don't blame the Army. I don't blame any leaders I had. However, there were people in my career and throughout my career that knew that I drank a lot, and I drank too much.
- Sergeant Major ...: [25:04](#) If they would've confronted me, and if they would've confronted me or they would've said, "Hey, you need to get help," would that have made me quit drinking? No. My point in saying this is the majority of the time, if you know your Soldiers, your civilians, et cetera, you know the folks, the one that comes in late whatever the signs are. They're on these slides, and you guys are smart folks out there. You usually know someone who's struggling. Those are the ones you need to help. One in seven. You can do the math: break down whatever you're responsible for there. We talked about coming out publicly. Back when I was in treatment, and I was the sitting brigade sergeant major, and again, it doesn't matter, but I say that because everybody knew where I was at. So I said to myself, "Well, I'm just going to come out with this, to hell with it."
- Sergeant Major ...: [26:17](#) And that's what I did. I put it on social media, and I'm not the smartest guy, but I knew some folks would say, "Oh, he is doing it for attention." No, I'm not. Absolutely not. I'm doing it to help that one Soldier. I think we need to do a better job at putting the face to alcoholism. No offense to the professionals out there, the PhD holders, because they've helped me through it, and I'm going to talk about them. But when you take somebody who's actually gone through and has battled addiction and alcoholism, and you put them in front of a group of Soldiers, I think it resonates a lot more. Does it solve the problem?
- Sergeant Major ...: [27:04](#) We're going to always have a problem. But I think if we start putting a face to a disease in this case, we can get farther after the desired instate of helping just that one Soldier. If one person gets help, it's a win. And if anyone's out there questioning if they have an issue, I'll tell you this: I've had a lot of people reach out to me, and a lot of people with different

questions, and we're going to get to some questions. One of the questions I get is, "What keeps you sober?"

Sergeant Major ...: [27:54](#)

To be honest, there's a couple things. And how did you know you were ready to quit drinking? Look, it's like anything else. You have to be willing to do it. You have to want it more than anybody else. And that sounds like an easy scripted answer. I get it. But it's the truth. I have individuals and I see individuals that are all active duty military reach out to me as Sergeant Majors or whatever the case may be. They say, "Justin, I want to quit drinking," et cetera. Two weeks later they called me back hammered. And I'll bluntly tell them, you have to want it more than me. I can't get anybody sober. This slideshow's not going to get anybody sober. It's not. It didn't get me sober for 27 years.

Sergeant Major ...: [28:46](#)

You have to want it as a person first. What blows my mind is the majority of folks that have reached out to me are senior NCOs and field-grade officers, majors, or even a one-star general, and look, I get it. There are folks who suffer from different things, and in this case, alcoholism, and they don't want to come out about it. They want to be silent, and that's awesome. Whatever works for their recovery. But when there's that many folks that I've talked to, and it's a lot of folks, we have to do better at showing our true challenges, addictions, whatever it may be, but in this case, alcohol addiction and being transparent with our Soldiers if we want to change the culture. What I also say too is that the glorification of alcohol in the Army still exists. I've been in debates about it. I did it for years.

Sergeant Major ...: [30:00](#)

What I'll tell you is this, quite simply, go to a military function and don't drink. Just try it and see how many people ask you if you want to drink. I get it. There are folks out there saying it's a choice. It is a choice. But if you're an alcoholic, you lose that choice pretty quick. When you put that first sip of alcohol into your system, because your brain takes over, the obsession takes over, the alcoholism takes over. And some folks will never believe that. And that's quite fine as well. But what I'll tell you, at military functions, like military balls for example, people say, "I'm going to get hammered. I'm going to do this." There's free wine on every table. It doesn't make anybody drink. But what are we telling Soldiers? Go into your local shop, and it's stocked, floor to ceiling. Through Covid, most of them were still open but you couldn't get into anything else on post from my experience.

