

## Military OneSource Podcast — Mentorship in Action: Military Spouses Empowering Others

### Episode transcript

#### Intro voice-over:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

#### Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. This week, I'm in San Antonio, specifically I'm at Joint Base San Antonio. Even more specifically, I'm at Lackland Air Force Base, and to get really, really specific, I'm at Stillman Park; yes, which is really beautiful. And it's a hot, hot day today, and we're in the shade, and it's lovely.

Anyway, I'm joined today by Traci Ostrander and Ally Hughes, and we're going to talk about mentoring spouses. But before that, let's get the two of you to introduce yourself. So Traci, let's just begin with you.

#### Traci Ostrander:

Hi, I'm Traci Ostrander. I'm representing Armed Forces Insurance Military Spouse of the Year. I'm the 2024 Camp Bullis, which is also in San Antonio, Military Spouse. I also am the manager for the Military Spouse Mentorship Program, which is part of Military Spouse Advocacy Network (MSAN).

#### Bruce Moody:

All right. And Ally?

#### Ally Hughes

Hi, I'm Ally Hughes. I am also with Military Spouse Advocacy Network. I am an Air Force Spouse Mentor, and I am also the leadership development program coordinator.

#### Bruce Moody:

Great. So we're going to talk about mentoring spouses, and people might think, "Oh, yeah. Well, when you're new to the military, you need a mentor." But the fact is you're new to every new twist and turn of military life, and you can have been in for years, and maybe it's your first PCS overseas, or this or that is a lot of it, so let's unpack that.

Generally speaking, why is it that you provide mentoring to military spouses? Ally is pointing to Traci, so I'm pointing the microphone to you for wisdom.

**Traci Ostrander:**

For years and years, as long as the military has been around, military spouses have not gotten that mentoring, that support to show them where to go, what to do, how to do. They come into this military life with all these questions, and they don't know where to start. So that's where the mentoring has come from. It's actually specifically why MSAN was created, for those brand-new military spouses.

But through the years — we're actually 10 years old this year — we've found that it's all spouses. It's every time they have that first deployment, have that first move, they add kids to the loop, maybe the kids are going to college now, retirement ... anytime something new happens, military spouses need to know the answers to their questions. So that's what we do. We provide those answers, we provide that connection, that support, from a fellow military spouse who gets it.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now, I'm a retired Navy chief, and I can say that my fellow uniformed spouses were not always the best sources. Spouses need to mentor spouses because I would say that even the best-intended service member doesn't really see how much the spouse doesn't have eyes on and awareness of, and they probably take a lot of military life for granted.

And so, it really takes that perspective of a military spouse to talk to a military spouse. Thoughts on that? Ally, we're looking at you now.

**Ally Hughes:**

I'm currently reading Corie Weathers' newest book, I forget the name off the top of my head right this moment, but it mentions that military spouses, with all the different PCSes, we're having to start over, but the military service member jumps right back into a new job, a new family of sorts, with their new squadron or unit or whatever. But as spouses, we're constantly starting over, starting over, starting over, which is why it's so important to have that opportunity to have a mentor.

**Bruce Moody:**

All right. So let's get into the mentoring. What does that look like?

**Traci Ostrander:**

It is different for each military spouse, so it's about what does that military spouse need? What are they looking for? Are they looking for answers to questions, and we're going to provide resources? Absolutely. Are they looking for just that connection with another military spouse?

Because so many times our military spouses, there's no cookie cutter for a military spouse. We have military spouses that are highly involved into the local military installation, but then we have the ones that aren't even stationed near an installation, or a smaller-functioning installation where it's just like what I call "the workplace." There's nothing else there, so they need that connection.

Our reserves, our National Guard, our Coast Guard, need that connection to military because they often are not connected into the military side of their spouses. So, it's going to be whatever they need is what you're going to want to help and support them to get there.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now, especially for those who are not connected, living off base, do they know what they need to know? Do they know what they don't know? There's a whole world, and they may not be aware of just how much help is available, how much community they can experience around them. So how do you help them discover that?

