

HERO: Your Call For Help

Video Transcript

Kevin Blatnik, Newport News Shipbuilding program manager

Hi. I'm Kevin Blatnik and I'm here to tell you a story. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio back in 1967. After that, we moved to Spencer, Ohio, a little kind of a farming community out in the middle of pretty much nowhere. I worked on farms and I baled hay, milked cows and I started working probably when I was about 8 years old. I've always been a worker.

So one of the things I can say about my early life is that I've always known that I was different. I didn't really understand why I was different. One thing is, I'm an extreme introvert. So I had a really hard time growing up because I didn't know how to talk to people and that was very uncomfortable with social circumstances, which was pretty painful I have to say.

I first tasted alcohol, I think, when I was about 8 years old and I loved it, you know, right from the very beginning. So starting at about 12 years old I drank most days, up through probably my early 20s. When I drank it made me feel normal. At the same time as I was experimenting with the drinking, I didn't really understand the other component of it, which is my bipolar disorder. I didn't understand why I felt the way I felt.

I was in college at Kent State University and I was just so miserable that I went to one of the counselors and she said, "What? You're so messed up, you need talk to the head psychiatrist." I talked to the head psychiatrist and he made the diagnosis, in my early 20s, that I had bipolar disorder. At that point they decided to put me on different medications and some of them seemed to help and some of them did not. So it was a long path of trying to figure out what was going to make me feel better. And even once I was seeking help, it wasn't a quick fix.

It's been a lifetime of learning how to deal with both the alcoholism and the bipolar disorder. Music is a huge part of my life, and always has been. Music was one of the things that took the edge off and helped give me some stability.

Mental disorders and alcoholism have great stigmas attached to them, and that keeps people sick for a long time. People -- myself included -- don't like to go out and express that they're broken. But what I will tell you is that the only way to get better is to admit that you have a problem. So if you do decide that you want to get help, whether it's for alcoholism, bipolar disorder or any mental disorder, the first step is just to do it.



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I can tell you that if I did not reach out so many years ago I would not be here today. I would not be talking to you I would not be alive. There's no doubt in my mind. The thing that saved my life was overcoming my fears and having the courage to reach out to somebody.

So when you do decide to open that door there are many opportunities. HII has, for instance, HERO. It's a confidential phone call that you can make. Nobody else is going to know about it, but you have to make that call.