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Speaker 1 ([00:06](#)):

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.

Bruce Moody ([00:26](#)):

Hi everybody, Bruce Moody on the Military OneSource podcast. Military families, they move a lot. You know we don't like to use acronyms a lot on this podcast, but in this case, PCS, it technically means "permanent change of station," but PCS is shorthand for moving, and so we're going to be talking about PCS or PCSing in today's podcast. My guest today is Patti Dybdahl. Patti is a colleague and she's with the Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, and we're going to talk about moves, moving and how to deal with it. Patti, welcome. Glad to have you with us.

Patti Dybdahl ([01:09](#)):

Bruce, thank you so much for inviting me. It is an absolute pleasure to be here today to talk about my favorite topic, PCS. In fact, I consider myself a self-proclaimed PCS expert and I'm honored to be here today to be able to share not only my experiences about helping military families making PCS moves, but also to be able to share a little bit about my own personal experiences living through moving as a military spouse and moving throughout my career, so thanks for having me.

Bruce Moody ([01:42](#)):

Oh, it is really great. You and I have been having conversations leading up to the recording of this podcast and yeah, there's a lot to moving that you know and you have to share and you've got some stories, you've got some advice. A lot of it falls into two categories, I think, and you can speak to this, there's the actual move, there's watching all your stuff, all your possessions go into a box and then leave, and then there's the other half, which is how you react to it, how you respond to it, how you grow from that, so we're going to talk about those two things, which, as we talked about, you say kind of falls into four universal truths, so let's talk about those four universal truths as they pertain to a PCS. Let's get started with those, would you, Patti?

Patti Dybdahl ([02:33](#)):

Sure. And Bruce, those four universal truths, I mean, people are going to say there's a lot of other things that go into PCS and that is absolutely true, but I'm going to argue the point that they're probably going to fall into one of these four buckets, so I think if we cover the four universal truths today, they'll cover the whole experience for everybody.

Patti Dybdahl ([02:56](#)):

So that first #1 Universal Truth that we're going to start out with is not all moves are created equal, and I'll be the first one to tell you there are some absolutes in every PCS, right? The absolute first thing is you can guarantee you're going to lose something and you're also going to gain something, and everyone's experience is going to be a little different. I mean, if we looked at two families that are almost identically the same in every regard, and they're moving from one installation to the exact same installation, they're probably going to have an absolute different experience, each one of those families, and it's because not all moves are created equal.

Bruce Moody (03:42):

That's true. They're not all created equal. You and I could be moving same time, same place, and even those are going to be two totally different moves between your experience and mine. And another thing is, it doesn't really matter how far you move. I mean, whether you're moving across town or to another continent, it doesn't necessarily mean that your move is going to be more or less challenging, does it?

Patti Dybdahl (04:08):

That is absolutely true, Bruce, and I'll tell you, even just reflecting on my own PCS experience, if I look at, just share with you my first PCS experience, we hadn't been in the military community very long and we were going to go large or go home, so we were making our first PCS move from a stateside base to Japan, and when I look back on that experience, I don't remember a lot about physically moving our things. I mean, I know we had things, I don't remember a lot about moving them, but what I do remember is being at the Los Angeles terminal and having our family there late at night and waiting for the airplane to come in and they say over the loudspeaker, "Attention, attention, your airplane has landed. Ten minutes to boarding."

Patti Dybdahl (05:03):

And I walked over to the window to show the kids the airplane, and it was this big, huge brown UPS plane, and I thought... I was very young, I didn't have a lot of experience and I thought, "Oh, my gosh. We are going to be sitting on this airplane with a bunch of brown boxes because they send you UPS to Japan." That's really a thought that went through my mind. But that experience, what I remember, was getting there, it was not UPS boxes, it was, we were actually in a real airplane.

Patti Dybdahl (05:36):

But if I fast-forward to my last PCS, now, I have just decades of experience with PCSing, and for the first time in my life, I found myself looking at a semi truck full of everything we've collected on our adventures over the years and for the first time in my life, I was the only person on the receiving team. I didn't have my inventory checker, I didn't have my logistics police, it was just me, and thank goodness that I had this fabulous moving team.

Patti Dybdahl (06:14):

I had made a remark to one of the movers that my goal was I want to be able to park in the garage, and anyone who's PCSed knows that when those boxes start coming in and rooms start filling up, your solution is put it in the garage, and one of the movers heard me say that and he said, "Look, I am not going to let you stack this garage full of boxes. We are going to make this work and you are going to park in that garage." And I parked in that garage, but I tell you those stories to say that those are two very different experiences just in my lifetime.

Bruce Moody (06:52):

Two very, very different experiences, almost like a highlight reel.

