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Advisory Committee Spotlight: Jerome Tennille on the Impact of the School for Volunteers



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The PsychArmor Institute exists to support those who engage the military community – and that includes the more than 62 million Americans who volunteer each year. Thanks to the generosity of the Bob Woodruff Foundation, PsychArmor can offer FREE, on-demand courses specifically for volunteers.

All PsychArmor courses are evidence-based, clinically informed, and developed by nationally recognized subject matter experts. We've also established Advisory Committees to help guide our schools. The Volunteer Advisory Committee consists of 15 leaders from some of the nation's leading nonprofit and Veteran organizations.

Jerome Tennille, Senior Manager, Impact Analysis and Assessment at Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), is a member of the Volunteer Advisory Committee. A Veteran himself, having served for eight years as an intelligence

specialist in the U.S. Navy, Jerome oversaw the management of a network of 9,000 volunteers nationally for over five years in his previous role with TAPS.

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Part of what drew me to serve on the Volunteer Advisory Committee for PsychArmor is that, like PsychArmor CEO Marjorie Morrison, I've experienced the military-civilian divide first-hand on a near daily basis.

Currently, less than one percent of the U.S. population serves in the military, and we have a whole generation for which the media and the movies are their only exposure to Veterans' issues.

People talk about how the military is its own culture, and I've found that to be true. For example, in the military we're conditioned to write emails that are brief and direct. When I transitioned into my civilian role at TAPS, even though I was surrounded by those with a direct or indirect connection to the military, I was approached by one of my coworkers who mentioned that some of our other colleagues thought I was mad at them because of my brevity! For most of my adult life I'd been working a certain way, and suddenly I found myself in a professional environment that demands something else. Or consider a job interview, where a Veteran may be talking about his or her military leadership experience and might say "my subordinates" instead of "my direct reports" or "my colleagues" – but in some workplaces, that has a negative connotation or comes across as demeaning, and that Veteran may get passed over for the job opportunity as a result. These are just some of the misconceptions that the courses in PsychArmor's [Military Culture School](#) are working to prevent.

Within the School for Volunteers, Setting Boundaries as a Volunteer is one of my favorite courses.

Setting Boundaries as a Volunteer



This course discusses the importance setting personal and professional boundaries when working with different groups. Topics in this course include how to define different boundaries, understanding how boundaries impact relationships, and learning how to set boundaries for different groups.



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Different groups and different people will all require different personal and professional boundaries, and the techniques you learn in this course can help organizations manage their expectations of volunteers, and can help volunteers manage their expectations of an organization. For example, at TAPS, we take experienced and trained survivors of military loss and pair them with the newly bereaved, and our Good Grief Camp Mentors are paired with a child who's lost a parent with a military mentor. One of the benefits is that it helps recreate the safety and cultural familiarity of the military installation that they will soon have to leave, or have recently left. But our volunteers need to be well-trained to create boundaries with the child and the grieving family, and this course can help them do that.

One of my colleagues at TAPS, Zaneta Gileno, Director of Community Based Care, worked with PsychArmor to create Supporting a Surviving Loved One, a course for volunteers looking to better understand the topic. So many people are afraid of unintentionally hurting someone by what they say or don't say, so they do nothing. But most people want to talk about their loved one, and this course can help you navigate that.

Supporting a Surviving Loved One



This course is designed to help volunteers support surviving loved ones, and provide volunteers with tips and tools to better support veterans at their organization.



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It's also important to remember that there are many motivations for volunteering – it's not just because your heart is in it. For example, I've worked with court appointed volunteers, military service members who are looking to give back to the community, and students who are fulfilling community service requirements, to name just a few.

One of the biggest nonprofit challenges is training and equipping the volunteer force with limited resources – and PsychArmor fills that gap. When PsychArmor comes to organizations like ours, with a repository of online training from clinicians and subject matter experts that they're offering to us for free? For nonprofits, that's HUGE. I was responsible for 9,000 volunteers across the country and unfortunately don't have the resources to fly them all to one location to be trained by experts, so to put that kind of learning at my volunteers' fingertips on-demand is incredible.

PsychArmor is doing something important. While it's perhaps not as tangible as sending care packages to service members overseas, equipping society to better serve and support the military has a large ripple effect. Every course taken has a positive impact not only on the individual's success, but also the organization's success.

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