

FROM SERVICE TO SAFETY

Why Armed Forces experience is a natural fit for risk management

When Harold Floyd, Lead Instructor at Elite Force Safety, looks back on his 26-year career in the

British Army, he doesn't see a transition into risk and safety, he sees a continuation.

"People ask why so many ex-military go into safety," he says. "The truth is, we've been doing it for years without even realising it."

As a professional body dedicated to advancing risk and safety management across sectors, IIRSM recognises the significant skills, experience and leadership that individuals from the Armed Forces community bring to organisations and the wider economy. IIRSM is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant and has received the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Bronze Award.

Harold joined the Army from school at 16. From the outset, responsibility and risk awareness were embedded into everything he did. "You're taught to look after yourself first, then your buddy – the person next to you," he explains. "Then you're part of a team, then a section, then you're responsible for dozens, even hundreds of people."

As his career progressed, so did the complexity of the environments he managed. Coordinating night-time exercises involving vehicles and troops required meticulous planning to avoid potentially catastrophic incidents.

At the time, he didn't label it as "risk management". But in hindsight, the parallels are clear. "We were writing what we called emergency safety plans and range action safety plans. Looking back, they're the same as risk assessments, RAMS, safe systems of work."

That grounding continues to shape Harold's approach today and it's one he believes the wider profession can learn from. "When rules don't reflect reality, people ignore them. And that undermines all the good work we're trying to do in safety."

Instead, he advocates for a pragmatic, human-centred approach rooted in observation, understanding and continuous improvement. "In the military, you respect the rules, but you also question them. Why are we doing it this way? Can we make it better?"

This mindset makes Armed Forces personnel particularly well suited to careers



Harold Floyd



SHARE WITH YOUR NETWORK



“

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in risk and safety. “We’re used to structure, we respect authority, but we’re also trained to think, adapt and improve. That combination is powerful,” he says. “At its core, safety is about looking after others.”

Yet despite this alignment, the transition into civilian careers is not always straightforward. “People leave it too late. You might get 12 months’ notice before leaving, but that’s really the minimum time you should start preparing.”

Too often, service leavers remain focused solely on their military role until the final months. “You’ve got blinkers on. Then suddenly you’re out, and you’re expected to know what’s out there and how to position yourself.”

Another key challenge is turning military experience into language that civilian employers understand. Harold says: “If I write down what I used to do in military terms, it might mean nothing to you. You must convert that into something that makes sense in a civilian context.”

This is a challenge that John Stephenson has made it his mission to address. After struggling with his own transition from the military, he founded the Forces Transition Group (FTG) to provide structured, practical support to service leavers.

“I didn’t understand what society wanted from me or how I fitted into it,” he explains. “That led to a churn period – jobs in, jobs out – for nearly two years.”

John points to data suggesting that more than half of service leavers change jobs more than three times within their first two years, highlighting a gap between initial employment and long-term career stability.

“People will find a job,” he says. “But whether it’s the right job, whether they understand it, whether they stay in it, that’s a different question.”

At the heart of FTG’s approach is a structured model designed to help individuals take ownership of their transition. This begins with



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John Stephenson

ARMED FORCES WEEK 2026

Armed Forces Week takes place in June each year, providing an opportunity to show support for the people who make up the Armed Forces community, from currently serving personnel to veterans, cadets and their families.

The week culminates in Armed Forces Day which, in 2026, will be celebrated on 27 June, with events taking place across the UK. It follows Reserves Day on 24 June, recognising the valuable contribution of Reserve Forces.

helping people understand their own value in civilian terms.

“If someone says, ‘I’m a sergeant’, that’s not a sellable product in the civilian world,” he says. “We have to professionalise the individual and help them understand who they are, what they offer and how that translates.”

From there, the focus shifts to direct engagement with employers. “Businesses own the jobs. They understand what risk looks like in their world. So, the earlier we connect service leavers with business, the better.”

Through events, training and employer partnerships, FTG creates opportunities for service leavers to build networks, gain insight and develop confidence before they formally leave the military.

“It’s about moving from what we call a ‘sleepwalker’ mindset to a ‘hunter’ mindset,” John explains. “If you’re not doing anything, you’re learning nothing. If you’re actively engaging, you’re growing.”

Employers also have a role to play. According to John, successful transitions depend on creating the right environment for veterans to thrive.

John points to examples where this approach is already working well. Citation, an IIRSM partner which offers expert health and safety and employment law services, has demonstrated the value of long-term commitment to veterans through structured support and clear career pathways.

Organisations such as KH Plant Training are also demonstrating what meaningful commitment looks like by investing directly in veterans through training, development and employment pathways.

“Some organisations sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and do nothing,” says Harold. “But when you see organisations that really invest in people, you know they’re committed. That takes time and effort.”

For Harold, the connection between military service and risk management goes deeper than skills alone. It’s about purpose. “The best part of my career was training people and seeing them improve. That’s what I still enjoy now.”

It’s a perspective that resonates strongly with the wider mission of the risk profession and one that highlights the enduring value veterans can bring.

Harold says: “There are people out there with the right mindset, the right experience, and the right values. We just need to make sure they know where to go and that we’re ready to support them when they get there.” ♥

Find out more at www.eliteforcesafety.com and www.ftgjobfairs.com

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