Sergeant Major ...: [31:11](#)

But the shop's open, we want to go drink. So we have a problem in that Soldiers have to feel comfortable coming forward. What I see a lot, and what you all see a lot I guarantee is this Soldier

gets in trouble. They get a DUI, they call somebody, they call reach out to me: "Sergeant Major, I don't know what to do, what happened? I got a DUI, it's too late." We all know the drill with DUI. We all know the drill with the Drunk on Duty. We all know the drill.

Sergeant Major ...: [31:48](#)

And I've seen a lot of Soldiers reach out to me who were struggling. And again, this is not egotistical. This is why I continue to share my story. These Soldiers went through treatment and are sober and are doing phenomenal. And those are wins. Those are wins. Talking about the resources that I had at coming out of treatment. You still, there's still a daily fight. I got a daily reprieve every 24 hours of sobriety. You don't go to rehab or treatment, and you come out and you're cured and you're never going to drink again. No, no, no. It's not how it works. You have to change a lot of things. I don't even drive home the same way because every day for so long I would drive from my office and stop at the shop every day and buy a bottle of booze. You have to change everything that you do. And you have to work with, for me personally, mental health professionals. And you have to be honest. And there's that honesty word again. You know how many times I went to the doctor, and they asked, "How often do you drink?" and I'd say, "Two beers a week"?

Sergeant Major ...: [33:22](#)

You have to be honest. You have to be willing; you have to want it. And you have to change your lifestyle. Is it easy? No, but you have to want it. Is it worth it? Yes. I joke about my life over the last 16 months. I'm a humorous guy, or I think I am. My wife might not think I'm too humorous at times, but I laugh about some of this now because that's how I deal with it. What I'll tell you is after living drunk for so long, once I finally got sober, I had to deal with life sober. Things look different. My wife got more beautiful. Things feel different. You notice the sunset, you notice things that you didn't notice before driving to and from work, but you got something else. You got something called emotions that before were suppressed with alcohol. That you deal that now you get to learn to deal with sober. And it's not always easy. It's probably made me more emotional, which is good or bad. But you have to put the work in. And for me it's a continual work in progress, continually working the 12 Step Program that I work off the installation, continuing to work with mental health professionals.

Sergeant Major ...: [35:01](#)

And you have to want it, my advice to anyone that's struggling is exactly that. You can continue to go down that road like I did casual drinking. Look, we're adults. You should know how alcohol is affecting your life. Like I said, it doesn't matter how

much you drink, in my opinion, it matters. What are the results of your drinking? What does that do?

Sergeant Major ...: [35:36](#)

If you need get help, get help before it's too late. Get help before you have that alcohol-related incident. Get help before you cross that line to where you lose your family, your kids, your loved ones, your friends. And speaking of friends, when you get sober, you have to find a whole new set of friends. Friends, there are places I don't go that I will not go. I won't go to a bar. I think I've been in the shop twice since I've been sober because it brings back those old feelings, that old alcoholism that I have. But you have to want it. There's no stigma in getting help, okay? And what frustrates me is you'll hear that. And when you peel the onion back, the individual who is usually saying that you'll face punitive action prior to getting help, and they twist the story, they're not being honest.

Sergeant Major ...: [36:44](#)

I'll tell you right now, if you're struggling, you raise your hand and say, "Hey, I need to go to ASAP. I have a problem with alcohol." You will receive nothing negative in your career. I hear some folks, not a lot, who say, "Well, this happened and then I got an article 15." But, no, no, that happened before she got help. So we have to be really careful when we tell those stories. If you're struggling, you need to get help. In the military as a whole, we all know we face different challenges than society. There are different stressors. It doesn't justify, but it's just what it is. It's the line of work we're in. I don't blame the Army for my drinking. I blame Justin Shad for that. And you have to get to the point where you want it more than anybody else.

