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Exploration of Creativity, Leadership, and Entrepreneurism: Reflection and Participation in a Unique Holistic Military Transition Fellowship with Dog Tag Inc.

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**Exploration of Creativity, Leadership, and Entrepreneurism: Reflection and
Participation in a Unique Holistic Military Transition Fellowship with Dog Tag Inc.**

by

Valerie-June Button

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creativity and Change Leadership

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

December 2021

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

Abstract

Leaders and Entrepreneurs change the world. How might we best help them to inspire positive change? Perhaps by recognizing that the positive change that leaders and entrepreneurs drive starts with the hearts and minds of humans. Being mindful of this can open doors to new creative leadership/entrepreneurial development practices and have a positive butterfly effect on the world we live in. The purpose of this project is to observe, reflect and document the experience of participating in a uniquely holistic entrepreneurship hands-on fellowship as it relates to creativity and leadership development. The fellowship is a five-month program that exists to help military members, their spouses, and their caregivers who are in transition to connect with their personal purpose, and to give them the tools to move forward in entrepreneurial/leadership pursuits if they so choose. Reflections on key learnings from the experience provide insights into the human side of leadership/entrepreneurship, roadblocks to creativity, and potential areas for creative leadership/entrepreneurial development.

Key Words: creativity, leadership, entrepreneurship, military, military spouse, veterans, wellness, fellowship, human centered, holistic, change, transition

Valerie-June Button

Signature

12/01/2021

Date

Buffalo State
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Dates of Approval:

12/01/2021



Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Associate Professor

12/01/2021



Valerie-June Button
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Permission to place this Project in the Digital Commons online

I hereby grant permission to the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State college permission to place a digital copy of this master's Project (*Exploration of Creativity, Leadership, and Entrepreneurism: Reflection and Participation in a Unique Holistic Military Transition Fellowship with Dog Tag Inc.*) as an online resource.

Valerie-June Button

Name

12/01/2021

Date

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Thank you to Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers for her envisioning of this reflection project, her support, and her guidance throughout the process of production, and to the Creativity and Change Leadership Department Chair - Dr. Gerard Puccio for his approval of this project.

Without the compassionate belief of man that people are valuable and capable beyond perceived limitations, the financial savviness of a strong woman, and the support of numerous others that will never know the extent of their positive impact, this project would have never come into being. Sadly, I will never get to meet Father Rick Curry other than through his legacy, but I hold the deepest gratitude towards him and Constance Milstein for birthing the Dog Tag Fellowship into existence. I would like to thank Meghan Ogilvie - CEO Dog Tag Inc., Dog Tag Staff, Board Members, Alumni, Georgetown University Faculty/Staff, Cohort 13 members, and Dog Tag supporters for their contributions to developing, maintaining, and growing this wonderful program/community/experience of which my project is based upon. Not only have these supporters been faithful stewards of the fellowship, but they have been committed supporters of me personally and for that, I am exceedingly grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank God, my family, and my friends who supported me in incalculable ways from the beginning to the completion of this creative exploration.

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SECTION I: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

This section focuses on the purpose and rationale for the completion of this project. The foundational fellowship on which this project is based is described, guideposts of personal goals during the fellowship are clarified and the connection between creativity, entrepreneurship, and wellness are highlighted.

Purpose & Description of the Project

The purpose of this project is to observe, reflect and document the experience of participating in a uniquely holistic entrepreneurship fellowship as it relates to creativity and leadership development. The fellowship is a five-month program that exists to help military members, their spouses, and their caregivers who are in transition to connect with their personal purpose, and to give them the tools to move forward in entrepreneurial/leadership pursuits if they so choose (see Appendix A; Appendix B). The focus on personal connection and development of the individual within a hands-on entrepreneurial training experience is unique amongst other entrepreneur training experiences. A combination of university-led continuing education classes, weekly wellness sessions, learning labs, projects, and experiential rotations within the context of a working business/non-profit provides the structure of the program and allows for holistic growth of the participants both as entrepreneurs and leaders.