Patti Dybdahl (06:57):

Bruce, it is absolutely like a highlight reel and that really kind of goes along with Universal Truth #2, and that is every move has highs and lows, and when I look back over our nine PCS moves and it's really like being on a rollercoaster ride. I mean, when you find out you're PCSing, you've now entered the theme

park line, right? And that line can be frustratingly long, you might find you got one of those little bands and you get to go to the front of the line, but the reality is there is just a ton of emotion in a PCS and you're experiencing all of those emotions often on this accelerated timeline and the PCS rollercoaster ride, in the grand scheme of things, is not very long, but if we take it back to those highs and lows, when you're making a move, the lows might be leaving a job that you love or leaving your friends or worrying about your kids making friends, maybe packing up your stuff is a low for you.

Patti Dybdahl ([08:03](#)):

Another aspect that I know we struggled with in our family was our own extended family. They didn't understand how the military moved and we wanted to spend time with them, but we also wanted to get to our new location so we could get settled, so that was a low for us, that those two things really didn't go together. But then if you think about it, there's also highs from that PCS rollercoaster ride. That can be things like the excitement of experiencing a new culture, or maybe you're going to move to an installation that has better weather or a beach, or maybe your job prospects just got a lot better because you're moving to a really good location.

Patti Dybdahl ([08:49](#)):

For me, one of the highs was actually the physical moving, the move portion of that because I like to thin the herd. You know, you're getting rid of those markers that dried up three years ago that nobody threw away and stuff like that. So, I mean, really, the universal truth is there's highs and lows with every PCS.

Bruce Moody ([09:11](#)):

There are highs and lows. It just seems like PCSing is sort of a distillation of life. People do say, "I'm packing up my life." It really is true, you're packing up your life, your community, your environment, your career, your stuff, of course, your schools, everything else, and in all of that, there really seems to be a balance that you have to maintain, a balance between those highs and those lows. Can you talk about that, Patti?

Patti Dybdahl ([09:41](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Really, the balance is about expecting and really being okay with the fact that there's going to be both good and bad that are going to make up your experience. I mean, you really have to be prepared for things to go wrong to really appreciate the things that go right. I mean, in our family, we use humor. I mean, it really balances out the good and the bad, and one of our battle cries of PCS is "protect the dining room table," and there's a funny backstory that goes with that.

Patti Dybdahl ([10:18](#)):

We were PCSing from RAF Lakenheath and we lived in base housing at the time, and I was perched on the kitchen counter because I had a perfect view out the window at the shed where the shed was being packed up, and then I could also oversee the essential kitchen pack-up because one of the things in PCS, well, my family, first of all, we like to eat. We also have tried to keep some semblance of normal when we PCS, so one of the things to do that is we needed to make sure we all got to eat together, and so my husband comes in and says he has to go to an appointment so whatever you do, don't let them pack up the kitchen table. And I thought, "I got you. That is an easy job. The dining room table is not going anywhere."

Patti Dybdahl ([11:06](#)):

Well, no sooner does he leave, do I notice that the person out in the shed is packing up our recycling, so I leave my post for, I swear to you, it was 30 seconds, okay? I go out there and I like to talk and have fun and stuff, so maybe I was out there a little longer, but I rescued the recycling, locked it in the trunk of the car just to head back up the sidewalk to see the top of the dining room table all packed up and going into a crate, so that gets us to the kind of our funny story, "protect the dining room table." I will tell you, we had a happy ending on that, our family did eat together, we made do with some boxes and stuff, but we still joke about "protect the dining room table."

Bruce Moody ([11:48](#)):

That's really awesome. I think the thing about that story is, first of all, folks, you should know Patti has an archive of moving stories and I think that we all do, we all have these stories. We all have these stories where basically something happens and you're really forced with a choice. You can either find the humor, or you can just let it just cook your goodwill out of your soul, and I think that it's so important to have the right frame of mind when you're looking at these things and really find the humor in it.

Patti Dybdahl ([12:26](#)):

You know, Bruce, and I mean, I couldn't agree with you more on that and that really is Universal Truth #3 is that you control your narrative. I mean, when you're PCSing, things get, for lack of a better word, they just get "real," they get busy and you feel like things are out of control and it's okay. It's okay to feel all of those things, but what you have to remember is that you really control your outlook, you control your narrative.

Patti Dybdahl ([12:58](#)):

If you're in a rose garden and all you want to see are thorns, that's all you're going to see, and you're really missing out on the beautiful roses, right? And I think of that narrative as you really have to remember that it's not only your narrative, but it extends and it influences all the people in your inner circle, so if you take a minute to reflect on that, your children, right? They take their cues from your narrative. Your spouse is going to frame their outlook on the PCS and their attitude every day that they bring to the PCS based on your narrative, so your narrative extends to your circle and those people in that circle and the people that you care about are going to use your narrative to help them shape and react to your experience.