**Traci Ostrander:**

I think that's the biggest one we get all the time is they don't know. They don't know what to ask, they don't know what's out there, so it's building a relationship with a spouse, and then it's saying, "Hey, you're located here. Okay. Did you know about this? Did you know about this?"

As you're going through and developing that connection with them, you're finding out and you're keying into what they're looking for. Are they looking for just finding ways for in-person events, and then we're going to give suggestions? Our biggest suggestion, I think, is always volunteer. Get in and volunteer with someone somewhere within your passions, whether it's the military or the community outside the military.

But that's how you get to know people, and that's how we figure out what exactly are they looking for. But we're always suggesting a plenitude of places and things, and we have our mentorship hub with MSAN, and that's a great place, a platform to share resources and questions and support.

**Bruce Moody:**

So any examples, any stories you want to share of working with a military spouse?

**Traci Ostrander:**

Our reserves and National Guard never know what's out there. I think the one I always, yeah, the ones I will say is that our civilian counterparts, while they get that our service member is away, they don't truly get it, so they don't understand it. So, so often, those specific spouses, even our Coast Guard, they're starting to open up our teams with us and sharing with me that they have the same exact feelings — that people don't get their lifestyle.

So, sharing with them what's available. I mean, so many people don't realize that when your spouse is on a long TDY or a deployment, that there are so many things, like yard cutting and snow removal, that are available. A lot of the civilian companies will help you out, and our spouses just don't even realize that, even for our active-duty members.

**Bruce Moody:**

So I was active duty, and it took a number of years before I finally really saw firsthand how truly challenging it is to be in the guard and reserve, to have your feet in both worlds, to be in a community that you're trying to remain connected to, while in a military, you're trying to connect to. Because in a lot of cases, you're significantly far away from the unit where you're serving, so that's very, very interesting.

So, I guess my question would be is, what does mentoring actually look like as it begins? As you find a spouse or as they found you, how does that work?

**Ally Hughes:**

When a spouse is looking to get a mentor, they will go through the website and sign up to request a mentor. Traci will introduce herself and introduce them to the program, and then they

will be assigned to a mentor, which is something that I do. Once I get their information, I reach out to them, tell them a little bit more about what the program's all about and slowly get to know them.

**Bruce Moody:**

So we'll put a link in the program notes so people know what we're talking about here. And so, essentially, there's a central desk, if you will, virtual desk, and then you've got a national network. Is it more than that? I mean, do you have mentors?

You have mentors overseas? Okay.

**Traci Ostrander:**

Yeah.

**Bruce Moody:**

I should have pointed the mic at you when you were saying yes, but you have mentors overseas as well as in the states, CONUS or OCONUS, as we like to say in the military. So how do you keep track of all of these spouses? Who are they, and how do they get to join?

**Traci Ostrander:**

So, like Ally said, they join, and they make a request, and within that request, they're going to tell us their branch.

**Bruce Moody:**

Are you vetting these people who are the mentors?

**Traci Ostrander:**

The mentors go through a strict interview process with our mentorship program management team, which is myself and Marivel, who is our director. And we talk to them, we ask them questions. We're looking for the passion, we're looking for the knowledge of resources.

Now, they don't have to have an extensive knowledge, but just some knowledge because it's all about experiences. It's about sharing your stories, so if they can share their stories, and they have that passion, then we know that they're going to be a good mentor to mentor other spouses.

**Bruce Moody:**

So they have their experience as a military spouse and, along with that, moves, deployments and all other stuff. But are you also giving them a database, some sort of list of resources?

If somebody says, "I'm looking for this and that and the other," they're not just on their own? They have some sort of resource? I'm hoping the answer is "Yes," and I'm hoping you're going to tell me about it. All right, good.