Entrepreneurs are constant problem solvers, moreover, they need to be creative to maintain an edge over their competition, react to rapid changes in their environment, and sustain themselves and their organizations. They must constantly cycle through divergent and convergent thinking, show flexibility and open-mindedness, be able to tolerate ambiguity and risk, and be resilient. Additionally, they need leadership skills to

be able to influence and rally support from multiple stakeholders that might include funders, employees, and clients. There is a great overlap between creativity and entrepreneurship. Participating in this fellowship program was an optimal opportunity for experiencing and observing that overlap. The unique holistic nature of the fellowship allowed for the 4P's (person, process, product, and press) interactions of entrepreneurial life to be explored in real-time.

Goals I set for myself during the fellowship included:

- Complete the five-month fellowship
- Earn a Business Administration certificate from a leading university
- Experience entrepreneurship through education, the simulation of being an entrepreneur, exposure to perspectives of actual entrepreneurs provided by the fellowship, and interacting with other cohort members going through the same process
- To observe the role of creativity in entrepreneurship/leadership
- To build my awareness of roadblocks and opportunities for creative development in entrepreneurship/leadership and organizations in general
- To observe methods of eliciting and supporting the human behind entrepreneurship

These goals required me to use academic learning skills, creativity skills (flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, clarification, ideation, and many more), and observational skills for my personal progress through the fellowship, for building a foundation of empathetic understanding of the entrepreneurial experience and for recognizing potential opportunities for helping develop entrepreneurs in the future.

Rationale for Project

Entrepreneurs are the leaders of tomorrow. It is their creativity, grit, and passion that drive change in our communities, our nations, and our world. Undoubtedly, there will be change. It is my desire to create positive change. My future intention to use my creativity and leadership knowledge to help those entrepreneurs who seek to help others and make the world a better, more compassionate place to live, succeed, and thrive. Participation in this fellowship was a way to deepen my understanding of the many facets of entrepreneurship, leadership, and the role of creativity from a holistic, observational, and personal experience standpoint. It is from this awareness building and experience that I increase my abilities to connect and support entrepreneurs, to influence and amplify positive change, and to potentially become an entrepreneur myself.

SECTION II: PERTINENT LITERATURE

The fellowship is designed to be a hands-on experiential learning opportunity. While numerous articles were read for project and rotation research, the bulk of the reading was of texts required to support learning in the university classes pertaining to the acquisition of the Certificate of Business Administration from the School of Continuing Studies at Georgetown University. The area of focus for pertinent literature in this section are the required texts for Georgetown University Certificate Program organized by each university class.

Georgetown University: Communications in Organizations

Munter, M., & Hamilton, L. (2014). *Guide to managerial communication*. Pearson.

Munter & Hamilton (2014) has condensed years of dense materials regarding managerial communications into a clear and concise text geared to undergraduate and graduate business or communications students. It is easy to read, understand and gives practical instruction that is easily applied to create effective written and oral communications. Topics covered include how to be strategic in expressing the message, macro and micro writing issues, aspects of speaking communications, and it also serves as a quick reference guide for grammar and punctuation.

Georgetown University: Entrepreneurship

Godin, S. (2014). *What to do when it's your turn: And it's always your turn*. The Domino Project.

Seth Godin (2014) is a serial entrepreneur, an international influential speaker, and the author of 17 bestseller books. In this delightful, visually stimulating book, Godin points out the pink elephants that keep us from doing our best creative work and goals

the reader to examine themselves, embrace the pink elephants, and get to work. He addresses topics like fear of failure, the costs of broken promises, why we continue to listen to the voices that make us feel bad, and many more. His humor, sarcasm, way of making inspirational points, and use of images make it easy to read, yet provides opportunities for new insights with each read. This book was the most valuable to me during the fellowship and will be one that I keep for years to come.

Georgetown University: Principles of Marketing

Chernev, A., & Kotler, P. (2018). *Strategic marketing management*. Cerebellum Press.