Bruce Moody ([13:54](#)):

So, Patti, I'm listening to this and I'm just seeing how a move is, again, just a distillation of life in so many ways, how you deal with stress and in particular to what you've just been talking about, because I just see this, not even going through a move, we've been busy with work, it's just been incredibly busy and how you deal with stress, how you personally deal with stress is felt and responded to by the people around your life, and that's so important, when you have a family, to understand that those highs and lows that you navigate, how you deal with them and they react to your reactions.

Patti Dybdahl ([14:39](#)):

And Bruce, that is absolutely true, and your narrative helps you navigate those highs and lows and if we take it back to that rollercoaster ride that we talked about, and if we layer, on top of that, controlling

your narrative, it's really about what kind of rider do you want to be? And if you really think about... Think about two extremes of a rollercoaster rider, right? And you can look on a continuum.

Patti Dybdahl ([15:09](#)):

So on one extreme, you have that rider who we trick them to get into the line, they thought that they were getting in line for curly fries or a corn dog or something, but we really put them on the roller coaster ride, so they're resistant. They're going to go in kicking and screaming. We're going to push them in the rollercoaster ride and those are the people that are hanging onto that little bar and they're closing their eyes and kicking and screaming and they're never really going to enjoy the ride, so that's one extreme, and they're the kind of "heck no, I won't go" person.

Patti Dybdahl ([15:42](#)):

But on the absolute other extreme, you have the person who is so enthusiastic about the ride that he gets everybody in the line pumped up about the rollercoaster ride, right? You can't help but feel the energy from this person. They get into the car, they jump in there, they don't care where they're sitting, they're enjoying the ride, they haven't even double-checked to make sure their little bar snapped because they got their hands up and they're hooting and hollering, and they're contagious, so if you think... The reality is you're going to bounce back in between each one of those extremes during your whole PCS, but it's your narrative that helps you shape what kind of rider you are.

Bruce Moody ([16:27](#)):

And the kind of rider that you are, the kind of energy that you put out is really the energy that you get back from the people around you, so depending on how you determine that you're going to respond to something, you're going to see that back in the people around you.

Patti Dybdahl ([16:47](#)):

Yes. And I said, our family, we use a lot of humor. PCS is... It's so stressful, and we use humor to kind of deflect. I like to call it the "crabby pants," you know? If somebody has their crabby pants on, if you're laughing, the crabby pants really aren't as bad, right? There's just a lot of ways...

Patti Dybdahl ([17:10](#)):

We draw on those funny PCS blunder stories like the dining room table story I told you about, but we also have this, we call it a "PCS pinky promise" in our family, and basically, we monitor ourselves and we know when the stress is getting to us, we have that conversation where we say, "Hey, you know what? I love you, I care about you and I know that I'm going to get emotional and I'm going to act sometime in emotion and I need you to be patient with me and I need you to cut me a little slack and I'm going to do the same and cut you a little slack."

Patti Dybdahl ([17:46](#)):

And so we kind of make that PCS promise to each other, because we know we've got some times when we're going to be that crazy, on the crazier end of the rollercoaster rider, but we're in this together and we need to support each other to get through.

Bruce Moody ([18:06](#)):

That's absolutely true. There's a group of people, a group of individuals in this family that are all making the same move, the same PCS, and especially as a parent, you really need to acknowledge the emotions that each individual is going to experience.

Patti Dybdahl ([18:25](#)):

Absolutely. Recognizing that it's going to be different for each person, and that is a good place, Bruce, for us to kind of swing around to the last universal truth, and that's, basically, you're not alone. I know a lot of the examples that I gave were on my family unit, but it doesn't really matter if you're a single service member who's PCSing for the first time or if you are a family of five moving for the fifth time, you are never alone. There are a wealth of resources to assist you at every stage of your PCS. It doesn't matter what stage of your military career you're in. You're never alone.

Bruce Moody ([19:11](#)):

Yeah. For folks who have moved several times, they know that you never get a total lock on the issue. It's always different, there's always a new set of circumstances and challenges. For those who are new to the military, know that every single move is going to have its own twist, but as you say, there are resources. So yeah, we want to talk about them, and one of the resources that we offer is called Plan My Move. Can you explain what that resource is?

Patti Dybdahl ([19:42](#)):

Right. And the Plan My Move is, it's a way to organize yourself. It's a self-help application that you answer. It's as simple as answering a few questions and all of a sudden, you have a ready-made checklist of items that you can actually divide and conquer. You can divide them up by family member, you can give people different tasks to accomplish and they're really based on what your situation is. So, for example, if you're PCSing with pets, you answer "yes" to the pets and you get a list of tasks that are probably going to make your PCS with pets a little bit easier. So it's really a self-help planning tool that you can use, and you can even save the checklist so if you had one last time, tried and true, that worked, you could restart that one up again for your next PCS.