Sergeant Major ...: [37:51](#)

And you have to go do it and put in the work. My life over the last 16 months of sobriety, like I said, is unbelievable. The cool thing is I can watch old Seinfeld shows and they're brand new to me because I never watched TV. See that was a joke, but no one's probably laughing, or everyone fell asleep on me. But I can't even put into words the way my life has been over the last 16 months. My relationships with my family, my friends, those I care about and taking time to actually be present at things. Because before I was at things or places, but I was also drinking. I really wasn't there, and quite honestly, I didn't really care. I cared about the next drink. That's the power of alcoholism. That's the power of addiction. I'm fortunate that for whatever reason in my life, I was able to get help. I'm fortunate that my wife of 25 years is still by my side and that my kids are still by my side. I'm fortunate that I'm still alive, to be quite honest with you. Alcohol ravaged my body. I won't get into all that. I'm lucky to be alive, and it's a blessing from God as I understand Him, the God of heaven.

- Sergeant Major ...: [39:29](#) All I try to do, I'm just a guy with the story. It's got nothing to do with being s r Major, none of that. I'm an alcoholic. That's who I am. And I know there's some folks who don't like that word. You're not, that's a no. I have a disease. If you have cancer, you go to the doctor. Alcoholism doesn't go away. It's something you have to struggle with every day. But there is a solution to it. That's the great news. There's a cure, but you're never really cured. It's a daily maintenance. Look, I'm going to stop rambling because I'm all over the place. Hopefully somebody somewhere got something or will get something out of this. And what I'll tell you too, before I forget, is if you ever need anything. If anybody has questions or needs to reach out, please, please reach out to me. I'm open to helping you guys facilitate training. Whatever you may need. I'm here to help. So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Ms. Walker. I appreciate it.
- Lytaria Walker: [40:56](#) Sergeant Major Shad, thank you so much for the presentation. At this time, we will now take a few questions from the audience. If you would like to ask a question, please type your question in the Q&A box, and we will read them aloud. There will be a short delay before the first question is announced. Okay, first question here, sir: When did you realize and acknowledge that alcoholism is affecting your personal and professional life?
- Sergeant Major ...: [41:33](#) All right, good. We're starting with easy questions first. I knew for a long time. I would joke that I was an alcoholic, but it was a joke. I was in denial. I wasn't being honest. It was affecting my life for a long time personally, professionally. I know there are some folks who say, "Well, you made Sergeant Major." Well, yeah, but alcoholics are smart individuals, and they learn how to hide it. Your Soldiers know how to hide it. But anyways, I knew for a long time that it was affecting my life, but I wasn't denied. I didn't want to accept it because again, in my mind, the frame of reference that I had was an alcoholic with somebody under the bridge. Somebody that went to a treatment center or somebody that went to a 12 Step Program was what we see on tv. You know, somebody without a job, without a house, without a wife, a husband, whatever the case may be I wasn't that person, but I was that person. It affected my life negatively for a long time. Just took me a long time to want to get honest about it. Great question.
- Lytaria Walker: [43:08](#) Thank you, sir. The next question, coming from a home with a Vietnam vet who drank heavily, and a brother who is a Desert Storm vet who was diagnosed with PTSD and also drank heavily, how can a family member support and help a person who has a drinking problem? How did your family assist with your

recovery? Did you receive counseling as a family, or did you seek help alone?