Organizations rely on marketing to get their products and services purchased or supported. This text provides a framework for creating solid marketing strategies and making sound business decisions relevant to product and service design. It covers communications, sales promotions, branding, pricing, and distribution in a way that is useful for a generous range of organizations including start-ups, non-profits, manufacturers, service providers, and for-profit corporations. Targeting the right audience with the right product or service at the right time in a compatible method of communication predicts successful outcomes in organizations and in life. Chernov and Kotler's (2018) text is knowledgeable, savvy, and useful.

Georgetown University: Business Accounting

Kimmel, P. D., Weygandt, J. J., & Kieso, D. E. (2019). *Financial accounting: Tools for business decision making*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kimmel et al. (2019) have created a thorough textbook covering financial accounting. While many start-up businesses rely on software to manage accounting, building a solid basis of accounting knowledge will help them to be more conscious and

aware of potential sticking points before they become a problem. This textbook covers topics including an introduction to financial statements, merchandising operations, the reporting and analysis of liabilities, statements of cash flows, financial analysis, etc. The book has a student-oriented presentation style, gives thorough and easy-to-understand examples, and emphasizes the importance of careful financial decision-making. It is not a quick read, but it builds a solid foundation of accounting understanding.

Georgetown University: Principles of Management

Jones, G. R., & George, J. M. (2019). *Essentials of contemporary management*.

McGraw-Hill Education

Management practices are constantly changing as the challenges and conditions evolve. Jones & George (2019) address these changes in their text. They try to bring the principles to life by including timely examples “Making it Real” for students. They cover a multitude of important topics within contemporary management such as managing in a global environment, designing the organizational structure, leading individuals, and groups. Opportunities to apply learning are provided within the text via included management questions for consideration. The text is student-oriented, well-structured, and insightful.

SECTION III: PROCESS

After concept approval and fellowship acceptance, much of the process included observing and participating in the five-month fellowship Monday through Thursday 9:00 am -4:00 pm. It is during this time that I attended learning labs, rotations, university classes, wellness classes and worked on various projects, university class assignments, and presentations. I observed leadership in action, team dynamics, creative problem solving, and potential areas for creative leadership development. Following the conclusion of the fellowship, the experience was reflected on, and the learnings have been documented according to project guidelines all with the goal of submitting the project for fulfilling the last requirement of my degree of Master of Science.

Process Overview

Table 1

Project Timeline

Month	Process Step
December 11, 2019	Acceptance into Entrepreneurial Fellowship
January 2021	Master's Project Proposal Approval
January 12, 2021	Dog Tag Fellowship Start
May 28, 2021	Dog Tag Fellowship Completion
June 2021	Review and Reflection on Fellowship Experience
July-August, 2021	Master's Project Write-up Drafting
August 2021	Master's Project Draft Submission
September-November 2021	Project Write-up Revisions
December 2021	Final Project Submission

Evaluation

There are three major types of evaluation involved in this project: 1.) Technical – did I fulfill the requirements of participation of both the fellowship and the business administration program certificate, 2.) Observational – did I observe and learn about creativity in leadership and entrepreneurship and 3.) Communicative – am I able to express my learnings and thoughts clearly and in concordance with project guidelines. Technical Evaluation was fulfilled by fellowship graduation and by the attainment of a certificate of Business Administration from the School of Continuing Education at Georgetown University. Observational Evaluation was done by review, reflection, and documentation of reflections on the fellowship experience. Communicative Evaluation was done by the Creativity and Change Leadership Department at Buffalo State College in accordance with project guidelines.