Bruce Moody ([20:33](#)):

There is Plan My Move, which we offer at the Defense Department level to military families, but we dovetail, I think, very, very nicely, and we totally acknowledge that your local installation, there is amazing support, and can you talk about that? And then we can get into some of the other resources that we have available.

Patti Dybdahl ([20:54](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. If you're more of a hands-on person, you want to sit in a class or you want to talk to somebody face-to-face, your Military and Family Support Centers offer a Relocation Assistance Program, and so there's somebody there to help you. If you're more concerned about your physical move, know that your local transportation offices have professionals. They do this for a living, they've moved people all over the world, so I can guarantee you, if you have some kind of issue with your physical moving your things, there is someone at that local transportation office that can help you.

Bruce Moody ([21:32](#)):

Two things I want to touch on. One is called MilitaryINSTALLATIONS and the other is the Military OneSource Call Center. So start off, Patti, if you would, about MilitaryINSTALLATIONS, because it's basically an online yellow pages for installations. It's pretty powerful.

Patti Dybdahl ([21:48](#)):

It is, absolutely. So if you need to reach out and touch someone and you're looking for an office, MilitaryINSTALLATIONS has you covered. It provides an online directory of offices and resources at installations to help you, so it's really easy to use and you can go there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, set yourself up for success, getting all of the contact that you need. And then Military OneSource also offers consultants who can help you talk through your relocation strategy, help you get organized, get all of your stuff together so that you can move your PCS forward.

Bruce Moody ([22:31](#)):

So we'll put links in the program notes, but that's links that will be to Plan My Move, to MilitaryINSTALLATIONS and also to the Military OneSource Call Center. So, Patti, I wanted to turn a little bit because this is just... It's so important and you've got a great take on sponsorship, so talk to us about being a sponsor, what it means to be a sponsor.

Patti Dybdahl ([22:58](#)):

And you know, Bruce, I'm glad that you reminded me about the Unit Sponsorship Program, so the Unit Sponsorship Program is a commander's program and really, the intent behind it is, I mean, okay, for lack of a better way to explain it, it's the adult version of finding somebody to sit with on the first day of school at their lunch table, right? Everybody probably can relate to that first day of school where you get your lunch period and you think, "Gosh, I hope I know somebody in the lunchroom." So that sponsorship really does that, kind of on an adult level, where they're giving you somebody who already knows the lay of the land and they're helping you make your way because for a lot of the things that we talk about, you've basically unplugged all of your support system and your connections and you're in a new environment that you aren't familiar with.

Patti Dybdahl ([23:52](#)):

So your sponsor helps you connect and make those routines a lot easier. And I'll tell you, we've had, over the years, we've had some awesome sponsors and we've had some not so awesome sponsors, and I'll tell you, I've always taken that as a challenge to pay it forward and be that awesome sponsor to the next person. And if you're not in a position to be a no-kidding appointed unit sponsor, I kind of see it as reverse crowdsourcing. Don't wait for the new people to come to you. Be that friendly face so they can sit at your lunch table. Offer the great information about their new location so that they can get settled. And I will add one more thing. It's not any easier for children to find friends and make those connections, so there's actually a Youth Sponsorship Program through the youth programs on your installation as well.

Bruce Moody ([24:50](#)):

It's really a great point. There are the formal sponsors, but anyone can be a sponsor. If you don't even use the term "sponsor," you can just refer as somebody who's looking out for somebody else, but still, it is very, very helpful. This is based on feedback that we get. We have a course online and it's the Sponsorship Awareness Course and we'll put a link for that as well, but it's a really great course for people who are going to be serving as a sponsor. You probably have a lot of it in your mind, what you

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think you ought to offer a family or an individual already, but this really goes through the whole list and you will get some nuggets, you'll get some additional ideas to just make yourself a better sponsor. You'll feel better for it and the family coming in will benefit tremendously from it.

Patti Dybdahl ([25:42](#)):

Absolutely, Bruce, and I'll just add, if you haven't been out on the MilLife Learning, I mean, they have a wealth of courses for you to add to your knowledge and your skills, so I'd encourage you to follow the link and go out there and check out what they have.

Bruce Moody ([25:57](#)):

Patti, I so appreciate you having this conversation. Any final words?

Patti Dybdahl ([26:02](#)):

Bruce, I just want to say, thank you so much for having me, it's been an absolute pleasure, and to folks out there getting ready to PCS, you're not alone and just remember those four universal truths.

Bruce Moody ([26:16](#)):

Excellent. Patti Dybdahl, thank you so much for joining us. For those of you listening, thank you so much for joining us today. We really encourage you to subscribe to this podcast because we hit so many issues, so many topics that cover the whole span of military life. We're Military OneSource. We're a website, we're apps, we're call centers, we're now a podcast, we're an official resource of the Department of Defense. We really do have so much to offer, so stick around, give us a listen and send us your feedback. So we thank you very much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.