- Sergeant Major ...: [43:36](#) Vietnam vets are held in high, high esteem, so thank them for their service. That's a tough one. So what I'll tell you is this: I too suffer from some mental health PTSD, anxiety, and so forth, so on. I don't use that to justify my drinking. However, I know it's played a part in it. But to answer your question, just show them love. So for me, me and my wife did receive counseling. Did we do it as a family as a whole? No, we didn't. Every situation's different. Are we still working through things on our end as a family? Absolutely. Rebuilding relationships and being honest in repairing things that I did through the years of drinking.
- Sergeant Major ...: [44:52](#) But just support them. They have to be ready to do it. They have to be willing, willing to do it. The thing about it is that some folks never will, and it's sad. My grandfather was an alcoholic. He died from alcoholism. Just show them love because what I'll tell you too is if you push too hard they're going to push you away. We know how that works. We all know how that works. If you pry too hard and push too hard, they're going to put their guard up. And they're going to do what I did for years, and say, "I'm not an alcoholic." So I hope that helps.
- Lytaria Walker: [45:42](#) That was a great answer, sir. Next question: What honestly helped you the most?
- Sergeant Major ...: [45:58](#) It's a tough one. There's a lot. It's strange because like I said, treatment or rehab took the alcohol out of my body. Because it's what they do, and they give you a good foundation. What helped me the most is when my body was starting to feel normal again, and I started to get this feeling of, "Wow, this is what life is." I had a different feeling. I can't put it in the words, and that's part of it. The other thing was when the doctor told me what he told me that I was either going to die or I could quit drinking. And the last part of it, what helped me more than anything, was my wife and my family standing by my side through the whole process. Because that's a whole other conversation about living with and being married to and having a father and a son who battles alcoholism. It affects the whole family. But my wife steadfastly stayed. I love her to death. She's probably critiquing me right now. But that probably helped me the most, knowing that I had a support system. It's tough.
- Lytaria Walker: [47:40](#) Sure. Family support is very important. Thank you for that. Next question. How would you recommend approaching someone who has a drinking problem?

- Sergeant Major ...: [47:51](#) I get asked that a lot, and I put myself in that situation. It's like I was saying, if somebody would've come to me and said, "Hey, you drink too much," or, "Hey, you're an alcoholic, you might want to tone it down." From my experience and from what I would've done. If somebody would've approached me, I would have skirted. I would've justified my alcoholism. And it sounds elementary, but I've said it. "I'm not an alcoholic. I come to work every day. I do a good job. I don't smell like alcohol when I come to work," even though I'm sure I did many times. "I don't have bills that are unpaid. I don't have a problem."
- Sergeant Major ...: [48:50](#) It's hard because those are the conversations I've had with a lot of people that reach out to me. And when we started talking, they get defensive really quick. Alcoholics are good at that in my experience. It's tough, and there's no cookie cutter answer to any of this. But again, what I'll say is if you push too hard, if it's a loved one, I think it's tougher because if you push too hard, you're going to get nowhere. They have to be willing, and they have to be ready. It's not the best answer, I get it. But that's just how it works from my experience.
- Lytaria Walker: [49:38](#) Yes sir. Next question. What we don't know is what we don't know. And we all have a story to tell. What's a good method for someone to open up and tell their story like you did today?
- Sergeant Major ...: [49:55](#) Just do it. Like I was saying, I was sitting in rehab, and I said, Hell, I'm just going to do it. And I've also been asked an interesting question. Would you have done this if you weren't a sergeant major in the position you're in? I'm at the end of my career. I got a year and some change left. But even then, I'm a Brigade Sergeant Major. So what's next? Let's be honest. Would you have done it if you were a sergeant first class or a platoon sergeant? And sadly my answer is I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. That's the stigma that still exists. Because if I would've done that as a platoon sergeant and come out, would I've gotten to where I was at or I'm at today? I don't know, it's something to think about.
- Sergeant Major ...: [50:40](#) But just do it because at the end of the day, everyone's in a unique situation. Everyone's story is different. That's the beauty of all this. Now you have to be ready. It's kind of like becoming a politician. Once you throw yourself out there though, you're out there. So you have to be ready for whatever that means. There's no going back. What I'll tell you is this. When I retire in the next year or so, people will say, "Aren't you the guy that was in the Army talking about how you were an alcoholic?" You see how that works? There might be some negative conversation with that, I don't know. But you have to be willing to put up

with that. There's no going back. Tell your story. If you're able to help one person, hey, it's a win. Whether it be addiction, whatever you're dealing with, just come and just do it. Like Nike, just do it.

Lytaria Walker: [52:02](#) Absolutely. Our next question. Do you feel the programs that are available to Soldiers and their Family members now are effective? And as leaders, what can we do to support them?

Sergeant Major ...: [52:15](#) Are we talking about alcohol-related programs?

Lytaria Walker: [52:18](#) I would imagine so, sir.

