

The Combat To College GROW Method

Veteran to Veteran Coaching For Student Veterans

Created by John H Davis

Student Veterans

Student veterans are a distinct subset of nontraditional students, who are typically older, have families, and need to work during their education. Many of these veteran characteristics contribute directly to higher attrition.¹ It's important to note that nearly 70% of nontraditional students drop out of college citing family and work obligations as the underlying cause². Student veterans face increased risks, checking multiple boxes in nontraditional student domains. It's important to note that over 50% of student veterans have a documented service-connected disability from the Department of Veteran Affairs³. Veterans face many challenges to their post-secondary educational goals. Even minor disabilities, like tinnitus, headaches, backpain or other issues can have a major impact on education and contribute to lower degree completion rates.⁴ In addition, many disabilities cannot be seen, and veterans may find it difficult to communicate their struggles to their professors and peers due to the self-sufficient nature fostered in the military.

A veteran coach understands and relates to the varied needs of veteran students. Veterans will more honestly interact with coaches they know can relate to their lived experiences. Veteran to Veteran student coaching for student veterans has the potential to increase veteran graduation rates and produce positive mental and physical health outcomes for this population. As Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll said, “[We] rise by lifting others,” and veterans can uplift one another and themselves through the *Combat To College* coaching system. Not only will having veteran coaches create measurable academic success, but it can also save lives. We live in a country where twenty veterans kill themselves every day, veteran coaching will provide purpose to both the veteran coach and veteran student. A veteran without purpose is a veteran at risk.

¹ Cate, C.A., Lyon, J.S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B.Y. (2017). National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.

² Dr. Kris Macdonald, <https://www.educationcorner.com/nontraditional-students-guide.html>

³ Dr. Samantha L Solomon, The Veteran Experience in College Classrooms, November 11, 2019, [https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/veteran-experience-college-classrooms/#:~:text=According%20to%20Student%20Veterans%20of,to%20traditional%20students%20\(2.94\).](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/veteran-experience-college-classrooms/#:~:text=According%20to%20Student%20Veterans%20of,to%20traditional%20students%20(2.94).)

⁴ Wagner BA, Long RN. From Start to Finish: What Factors Inhibit Student Veterans Completion? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. July 2020. doi:[10.1177/1521025120935118](https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120935118)

Coaching

Coaching is unlocking an individual's potential to maximize their personal performance.⁵ The guidance provided by veteran coaches to fellow veterans will provide vital encouragement in a pivotal time in the student veterans life. Because of the veteran-to-veteran connection and what that signifies, self-expression will flow naturally. A veteran coach will understand the lingo, the VA, and the transition process veterans go through; The groundwork of trust is present due to the coach holding veteran status, this intimacy will make openness and honesty more likely.⁶

Coaching aims to improve the veteran's life in the here and now. Although coaching has similar characteristics as mentoring and counseling, It is not those things. Coaching believes the coachee has the answers to their problems within them. You don't need to be an expert to provide coaching, it's assisting the person to unlock their own potential. Coaching is empowering the student veteran and supports them at every level. The ultimate aim of *Combat To College Coaching* is to help the veteran make progress in areas they feel are necessary. The progress doesn't necessarily need to be "in the classroom" as many life factors impact life satisfaction and academic achievement. The veteran coach opens the student veteran to the answers through powerful questions and authentic support. Veteran coaches will care. Coaching need not to be overthought, it's helping the student veteran help themselves.

Context

The context for *Combat To College* coaching is on college campuses. Ideally, junior, and senior student veterans who are academically successful will learn the GROW model to coach incoming student veterans on that campus. The coaching model has the potential to evolve into a self-repeating cycle. After veterans are coached as freshman, they can eventually transform into coaches themselves. Veterans helping veterans has proven to be an effective model for supporting our nations veterans and college provides a commonsense environment for this approach. A veteran support structure, purposefully built in our nation's colleges would help student veterans achieve academic, emotional, social, and economic support through school and after graduation. Veterans are comfortable with being coached. In all branches of the military coaching, mentoring, and leading are commonplace. Coaches ask the "powerful questions"⁷ to elicit goals and specific details on how to achieve them throughout the *Combat To College* method. Instead of the coach telling the veteran what their goals are, as done in military settings, the two will explore that together through open dialogue.