Table 2*Evaluation Organized by Goal*

Goal	Outcomes
Complete the five-month fellowship	Graduated from the fellowship on May 28, 2021
Earn a Business Administration Certificate from the School of Continuing Education at Georgetown University	Received certificate from Georgetown University May 2021
Experience entrepreneurship through education, the simulation of being an entrepreneur, exposure to perspectives of actual entrepreneurs provided by the fellowship and interacting with other cohort members going through the same process	Attendance and participation in fellowship programming. Monday -Thursday 9am-4pm, January – May 2021
To observe the role of creativity in entrepreneurship / leadership.	Described in the key learnings section of this project
To build my awareness of roadblocks and opportunities for creative development in entrepreneurship/leadership and organizations in general.	Described in the key learnings section of this project
To observe methods of eliciting and supporting the human behind entrepreneurship	Described in the key learnings section of this project
Fulfill the requirements of the project documentation	Project Accepted December 2021
Graduated with a Master of Science degree	December 2021

SECTION IV: OUTCOMES AND KEY LEARNINGS

Given the intense and complex nature of the fellowship, there are numerous outcomes. There are tangible outcomes of fellowship participation and intangible outcomes. Below I have listed some of the tangible outcomes organized by types of learning experiences. This is followed by a description of the intangible outcomes. While there were many technical key learnings related to business administration, leadership and entrepreneurship, this section will focus on the softer human side of these areas as they relate to creativity application, roadblocks, and opportunities for creative leadership development. My focus choice is in support of my future goals of coaching, training, consulting, and facilitating leaders in a holistic fashion which begins with the wellness of the leader/entrepreneur.

Tangible Outcomes

There are tangible outcomes that are directly related to the acquisition of the Certificate of Business Administration from the School of Continuing Studies at Georgetown University, and those that are related to the Dog Tag Fellowship Programming. Those outcomes are organized accordingly and reflected in the outline below.

Acquisition of a Certificate of Business Administration from the School of Continuing Studies at Georgetown University

- Communications:
 - Two verbal presentations: 1: Informative Speech, 2: Persuasive Speech
 - Two written samples: 1: Informative memo, 2: Persuasive letter

- Entrepreneurship:
 - 1 recorded reflection – based on the book “*What to do when it’s your turn: And it’s always your turn*”
 - Value Proposition Canvas Example
 - Business Model Canvas Example
 - 3 Discussion Thread posts
- Principles of Marketing:
 - 1 Final Exam
- Principles of Management
 - 1 Personality Assessment (informal)
 - 1 Team Presentation
 - 9 Reflective Response Discussion Thread Posts

Dog Tag Fellowship Programming

- Fellowship Capstone Project
 - Midpoint Assignment
 - A personal future business plan & budget.
 - A Pecha Kucha pitch presentation for my future business
- Fellowship Experiential Rotations
 - Rotation 1:
 - A team created new location opening business plan & budget
 - A team created new location opening Pecha Kucha pitch presentation

- Rotation 2:
 - A team created new product plan & budget
 - A team created new product Pecha Kucha pitch presentation.
- Fellowship Class: Find Your Voice
 - Multiple in class verbal story presentations
 - 1 Public verbal story presentation
- Fellowship Learning Labs
 - Personality Assessments
 - Deloitte: Business Chemistry
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Fellowship Wellness
 - 4 monthly reflections
- Fellowship Other
 - 1 Social Media Post – Weekly wrap up
 - 1 Introductory Bio
 - 1 Flipgrid- personal introduction
 - 1 Flipgrid - program takeaways
 - 1 Flipgrid -tips for future cohorts
 - Over 50 new networking connections

Intangible Outcomes and Key Learnings

Four areas are outlined next that reflect the intangible outcomes and key learnings. They include leaders and Entrepreneurs Are Human Too, Identity Plays a Role in Creativity, Tolerating Ambiguity/Risk is an Essential Skill, and Challenges of Military Life in Transition: Opportunities for Leadership Development.

Leaders and Entrepreneurs Are Human Too

Often, I have found myself questioning why a leader/entrepreneur didn't do something differently, better, or more creatively. Going through this fellowship experience, I have developed greater empathy for leaders/entrepreneurs and even myself by lowering the bar of impossible perfectionism. I have learned that leaders and entrepreneurs are human too. It is all too easy to be lulled into the illusion that leaders have all the power to make change happen within their organization, but often this simply isn't true. Board members, stakeholders, resource availability, company culture all play a role in the level and type of creativity a leader/ entrepreneur can employ successfully. For example, in a team project I participated in where we were creating a new product, creative decisions were limited by numerous boundaries including product cost, shipping logistics, the need to stay on brand, customer trends, time, and many more. Being a creative person, I found that being limited in so many ways with this project was a creativity killer, frustrating, and discouraging, but very valuable in its realism. This was only one simulation experience; imagine being a leader who has this experience repeatedly. In recognizing this, I now have a deeper empathy for leaders and see the need for creative methods to help leaders stay connected to their creative spirit.