Sergeant Major ...: [52:20](#) Yes. I'm sure we got some providers on, hopefully we do. I know from my experience that there's a shortage of providers, but I think the programs are great. I think the providers are doing the best they can do. They're great, great Americans, great people help keep me sober, help keep me in check mentally. But they're shorthanded. And that's probably above everybody on this call. They need help. They need help. I don't have the answer to that. They need help because they're short staffed. We all know what that means. Folks sometimes get lost in the system, or they just give up because it takes so long to get an appointment, let's say. They think they're wasting their time. But the programs are phenomenal. The programs saved my life. ASAP putting me into the rehab center here locally literally saved my life. They're phenomenal people, but again, they're short staffed from my experience and from what I hear across the board. So they're doing the best they can do with what they have. It's a tough one.

Lytaria Walker: [53:42](#) Okay, we have time for about two or three more questions, so we'll move on to the next one. Sir. How do you cope with the urge to taste or drink alcohol?

Sergeant Major ...: [53:52](#) I don't have it anymore. I don't have it. So one thing I didn't say is when I got when I was in treatment, there's medication out there. I was on naltrexone. It blocks the endorphins that you receive and the dopamine that alcohol gives you. Alcohol's depressing, as we all know. The desire to drink went away fairly quickly. I've been around alcohol. I have no desire to drink. Now I'm an alcoholic, so it's always in the back of my head. What do I mean when they say desire is, I'm not sitting there foaming at the mouth thinking, "I really want a beer." That went away fairly quickly. Within about 60 to 90 days, the medication worked. I took the medication for about 10 months and just came off of it about five or six months ago.

- Sergeant Major ...: [54:53](#) I'm a firm believer in it. The medication was phenomenal. I don't have a physical desire to drink, but I tell people that's the easy part of the recovery journey. The hard part is being sober and being comfortable in my own skin because alcohol for me is a social lubricant. So I thought I was a pretty funny guy when I drank to a certain point. But alcohol made me feel comfortable in my own skin. Alcohol was what I used to cope with social situations or life. So when the desire to drink subsided, the urges are gone. The hard work comes in is when you have to live life sober. And again, like I was saying earlier, it's those emotions and being sober. And I know that sounds crazy to some folks, but I've been sober for 16 months out of a long time. So I learned to live again. I think there's a country song about it.
- Lytaria Walker: [56:07](#) Last question here. If you could go back in time and change something, at what point in your life or what would you change?
- Sergeant Major ...: [56:22](#) I wouldn't change anything. And I'm serious when I say that. I got a disease. I'm an alcoholic. I'm not proud of that part of my life. But at the end of the day, if I didn't go through what I went through, I'd probably be dead, literally dead, physically dead is what I mean. I wouldn't change anything. Sure. I'd change things like buying a Powerball or something. But seriously, I wouldn't change anything. It's what I am. Am I proud of my past? Absolutely not at times, no. Are there things that I put my family through that I'm not proud of? Absolutely, yes. Am I proud of it? No. But it made me who I am. It made me stronger, and it made my marriage stronger. I wouldn't change anything. Nothing except maybe have more hair. That's it.
- Lytaria Walker: [57:20](#) Well sir, thank you. Unfortunately, we have run out of time, and we will need to conclude this morning's webinar. I want to extend a gracious thank you to Sergeant Major Shad for taking the time today to provide this presentation for us. I want to also thank you listeners for joining today's webinar as well. Once the webinar ends, you will be prompted to complete a survey. We appreciate your feedback as this helps us to improve upon future webinars. If you'd like to receive invitations for ARD webinars and receive the latest news and information from the Army Resilience Directorate, please go to ARD's website at armyresilience.army.mil and sign up for notifications there. Please also follow us on ARD's newly launched LinkedIn and Instagram platforms. Thank you so much for joining us today. Have a wonderful rest of your day. Thank you, sir.
- Sergeant Major ...: [58:19](#) Hey, thanks again. I appreciate it.