The goal for student veterans is graduation, but also to make the most of their college experience in preparation for beyond. A diploma is the capstone of a successful college experience and the culminating result of many sub-goals. There are whole health aspects that play into a positive student experience for veterans, who aim to not only eventually possess the diploma but also the confidence to pursue a meaningful life post-graduation.

⁵ Sir John Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*, 2017

⁶ Sir John Whitmore, *Active Listening*, Table 3

⁷ Sir John Whitmore, *Powerful Questions*

To accomplish these dual goals, veteran coaches will use the *Combat To College* GROW framework. GROW has the most value when the coach feels a connection and responsibility towards the student veteran. That requires active listening, and powerful questions.⁸ Veterans have a deeper understanding of the struggle's fellow veterans' encounter. This will be useful when employing the *Combat To College* GROW model. Veterans coaches will be able to follow their instincts more confidently and successfully than civilian coaches would have the ability to.

Combat To College GROW

- **G- Goal Setting**

In goal setting, student veterans explore, and uncover short- and long-term goals while they are attending college. The proposed framework can be adapted but for this purpose we will focus on setting semester-long, singular goals in four domains: academic, social, emotional, and physical. The duration of the goals is one semester to drive stronger and consistent engagement between the coach and the student veteran. The specificity allows for more concentrated efforts for the student veteran. Veterans are used to backwards planning, beginning with the desired end-state in mind. This increases comfortability with the coaching method and provides early momentum by placing the goal first. Coaches and student veterans should strive for goals that come naturally from the veteran, which will be varied. Having multiple goals, but not too many goals is optimal. The *Combat To College* approach sets the goal quantity at four. The goal itself is less important than the fact that they are setting goals. There are complexities to life as a student veteran, this coaching focuses on the present and the future, not the past. Goals provide hope, and when there is hope, there is potential for student veterans. Thus, the goal comes first.

Powerful Questions to ask In Goal Setting:

- ✓ What is your dream?
- ✓ What will you have that you don't have now after accomplishment?
- ✓ What outcome are you looking for?
- ✓ What would it mean for you to achieve this?
- ✓ How would you break this down into smaller pieces?

Coaching Tip: Research the SMARTER goal setting framework.

- **R- Reality**

Veterans as nontraditional students face challenges coming into their first year of college. University campuses can feel more alien than combat environments. The initial reality stage is an assessment of where they are, their current predicament, the good and the bad. Being the only veteran in the room surrounded by civilian students presents difficulties. Finding positive ways to build community with civilian classmates is an important mission for all student veterans.

⁸ Sir John Whitmore, GROW model

Same as in the military, your peers can make or break your experience. An honest assessment of the veteran's reality is important, the coach and veteran should put honesty over feelings. Veterans have external as well as internal obstacles⁹ to address when confronting their current reality, especially combat veterans.

Powerful Questions to ask during Reality checking:

- ✓ How important is this to you?
- ✓ What are you doing that takes you towards your goal?
- ✓ What are your main concerns here?
- ✓ What internal resistance do you have to taking action?
- ✓ How much control do you have personally over the outcome?

Coaching tip: Ask deep follow up questions to get an accurate bird's eye view of reality, not what the student veteran sees. Encourage the student veteran to think deeply about their real and perceived barriers.

• O- Options

Veterans are comfortable with using the military problem-solving process (MPSP) when confronted with problems or challenges. Part of this process is to generate all potential alternatives or courses of action. The foundational knowledge of the MPSP will benefit coaches and student veterans to brainstorm more in-depth at this stage. As a reference, the MPSP is below, and can be worked through in this stage in its entirety or only steps 4-6.

Military Problem-Solving Process:

1. Gather information and knowledge.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Develop criteria.
4. **Generate possible solutions.**
5. **Analyze possible solutions.**
6. **Compare possible solutions.**
7. Make and implement the decision¹⁰.