**Traci Ostrander:**

Yeah, absolutely. So first of all, they go through extensive training with us. One thing we always tell our mentors is "We're never going to say, 'Hey, here, you're a mentor. Let's go for it.'" No. We're side by side with them.

We have branch managers that are working with them, sharing resources. We have an entire team that we encourage them to look to their own teammates, their own branch. Like Ally would look for her other Air Force branch mentors, our mentors. When she doesn't know the answers to the questions, we have our mentorship hub, we have advocates and ambassadors.

Our entire volunteer squad is there, so our mentors can ask, "Hey, do you know anything about this?" And they provide resources and share things. We also have branch groups that have folders, like a Google folder, that the branch manager or mentor is trying to drop in resources as they go throughout their time.

**Bruce Moody:**

You have something to add. I can tell, I can tell. All right. Ally, go ahead.

**Ally Hughes:**

So my branch mentor, she does have that Google folder like Traci said, but she also sends us monthly, bimonthly resources with her newsletter that she sends out to make sure that we always know the resources that are available. And some of them are bigger, like Military OneSource, and others are smaller that you don't know about until someone tells you.

**Bruce Moody:**

So when I think of mentoring, I think of wanting to learn more. I have questions. What about emergent situations, disasters, personal disasters or large-scale disasters of varying types? How are you helping military spouses when something like that is happening?

**Traci Ostrander:**

When there's a crisis situation, we have a whole policy and procedure with contact numbers, information to share, and then they share it with certain members of our volunteer management so that we can follow up. And that's posted everywhere. They all have it. They get it all the time. Most of them get it in every single check-in newsletter that they get, so they know where that is.

As far as disasters and stuff, we have lots. When we know something's going on in the area or in the news, like the recent hurricanes and whatnot, we were posting in our mentorship hub all kinds of resources, like we were checking in with people, we were checking in with our members, our mentees, and then we were listing lists of resources like, "Hey, if you need this, this, this," and just everyone would add and add. So there's always things like that posted in our mentorship hub.

**Bruce Moody:**

Are you talking with leadership either at an installation or at the more service level? So are they aware of you, and are you hearing from them? How does that work?

**Traci Ostrander:**

So our CEO and President Verence Castillo does all that, so she's the one checking in. Our ambassadors are checking in and speaking with leadership, and then she brings stuff to us from down the line like that.

**Bruce Moody:**

As I'm hearing you talk about what you offer to military spouses, I am aware that there is that first step that a military spouse has to take, and there's any number of reasons why somebody might be hesitant to take that first step but, generally, they feel pretty good afterwards. So what would be your motivating message to military spouses who may not even know that they should be contacting you guys?

**Traci Ostrander:**

I'm going to speak on behalf of the reserves and the National Guard because what I have found is that they don't realize how much better they can communicate with their spouse and understand their spouse if they get a little bit of involvement on the military side, even if it's from our spouses themselves. And they realize that, "Hey, they're experiencing this same exact thing as I am."

So, never hesitate to ask. We always say there's never a dumb question because someone somewhere has had that, and why start from the beginning if someone's already done a lot of the legwork? But for our National Guard, our reserves, our Coast Guard, anyone that's living away from the military life, just get in there and then just build a relationship with someone else because I guarantee you there's someone there that has felt something similar to you, and it's going to help you.

**Bruce Moody:**

Ally, you get the last word.

**Ally Hughes:**

That first step is definitely the hardest, but once you make it, it's so rewarding. And even if you just have one question, and you don't feel like you need a whole lot of mentorship, join us in the hub, post your question. What I did is I joined, did a couple of questions, and before long, I was a mentor, and I'm like, "How did I get here?" So, definitely take that first step.

**Bruce Moody:**

Awesome. Well, we'll leave it there. And I really appreciate this conversation in this beautiful park in the shade, and I appreciate that we did not have jet noise. Traci Ostrander and Ally Hughes, thank you so much for joining us today.

And I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you, so if you have a question or a comment about what you heard today, just send us a note. There's a link in the program notes for that. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.