Just being human, as I observed and experienced during the fellowship, impacts the employment of creativity in a leadership/entrepreneur position. For example, I as well as others found the long days in the virtual environment very tiring. As much as we might have wanted to extend our creative muscles on assignments, fatigue, family responsibilities and due dates limited the time available to diverge, converge and produce creative products. There were several instances where fatigue won over creative production, and I leaned into the most direct path of assignment completion. Fear/anxiety-based internal narratives are another example of how being human disrupts creative production. Even in a safe environment cohort members, including myself, admitted the fear/anxiety of public speaking and of having related negative internal narratives impacting the production of their speaking presentations. For example, might I have used more hand gestures in speaking presentations if my personal internal narrative didn't include being judged as looking awkward? To that end, I recognize that personal, professional, and general wellness support contributes more to creative decisions and products than is generally acknowledged. Some of the support methods that I experienced during this fellowship included mindful meditation, yoga, journaling, the creation of a safe environment to develop new skills, and monthly fellowship check-ins. My cohort members and I found these supports to be very helpful and renewing.

Identity Plays a Role in Creativity

In a learning lab, we were asked to think of how we identify ourselves. Outside of answering what is your name and what do you do, as is asked in conversations with new people, I have never really given it perhaps the thorough consideration it deserves.

However, even a surface examination can open doors of connection, alert one of unconscious biases, and unveil illusionary boundaries we set for ourselves. For example, I identified with being female, an adult, an only child, a pet lover, a friend, a resourceful person, and a student. Recognizing the identity of being an only child helped me to connect to other cohort members that were only children, and question how my reactions to situations might be different than that of members that identified with being sisters or brothers due to unconscious biases. In that process of connection and exploration, awareness grew, and as awareness grows so do the opportunities to be creative. What we don't identify can impact our creativity as well. Notice "leader" was not on that previous list. Why is that? Would I have gotten into the fellowship if I didn't have leadership skills to be developed? The answer is imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is a pervasive feeling of self-doubt, insecurity, and incompetence despite evidence that you are skilled and successful (Robinson, 2017) Many of us in the cohort identified with imposter syndrome once we had a word to describe it and we started to realize the boundaries we were setting on ourselves that weren't real. These illusionary boundaries can get in the way of creativity. For example, in a state of imposter syndrome after all the hard work I put into getting into the fellowship, I was ready to relinquish my slot to another applicant. Thankfully, the fellowship administrators recognized my state of thought and gave me the encouragement I needed to take my spot in the fellowship. As a result, I was able to participate, contribute my creative thinking/problem-solving skills to the fellowship, and create multiple products as listed in Section Three.

Tolerating Ambiguity/Risk is an Essential Skill

Leaders/Entrepreneurs by their nature are drivers of change, but change can cause a lot of uncertainty and unknowns. Unexpected environmental factors can also be a cause. As a leader/entrepreneur, it is essential that one can tolerate ambiguity. Our rotations in the fellowship provided a real taste of what it means to tolerate ambiguity. My team was tasked with creating a business plan for an expansion to another city. Because we wanted to do the project “right”, we found it challenging at times to sit with unknowns and trust the process. There are so many factors at play in leadership and entrepreneurship with no way to control all of them, that ambiguity is unavoidable, and perhaps that is a good thing for creativity and learning. If we knew the “right” answer, we would have given it straight away, but not knowing expanded our creativity to consider multiple pathways to get to a version of “right” and exposed us to the pressures of decision making in the face of unknowns and the courage it takes to move forward especially when others will be impacted by our decisions.