The options in today's civilian world can be overwhelming and seem chaotic to transitioning veterans. There is only one road in the military, but civilian life is full of detours. A coach will be able to help the student veteran explore unthought of options. There are more potential paths to take in the civilian world. Military culture has a "do what I say" environment and personal decisions go out the window. In the Option phase, the student veteran is encouraged to evaluate the totality of their options, it's advantageous to have someone trusted to brainstorm the range of choices. In most ways the military is straightforward, when veterans find themselves in college environments, the unstructured nature can present a culture shock. In this step of the GROW model the coach will strive for flexibility to explore all possible options. The coach will question challenge the veteran by questioning a variety of strategies for progression.¹¹

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ FM 22-100, Army Leadership, FM 101-5 Staff Organization and Operations (Chapter 5)

¹¹ Sir John Whitmore, GROW Model, Chap 9

Powerful Questions to ask during Options:

- ✓ What creative ideas do you have?
- ✓ Who could help you with this?
- ✓ What else could work here?
- ✓ What could you do to avoid or reduce risk?
- ✓ Would it help if I made some suggestions?

Coaching tip: Actively listen and intentionally empower the student veteran. Encourage out of the box thinking.

• W- Way Forward

. In this last step of the coaching model, the above steps will be summarized, and a plan will be implemented.¹² In military culture, accountability is crucial, and this step will keep the student veteran accountable to their coach moving forward. The coach will ask the student veteran further about potential obstacles to their goal and what potential problems to get upstream of. The coach will be there throughout the semester to provide support but will also guide the student veteran towards other potential supports. Colleges have support services, tutoring, and career assistance. The coach isn't expected to be an expert in any one field but expected to be a primary ally of the student veteran in recommending resources. This step also measures commitment, college is a multi-year endeavor, and it takes authentic dedication to make it to the finish line. The accountability and inspiration a coach provides is priceless to student veterans.

Powerful Questions to ask during the Way Forward:

- ✓ How committed are you?
- ✓ What could happen to hinder you from taking action?
- ✓ What can you do to support yourself?
- ✓ What other supports could you find during this period?
- ✓ How will you measure success?

Coaching tip: The student veteran isn't your military subordinate, don't think of yourself as a magic 8-ball with all the answers. Ask questions to let them to uncover their path forward.

Conclusion

The *Combat To College* GROW model is appropriate for student veterans due to the structure's utility for both coaching and mentoring.¹³ The coaches do not require formalized training because of their military experience. Their military background means they have a level of leadership training. Coaching is of great value to student veterans. It is geared to improve outcomes for student veterans in college and beyond. A veteran coach can help the student veteran remove and overcome obstacles in their path to graduation. Because of this unique spot in life, where veterans are transitioning out of the military, starting college, and moving all at the same time, coaching is particularly beneficial. *The Combat To College* GROW model used by

¹² Ibid

¹³ Grow Model Video, <https://youtu.be/6LmjV2R9qSo>

veteran coaches will help incoming student veterans improve performance and make their long-term educational, life, and career objectives more likely to be attained.¹⁴

Note: Powerful questions adapted or taken from:
John Whitmore, Coaching for Performance, Powerful Questions

¹⁴ Ibid

Combat To College Goal Setting

Date _____

Veteran Name _____

Coaches Name _____

Educational Institution _____

Degree Sought _____

Type of Goal: (Academic, Social, Emotional, Physical)

Goal:

Reality Points:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Options:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Way Forward:

How will the success of this goal be measured?

1. _____

2. _____

When will this goal be re-evaluated? _____

We agree on and certify this goal:

Student Veteran

Coach

Re-evaluation of Goal

Date _____

Goal was achieved

Goal was **not** achieved

How do you know? _____

Potential Goal Examples:

Social:

Join and play in a softball league

Participate in a local veteran organization

Find a club at your school to get involved with

Emotional:

Do weekly group therapy

Meditate each morning for ten minutes

Take a walk every time I get upset

Academic:

Get on the Dean's List

Join an honor society

Go to a tutor once a week

Physical:

Run a 5k

Lose 10 pounds this semester

Work out 4 days a week

Created by

John H Davis

US Army Ret.

Author of *Combat To College*

M. Ed Harvard Graduate School of Education

Email: John.h.davis.writer@gmail.com

IG/Facebook: John.h.davis.writer

Website: www.JohnHDaviswriter.com

Anyone can use this for any reason, good luck. Contact me for comments, assistance, or questions. Any editing, improvements, ideas, or changes for the better I'd love to see. I'm terrible at making worksheets so anyone wants to improve those, you have my blessing and appreciation. Thank you.