Challenges of Military Life in Transition: Opportunities for Leadership Development

Before entering this fellowship, I did not realize the full extent of the unique challenges military members and their families face in career development and transition to civilian life. My fellow cohort members consisted of veterans, and military spouses (some of whom were also caretakers of their disabled veteran spouses). In the sharing of our experiences, I learned a lot about some of the unique challenges faced in transitioning careers and to the civilian world. Challenges veterans face can include different communication styles, work ethic, mental health issues, and disabilities that are the result of their service. Their spouses may find challenges in showing job stability,

career development, and experience fully representative of their skills due to location changes to support their veteran spouses. They can also face feelings of isolation and loneliness as they uproot their families for location changes and/or when veterans are on deployment. It is through all these challenges that veterans and their spouses gain the strengths and skills required to be successful entrepreneurs. Strengths of performing under pressure, flexibility, open-mindedness, creativity, patience, persistence, risk-taking, and independence, just to name a few. Additionally, veterans and their spouses live a life of service and seem to generally want their career efforts to serve others in a positive way. This fellowship has recognized the unique challenges and potential for leadership development amongst this population and now I do too. However, there are many more veterans and spouses yet to be recognized and developed as leaders and entrepreneurs.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

Now, after completing the fellowship I have a deeper understanding of the pressures, challenges, roadblocks, and potential areas of supportive creativity development in entrepreneurship and change leadership from both a technical standpoint and from a human standpoint. This was my main goal in fellowship participation. I am also more aware of the unique challenges and wealth of potential in veteran/ spouse populations for developing strong, socially conscious leaders. The knowledge that I have gained, has primed me for my next steps which are to attend an International Coaching Federation accredited leadership coaching program, eventually start my own holistic human-centered leadership/ entrepreneur creativity-based coaching, training, consulting, and facilitation practice, and for changing the world via a butterfly effect.

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Appendix A

Dog Tag Fellowship Recruitment Flyer



Dog Tag Fellowship Program

The Dog Tag Fellowship Program equips veterans, military spouses, and caregivers with the tools and education to build resilience, find renewed purpose, and forge community beyond the military. Dog Tag provides a bridge from military service to the civilian world and acts as a catalyst for finding direction and moving forward

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Post-9/11 veteran with service-connected disability, military spouse, or caregiver
- Eager to learn and engage in professional development
- Ready to begin a career in the civilian workforce and/or explore entrepreneurship
- Able to provide own transportation to and from Dog Tag's Georgetown (Washington, DC) location

SCHEDULE

Monday - Thursday
9:00am - 4:00pm

PROGRAM ELEMENTS:

- 
Certificate in Business Administration from Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies
- 
On-the-job training rotations (within our bakery & nonprofit)
- 
Capstone Project: develop and pitch your own business plan
- 
Learning Labs with guest speakers (entrepreneurs, executives, veterans, etc.)
- 
Networking opportunities
- 
Skill-building workshops
- 
Monthly stipend and laptop provided during program

WINTER 2022 APPLICATION NOW OPEN!

Program Dates: Jan 18 - May 27, 2022
Application Deadline: Sept 15, 2021

Learn More & Apply:

dogtaginc.org/fellowship

 fellowship@dogtaginc.org

 202.527.9388

Appendix B

Additional Dog Tag Fellowship Information

Fellowship Description

Dog Tag's innovative approach consists of a five-month fellowship program that combines equal parts classroom, bakery, community, and wellbeing. Dog Tag Fellows earn a Georgetown University certificate of business administration in our classroom space; bring their coursework to life by learning the ins and outs of running a successful business in the bakery; build community with each other; and enhance their wellbeing by committing time to introspection and personal growth. Learn more about the program and register for upcoming recruitment events on their website:

<https://www.dogtaginc.org/fellowship> Help us spread the word and share this post today! #dogtagbakery #purposebakedin

Learn more about the program and register for upcoming recruitment events on their website: <https://www.dogtaginc.org/fellowship>

Social Media Links

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/dogtagbakery/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dogtagbakery>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DogTagBakery>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dog-tag/>

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